
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety: A Qualitative Survey Study of Moroccan EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Inquiry-Based Learning

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| ABSTRACT

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is becoming a key focus in global and Moroccan education policies as a crucial approach to promote critical thinking and autonomy. Despite the Moroccan curricular guidelines' endorsement of inquiry-based pedagogies to trigger a shift in educational paradigms towards student-centeredness, the enactment of IBL is often tempered by systemic and psychological pressures. The present qualitative inquiry explores Moroccan EFL teachers' perspectives on the benefits, classroom practices, and difficulties of IBL through a qualitative survey, distributed to teachers in public and private secondary schools. We undertook a thematic analysis using the "Triple A" (Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety) framework. The results show a strong pedagogical embrace of IBL, with 61.1% of respondents citing enhanced ownership and motivation as its main affordance, paralleling national studies that highlight IBL's value in cultivating 21st-century skills. Yet, findings reveal a persistent "rhetoric-reality gap", with teachers using agency to transform IBL into "problem-solving tasks" to align with institutional demands. Barriers include curriculum load and time (58.3%), pedagogic anxiety about classroom management, and a "linguistic threshold" on the balance between accuracy and fluency. The research highlights the gap between reform goals and classroom practice, suggesting that the successful and enduring implementation of IBL in Morocco requires institutional backing, resource provisioning, and culturally sensitive professional development beyond the efforts of individual teachers.

| KEYWORDS

Inquiry-Based Learning, English as a Foreign Language, Moroccan schools, teachers' perceptions, Triple A framework: Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety, thematic analysis, learner-centred pedagogy, educational reform

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) has experienced a paradigm shift in recent decades that favours learner autonomy in active and collaborative knowledge construction. Across the world, reforms call for inquiry-based pedagogies aimed at preparing students with 21st-century skills. One of these is Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), a pedagogical approach rooted in constructivist and sociocultural theories, that casts learners as active researchers rather than passive learners (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978).

In Morocco, this shift is documented in the Strategic Vision for Reform 2015-2030 (CSEFRS, 2015), which requires a shift from teacher-centred towards student autonomy. In the Moroccan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, IBL is considered a "pedagogical bridge" to real communication and higher reasoning skills. However, while the theoretical and top-down advocacy for IBL is evident, practical implementation is a "rhetoric-reality gap" (Errihani, 2017). EFL inquiry challenges students to understand complex problems posed in a language that is still in the process of being learned, and as such, may create a "linguistic threshold" to engagement.

This combination of inquiry and language scaffolding has serious psychological and professional ramifications for the practitioner. The transformation from a "lecturer" to a more "facilitator" represents a significant renegotiation of professional identity. Traditional teachers can often feel a sense of "professional panic" when moving to student-centred models due to perceived loss of control or deterioration in the students' language skills (Borg, 2006). Additionally, factors including the inflexibility in curriculum timing, large class sizes and the "washback effect" of the national examination add to this complexity. While there is a growing body of research on IBL, much of this work is concerned with student learning and outcomes, and little attention has been given to the "lived experiences" of the teachers. Exploring how Moroccan EFL teachers negotiate the trinity of autonomy, agency and anxiety will help close the gap between government reform agendas and classroom practices.

As such, this study aims to investigate Moroccan English teachers' views on IBL. In particular, it explores teachers' understanding of the approach, their views on the benefits of promoting learner autonomy and the contextual issues that cause pedagogical anxiety. This study, by documenting these teacher voices, provides valuable insights for teacher preparation and policy in the North African region.

2. The Problem Statement

Despite recent calls for learner-centered practices in Moroccan educational reforms, a rhetoric-reality gap exists between proposed reforms and classroom practices. National policies, such as the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 (CSEFRS, 2015), advocate for twenty-first-century skills (particularly Inquiry-Based Learning [IBL]) as a means of modernising the Moroccan school. Yet, implementation can be hindered by structural factors: class size, overloaded curriculum and the "washback effect" of test-driven teaching (Errihani, 2017). These often compel a return to traditional, teacher-centred practices, despite an official mandate to the contrary.

This reveals a significant "rhetoric-reality gap". When official rhetoric promotes student autonomy, teachers work in institutional contexts where this practice is hard to achieve. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, this is compounded by the "linguistic threshold". In language inquiry, students must explore problems in a language they are learning, which presents heightened challenges for the teacher and makes teaching more complex.

Teacher cognition studies indicate that teaching practices are influenced not just by policy prescriptions, but also by teachers' internalised perceptions and realities (Borg, 2006). This shift from a "lecturer" to a "guide" role may lead to professional dilemmas and pedagogic anxiety. Issues such as classroom management, language proficiency and time constraints may arise for teachers, especially when incorporating IBL in low-proficiency EFL teaching. Despite the challenges, we know little about the "lived experiences" of Moroccan EFL teachers in relation to IBL through qualitative studies. The majority of the research literature has centred on either theoretical approaches or student learning, with less attention to teachers' psychological and pedagogical negotiation. By neglecting teachers' perspectives, educational reforms can remain idealistic.

As such, the present study bridges this gap by exploring the views of Moroccan EFL teachers' on IBL, with a focus on the three-pronged concepts of autonomy, agency and anxiety. Exploring teachers' perspectives on these challenges, the study seeks to paint a more practical picture of how to implement inquiry-based approaches in linguistically and culturally limited settings.

3. Research Purpose and Questions

This study seeks to understand Moroccan EFL teachers' views of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in linguistically and contextually limited classroom settings. To this end, the study seeks to explore teachers' views of inquiry-based teaching, perceived pedagogical advantages of using inquiry-based approaches, and difficulties they face when trying to implement inquiry-based practices in their classrooms. Through an exploration of teachers' experiences and professional knowledge, the study aims to shed light on the tensions between pedagogic goals and classroom practice. In doing so, it offers insights on how inquiry-based approaches can be integrated in the EFL classroom and it informs teacher education, curriculum and policy. The current study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions of implementing Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in the language classroom?
2. What are the pedagogical advantages and opportunities for autonomy that teachers perceive in the use of IBL in EFL teaching?
3. What systemic and pedagogical issues do teachers face when using IBL, and how do these lead to anxiety?

4. Significance of the Study

This research aspires to add to the emerging literature on innovative pedagogies in EFL education by exploring these views. In particular, it aims to offer context-specific insights which could assist with the successful integration of inquiry-based pedagogies

into the Moroccan cultural and linguistic context, providing a practical approach for teacher training, curriculum design and policy.

5. Literature Review

5.1. What is Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)?

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is a learner-focused method of teaching in which the starting point for learning is a question, problem or a situation, rather than the more traditional method of delivering facts. IBL is a constructivist approach to learning where the emphasis is on "how" rather than "what" students learn, and the focus is on discovery rather than recall (Dewey, 1938). This means that, in the language classroom, students use the English language to investigate and negotiate meaning, rather than simply learning the grammar.

IBL is grounded in the theories of Dewey, Bruner and Vygotsky. Dewey (1938) considered education as a social act and learning as most meaningful when students undertake guided investigation in relation to their everyday experience. This was taken further by Bruner (1961) who proposed Discovery Learning, where students learn more effectively when they discover fundamental principles themselves. Moreover, IBL is situated within Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which the teacher offers "scaffolding" to facilitate the journey from inquiry to understanding for the student. A key feature of IBL is that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather a continuum that is defined by the level of teacher support (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). This continuum can be broken down into four levels:

1. Confirmation Inquiry: The teacher gives the question, the procedure, and the outcome is predetermined. The purpose is to verify a scientific idea.
2. Structured Inquiry: The teacher provides the question and the procedure, but the results are unknown.
3. Guided Inquiry: The teacher only provides the question. Students are expected to develop their own procedure and come to their own solution.
4. Open Inquiry: Students must devise the questions, procedure and communicate their findings. This is the most autonomous level.

5.2 Theoretical and pedagogical basis of Inquiry Based Learning

5.2.1. Theoretical Foundations (The "Why")

IBL is not a teaching method, it is grounded in constructivist understanding that students are not the passive consumers of knowledge, but the active constructors of their own learning.

The pioneer of IBL in Constructivism is John Dewey (1938). He criticised the "factory model" of education, in which teachers "pour information" into students, as lacking context. In his Experiential Learning theory, Dewey proposed that learning is the result of "reflective interaction". The theory of constructivism holds that knowledge is actively built up by learners as they assimilate new information to their pre-existing knowledge structures. Extending this idea, Vygotsky (1978) stressed that this construction is greatly influenced by social factors.

The social constructivist, Lev Vygotsky, (1978) focused on the social context. He introduced the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the theory underpinning the scaffolding in IBL. It postulates a learner will do more with the help of a "More Knowledgeable Other" (the teacher) than on their own. In the context of EFL classrooms, this means the teacher will provide language support (scaffolding) so that the students can focus on the inquiry rather than being distracted by their language abilities. And Jerome Bruner (1961) noted that for learning to be effective, it needs to be Discovery Learning. Bruner said students are more likely to learn something if they travel the path of discovering the "why" and "how" of a topic. This lays the foundation for an inquiry "problem" that begins the learning process.

5.2.2. Pedagogical Foundations (The "How")

IBL is based on a number of key pedagogic principles that distinguish it from traditional lecture-based teaching. The starting point is the guiding question as learning is centred on authentic, open-ended problems, which spark a learner's natural curiosity and need to explore (Dewey, 1938). The cycle of instruction is driven by ongoing inquiry and exploration, as students develop hypotheses, collect evidence and engage in higher-order thinking to build their own conceptual knowledge. Moreover, autonomy is a key component of the pedagogy; but it is achieved along a spectrum of inquiry - from guided to open - depending on the level of independence and the task at hand (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). Here, teacher scaffolding is a key

intermediary to ensure students have the cognitive and linguistic tools to support their learning through reflection and feedback, particularly in EFL classrooms where the "linguistic threshold" may be a hurdle (Kirschner et al., 2006).

Ultimately, assessment in IBL moves beyond recall of knowledge to a process-based approach that assesses the inquiry cycle itself, including formative feedback and metacognitive reflection. In this sense, Bybee et al. (2006) suggest that this type of multidimensional assessment (often summarised in the 5E Instructional Cycle) enables the capture of learning as it occurs across linguistic, cognitive and social dimensions. These theoretical and pedagogical considerations offer a critical framework to understand how IBL is integrated and why it requires a careful alignment of instruction, teacher cognition and support.

5.3 IBL in the International Context

The benefits of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) have been well documented internationally in various disciplines and at various levels of education. In science and STEM education, IBL has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on conceptual learning, scientific literacy, and complex problem-solving skill development, by getting students to engage in the real-world work of discovery (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). Within language education, IBL leads to high levels of communicative competence and vocabulary development by engaging students in using the target language as a tool for discovery, negotiation and presentation of findings. Escalante Arauz (2010) supports this, arguing that such development occurs when students are engaged in using the target language as a means of discovery, co-construction of meaning and formal presentation of their findings. This is achieved by encouraging students to use the target language as a means to explore, negotiate meaning with peers and formally present their knowledge.

On a global scale, IBL has also been shown to lead to significant gains in critical thinking skills, autonomy, and metacognition. Research shows that as learners progress through the inquiry cycle (posing their own questions, analysing evidence and reflecting on their investigative journeys), they acquire higher-order thinking skills that can be applied in diverse settings beyond the classroom environment. Moreover, IBL plays a crucial role in developing 21st-century skills, such as information literacy, creative synthesis, and independent learning (Savery, 2006). As Bybee et al. (2006) point out, these skills are crucial in equipping students to thrive in the challenges of contemporary knowledge economies, where knowing how to inquire is as important as knowing what to know. Yet, global research also illustrates the challenges of implementing IBL effectively.

Teachers around the world cite challenges in reconciling the time demands of inquiry with predetermined curriculum pacing, addressing the "cognitive load" for low-proficiency learners, and adjusting to the dramatic shift in teacher identity from knowledge source to inquirer facilitator (Kirschner et al., 2006). These challenges indicate that while IBL is more than a pedagogical decision, its success hinges on institutional commitment, ongoing teacher training and a nuanced understanding of local cultural and educational contexts.

5.4 IBL in the Moroccan Context

In Morocco, national education policies - most notably the Strategic Vision for Reform 2015-2030 (CSEFRS, 2015) - explicitly call for inquiry-based approaches to promote learner autonomy, critical thinking and 21st-century skills. Shifting the role of the learner to that of an inquirer, these initiatives seek to transform the Moroccan educational system from a "transmission" model to a more interactive and discovery-driven approach. However, research continually suggests uneven implementation of IBL, with a notable disconnect between policy and practice (Errihani, 2017).

A significant problem identified in the local literature is the lack of clarity around the term IBL. In the Moroccan context of EFL, for instance, teachers often misinterpret "inquiry" as a disconnected set of questions and responses or discrete facts and information, instead of a whole pedagogic process. As Bendraou and Sakale (2023) point out, many Moroccan teachers face challenges in transitioning from teacher-centered to interactive teaching styles, and may perceive active learning strategies as non-applicable in the context of the national curriculum. This is compounded by the educators' unfamiliarity with the "continuum of guidance" needed for successful implementation. Lacking familiarity with how to move from structured to open inquiry, teachers may view IBL as either a chaotic or tokenistic approach to an already overpacked curriculum, rather than a structured approach to building meaning (Caputo, 2014).

Despite these conceptual challenges, there is evidence in the Moroccan context supporting the benefits of inquiry-based learning. Bendraou and Sakale (2023) find that when students are engaged in structured inquiry, in the form of problem-solving and reading, their skills in critical thinking and higher-order reasoning are improved. These findings are in line with those of Wale and Bishaw (2020), who report that inquiry-based argumentative tasks promote a greater ability to analyse and evaluate information. What's more, Levine (2004) indicates that implementing student-centered, task-based formats such as global simulations, can lead to more engagement and autonomy. Similarly, Oussou (2020) finds that Moroccan EFL teachers have a positive view of learner autonomy and consider autonomy a priority that allows students to engage with their learning.

However, there are contextual barriers to adopting Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Amghar (2020) points out that the Moroccan "system world" often favours a technical-instrumental domain at the expense of the values-based "re-culturing" of pedagogic practice. This leads to constraints such as a crowded national curriculum and the "washback effect" of exam-oriented teaching, which may result in IBL being perceived as a tokenistic practice rather than an integral pedagogy (Bendraou & Sakale, 2023).

Moreover, moving from "lecturer" to "guide" can be anxiety-inducing. For IBL to work, Caputo (2014) stresses that teachers must stop being a source of language rule authority and become a facilitator and "consciousness-raiser". In Moroccan classrooms, Oussou (2020) points out that teachers acknowledge the importance of these roles (e.g. being a resource and facilitator), but their implementation is challenging because of the strong tradition of teacher-fronted learning. This can be especially challenging in cultures where knowledge is often seen as an abstract entity to be imparted rather than a "situated" outcome of active culture and activity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). These challenges underline that while IBL is a potentially valuable approach, its effectiveness in Moroccan classrooms is reliant on extensive teacher training and support, as well as an "IBL-friendly" school culture.

5.5 The Interplay of Teacher Cognition: Agency and Anxiety

The institutionalization of any pedagogical innovation is mediated through Teacher Cognition: the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching" which includes the intricate and often competing set of beliefs, knowledge and mental structures that teachers hold (Borg, 2006). The shift in the pedagogical paradigm from an authoritative model to a facilitative model, such as IBL, is more than a technical adjustment: it is a complete professional identity shift. In becoming a "guide on the side", teachers must reconcile the internalised pedagogical and the external systemic constraints (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

In the Moroccan context, this can result in pedagogical anxiety. This fear is originating from the "threat" to traditional classroom roles when students are given the chance to be autonomous, where teachers' concerns relate to a perceived loss of classroom control and "sloppy" language use on the students' side (Oussou, 2020). This is compounded by an expectation gap; teachers may embrace communicative methods, but students are often entrenched in cognitively-focused, grammatical exercises, and this can create a disconnect in the shift to learner-centredness (Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1997).

In addition, the "syllabi-pressure" of adhering to a heavy curriculum in a limited time frame results in a context where teachers perceive the need to "keep control" in order to cover material (Oussou, 2020). As Amghar (2020) explains, the "system world" of Moroccan education tends to favour this technical-instrumental domain over the "re-culturing" needed for innovative pedagogies. These concerns are reinforced by the "washback effect" of high-stakes testing, in which the shift from teacher-centeredness is seen as compromising student scores in an institutional environment that favours direct instruction and rote learning.

At the core of this mental dissonance lies the issue of Professional Agency - the capacity for teachers to act purposefully and exercise choice in relation to their work and careers (Priestley et al., 2015). In an ecological model, agency is not an intrinsic quality, but is "achieved" as a result of individual actions and resources. In Moroccan English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, such achievement is often prevented by a "rhetoric-reality gap" where teachers are expected to implement student-centred approaches like Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) but have little "room for maneuver" (Errihani, 2017).

This occurs because of an institutional divide between the "system world" (with a technical-instrumental emphasis on covering the curriculum) and the "values domain" of the classroom teacher (Amghar, 2020). As a result, teachers experience "syllabi-pressure" and a threat to classroom control, resulting in a pedagogical panic in which student autonomy is seen as a challenge to classroom order (Oussou, 2020). Yet, such fears are in direct opposition to the empirical outcomes of the model; recent research shows that the IBL model leads to the improvement of EFL students' critical thinking skills, as it promotes a shift from rote learning to analysis and evaluation of information (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). In the presence of outdated curriculum, high-stakes "washback effects" and lack of professional development, paralysis ensues (Ramila & Benmhamed, 2023). Here, "will to change" is ultimately stifled by "fear of failure" - a finding that suggests the negotiation of teacher agency and anxiety is a crucial factor in the success of educational reforms.

5.6 The Research Gap

While Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is promoted as a major focus of the Moroccan educational reform, there are still critical gaps in the empirical research. The bulk of the literature concerns higher education or theoretical policy making, and the Middle and High school levels (where inquiry-based instruction is a curricular priority) are less represented. Additionally, while the existing Moroccan literature often cites general barriers to implementation, it provides little qualitative data on the challenges teachers face when contending with the trinity of autonomy, agency and anxiety in both the public and private institutional settings.

There is an urgent need for data comparing the impact of these institutional contexts on the "linguistic threshold" and the teacher's capacity to guide student inquiry.

We need to understand how EFL teachers in Morocco view IBL, how they negotiate the inquiry cycle in their classroom and what structural factors drive their pedagogical choices. These understandings are crucial to bridging the "rhetoric-reality gap" between the nation's curriculum and its classroom implementation. Without including the experiences of teachers, pedagogic change, such as that required by the Strategic Vision 2015-2030, becomes rhetorical.

This research addresses these challenges by exploring the views and experiences of Moroccan EFL teachers in a range of secondary educational settings. Through an online recruitment approach via professional Facebook teaching groups and targeted WhatsApp groups, the study drew from the insights of practitioners in both public and private education. By bringing these voices to the fore, the study provides a holistic picture of how IBL is perceived, implemented and constricted in the current educational context of Morocco.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design and Approach

This paper takes a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' experiences of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Phenomenology is an apt approach for this study because it emphasises the meanings and interpretations made by practitioners of the changes in education within their particular contexts. This approach does not aim to measure results or test hypotheses; it intends to reveal the ways teachers understand, implement and negotiate the "Triple A" triad (Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety) in the real and genuine contexts of their teaching practice.

6.2 Study context and participants

The research seeks to engage English language teachers in the secondary educational stages (Middle and High schools) in the public and private spheres in Morocco. In contrast to localised studies, this study adopted an online approach to participant recruitment to create a geographically and institutionally representative sample. The questionnaire was randomly shared via professional Facebook groups dedicated to teaching and WhatsApp groups exclusively dedicated to English teachers in Morocco.

Thirty six teachers took part in the study. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to recruit teachers who had previously engaged with the inquiry based tasks. This was complemented by convenience sampling due to the online nature of the survey allowing for a wide sample of data involving diverse years of teaching experience, gender and institutional settings. This mixed sampling strategy was important in capturing the diversity of the IBL implementation in various socioeconomic and professional settings in Morocco.

6.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection process involved an online qualitative questionnaire, which included demographic questions and extensive qualitative questions. This approach was selected to suit the busy work lives of teachers and enable descriptive storytelling. These prompted participants to define IBL in their own words, to explain the shift in their roles from teaching to facilitating, and to reflect on the particular psychological and structural challenges (such as the "linguistic threshold" and curriculum density) that they faced in the inquiry process. The open-ended questions allowed for the production of rich descriptions that capture the "voices" of practitioners engaged in the change process. As highlighted in the data categories in Figures 1-5, the assessment made participants:

- Conceptualise IBL in their own way (e.g., "Problem-solving" vs. "Student-led questioning").
- Contemplate their professional identity shift from "teacher" to "facilitator".
- Recognise psychological and structural challenges, including "linguistic threshold" and "curricular density".

The use of both open-ended and categorical questions enabled the collection of descriptive data that provides the "voices" of practitioners as they engage in the inquiry process.

6.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative responses were thematically coded according to the six-step recursive approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), adopting an inductive-deductive coding approach. The data were first inductively coded using the raw responses of participants to ensure the findings reflected the teachers' lived experiences, before deductively linking these codes with the "Triple A" model

(Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety) for a sound theoretical framework. In this process, the data were continually revisited to identify meaning units, which allowed a sophisticated understanding of how institutional factors (such as the "washback effect" of the national exams and large class sizes) interact with individual pedagogical ideologies. Finally, this two-pronged approach to coding ensures the research captures both individual practitioner narratives and the larger systemic themes in the Moroccan EFL context.

6. 5 Trustworthiness and Credibility

To ensure this study's validity and credibility, qualitative methods were used. Credibility was ensured through member checking, where preliminary thematic findings were presented to a subset of participants to ensure the interpretations of their professional practices and perceptions regarding IBL were valid. For dependability and confirmability, the researcher maintained stringent "audit trail". This involved documenting the full journey from initial survey responses through to the formulation of the 'Triple A' themes, to ensure that the data are consistently and rigorously translated into the study's findings. This enabled the researcher to regularly reflect on biases and ensure that the themes represented the "true voice" of the participants.

6. 6 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to the ethical standards of educational research. Participants were asked to fill out an electronic informed consent form before accessing the survey, which contained information on the nature of the study, voluntarism, and freedom to withdraw at any point without repercussions. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying data or school names were gathered. Additionally, all electronic data were encrypted and stored in password-protected files that were accessible only to the researcher. these precautions ensured participant privacy in accordance with international ethical standards.

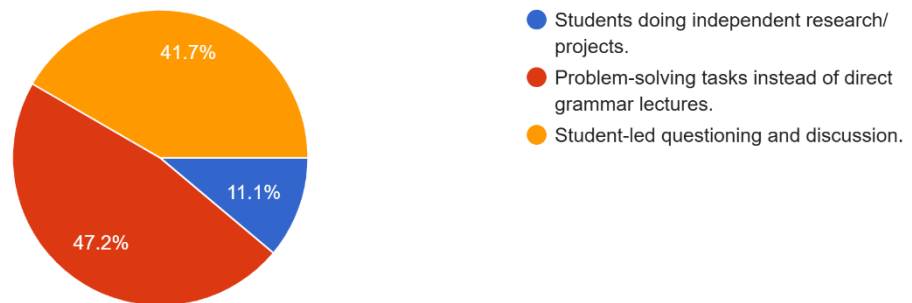
7. Findings

Themes emerging from the survey responses provide a rich set of findings to answer the study questions. The findings show a "rhetoric-reality gap": Moroccan EFL teachers have a nuanced conceptual grasp of IBL and its pedagogical potential, but their practices are hugely shaped by systemic factors. The themes below offer insights into how Moroccan EFL teachers balance the tensions between seeking to promote student autonomy, enact autonomy as teachers, and experiencing anxiety.

7.1. IBL's Perceived Benefits: Autonomy and Motivation

Figure 1:
Moroccan
EFL
Teachers'
Primary

Conceptions: What is your primary understanding of "Inquiry-Based Learning" (IBL)?
36 responses



Understanding of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL).

As seen in Figure 1, Moroccan EFL teachers' understanding of IBL is complex, with the large majority viewing the method as a means of "Problem-solving tasks instead of direct grammar lectures" (47.2%). The next most common conceptualizations are 'Students doing independent research/projects' (11.1%), and 'Student-led questioning and discussion' (41.7%). These findings indicate that teachers tend to see IBL as a functional and cognitive approach to changing classroom dynamics, rather than a fully conversational approach.

Most respondents depicted IBL as an opportunity for reinvigorating the language teaching and learning environment, largely through student engagement and ownership. Participants linked tasks that encourage inquiry with increased student motivation.

As a participant commented in the open comments, "Inquiry-based learning increases student ownership and motivation," mirroring global research that placing students in the role of scientists democratises the classroom.

From the qualitative findings, teachers most commonly link IBL with authentic language use, particularly fluency. The data show that when there is a "need to know" motivating learning, formal grammatical structures are de-emphasised in favour of communicative priority. One teacher commented, "It improves fluency because students are motivated to communicate", which implies that the "discovery process" (Bruner, 1961) offers more opportunities for English language use than traditional form-based approaches. This finding supports Bybee et al. (2006), who report that IBL supports 21st-century skills (such as problem-solving and collaboration) in the integrated use of language for inquiry.

Additionally, learner autonomy was a key theme with 61.1% of participants identifying the growth of student ownership as the main benefit of IBL. It was seen as having a transformative effect on student roles, from passive to active. This is echoed by Moroccan research (Oussou, 2020), which acknowledges that inquiry is a transformative process that shifts the learner's role to that of an active knowledge producer. This role is a feature of the Strategic Vision of Reform (CSEFRS, 2015), which promotes student-centered learning.

7.2. Classroom Implementations: A Facilitator's Challenge

Despite teachers' theoretical inclination towards IBL, their accounts show a tendency for "pedagogical adaptation." A number of teachers confessed that they do not practice "open inquiry", but instead practice "Problem-solving tasks instead of direct grammar lectures". This indicates that for many in Morocco, IBL is reduced to more manageable tasks to be completed within the 45-minute or 1-hour lesson.

Instructional Roles: How do you feel about shifting from a "direct instruction" role to a "facilitator" role?

36 responses

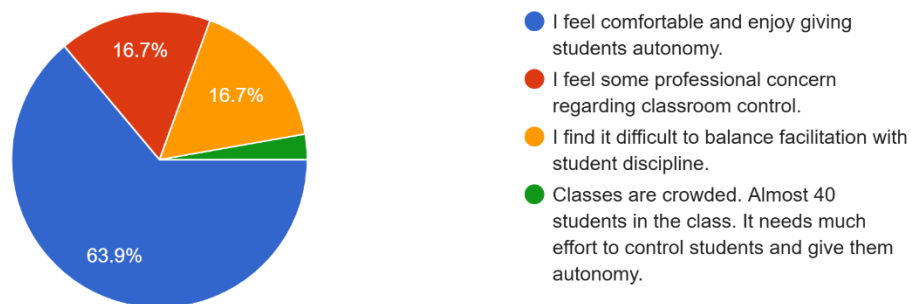


Figure 2: Reported Pedagogical Advantages of Inquiry-Based Learning in the Moroccan EFL Context

Figure 2, which shows the main benefits perceived by teachers, statistically confirms the pedagogical potential of IBL. The majority of teachers (61.1%) cited 'Increased student ownership and motivation' as the greatest advantage, implying that the inquiry approach overcomes student disengagement. In addition, 27.8% of practitioners reported the "Development of critical thinking and 21st-century skills" which is in line with the strategic objectives of the Moroccan education reform agenda.

The transition from the role of 'lecturer' to a facilitator is a complex professional process. While most survey participants indicated that they "feel comfortable and enjoy giving students autonomy" a parallel story of uncertainty was evident among a third of the respondents. The qualitative responses showed that this shift is frequently constrained by practical challenges, as teachers reported, "I find it difficult to balance facilitation with student discipline" and a "professional concern regarding classroom control". Such responses show that the implementation of professional agency in student-centered classrooms is not simply a shift in teaching and learning, but also a psychological one. This shift is often not supported by the institutional culture, as the role of the 'facilitator' may not always be recognised by the school culture (Amghar, 2020). As a result, the teacher's agency is constrained by the dilemma of having to maintain traditional classroom order and implement the autonomous activities promoted in the Strategic Vision of Reform (CSEFRS, 2015).

Language vs. Process: How does focusing on the "discovery process" affect students' linguistic accuracy?
36 responses

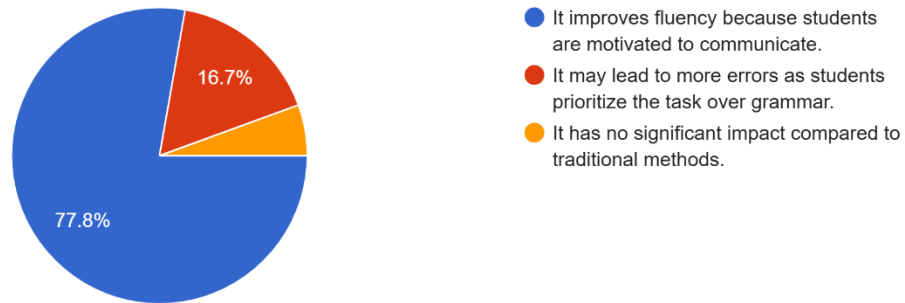


Figure 3: Teacher Disposition Toward the Transition from Direct Instruction to Facilitator Roles.

Figure 3 depicts Moroccan EFL teachers' attitude towards the reversion of their role. While 63.9% of the teachers are comfortable and enjoy giving autonomy to students, a substantial minority of 33.3% of the respondents share psychological and practical concerns. On the one hand, 16.7% of teachers call attention to "professional concern regarding classroom control". On the other hand, another 16.7% stress "difficulty of balancing facilitation with student discipline". The results indicate that for a third of the teaching staff, the transition to IBL is a pedagogical source of anxiety about classroom control

Perceived Benefits: What is the most significant advantage of this approach for your learners?
36 responses

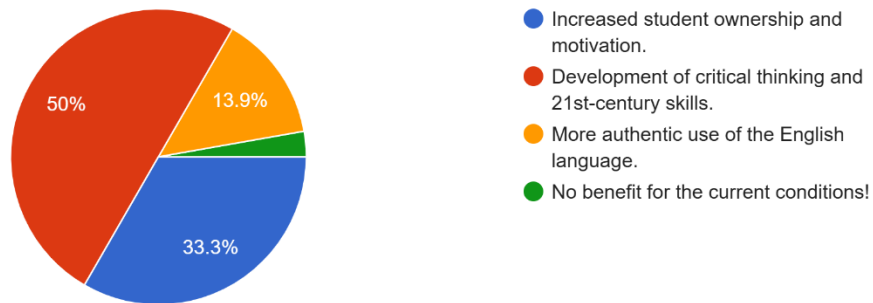


Figure 4: Teacher Perceptions of the Impact of Inquiry-Based Discovery on Students' Linguistic Accuracy and Fluency.

Figure 4 illustrates the 'Linguistic Threshold'. A clear majority of the teachers (77.8%) believe the discovery process enhances fluency as it encourages meaningful communication. But a considerable minority (16.7%) is pedagogically worried that IBL 'may lead to more errors' because students focus on meaning-making rather than grammatical correctness. This dilemma echoes the larger apprehension experienced by Moroccan EFL teachers that the discovery process may come at the expense of the accuracy needed for high-stakes exams.

Another area of professional concern among the teachers relates to assessment and the quality of language. A significant number (16.7%) of the teachers expressed concern about the possible consequences of the discovery process on the linguistic 'product.' As one teacher put it, 'It might create more mistakes as the task is more important than grammar.' This qualitative finding confirms the presence of a 'linguistic threshold', where teachers are caught between the pedagogical goal of discovery and the "reality" of the need to ensure grammatical correctness, which is essential for national language exams. This suggests a tension between the teachers' central beliefs around communicative fluency and the peripheral concern of a form-based curriculum (Phipps & Borg, 2009). As a result, the threat of linguistic 'fossilization' or under-performance in exams is a significant

systemic barrier for teachers and leads them back to more teacher-centred instruction to ensure accuracy, despite their theoretical endorsement of the principles of IBL (Errihani, 2017).

7.3. Challenges to Implementing IBL: Systemic Barriers

Our findings revealed a number of systemic challenges that impede the implementation of IBL in classrooms teaching EFL in Morocco. Time and curriculum were identified as the major issues. The need to cover the syllabus and the need to prepare students for the exams were reported to be a barrier to the "slow" inquiry process. According to one respondent, the key challenge is "Curricular constraints (Lack of time/pacing guides)." This is an example of a "washback effect" in assessment, where the assessment culture drives the pedagogy - in this case a fast-paced, direct teaching model is preferred over the slow process of inquiry.

Implementation Challenges: What is the primary obstacle to implementing student-centered inquiry in your context?

36 responses

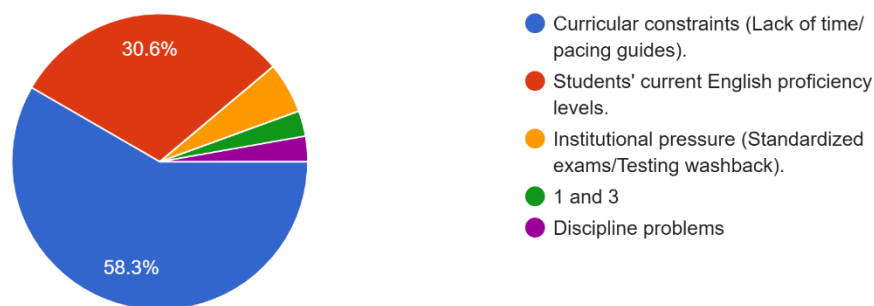


Figure 5: Primary Systemic and Pedagogical Obstacles to the Implementation of IBL in Moroccan Secondary Schools.

Figure 5 shows the "Rhetoric-Reality Gap" in the system through a list of barriers to implementation. The most common barrier is "Curricular constraints and lack of time" (58.3%) followed by "Students' current English proficiency levels" (30.6%). In comparison, institutional pressure (5.6%) is actually a lower concern than the curriculum itself. This proves that the "Anxiety" is caused by the workload, not just by the bosses or administrators. The pressure from the institution and disciplinary issues represent lower percentages of the main concerns, suggesting that the rigidity of the curriculum and the "linguistic threshold" of Moroccan learners are the most influential factors that govern, and therefore limit, the implementation of inquiry-based pedagogical practices in the country.

As mentioned in Figure 5, the second physical barrier to IBL was the large class sizes popular within the public school system. Teachers expressed the impossibility of working with multiple inquiry-based groups in classes of 40 students or more. As one participant noted, 'It's hard for teachers to manage big classes, and some students need scaffolding as they don't have the independence.' This highlights a major gap between the 'active school' aspirations of the Strategic Vision of Reform (CSEFRS, 2015) and the reality of many schools' built environment. Moreover, the required level of scaffolding in such a dense learning environment poses a pedagogical dilemma: while IBL seeks to support student discovery (Bruner, 1961), in many cases the teacher returns to acting in a direct role to maintain control and safety in the classroom. This systemic disconnect implies that unless class sizes are reduced or classroom spaces are reconfigured, the 'rhetoric-reality gap' in Moroccan ELT will continue to exist as teachers' pedagogical choices are constrained by the physical space (Errihani, 2017).

Finally, teachers expressed a need for more professional support. Rather than pedagogical seminars, teachers want resources. The most sought-after professional development resources were "Strategies for managing active learning in large classes" and "Ready-to-use lesson materials adapted for the Moroccan syllabus." One teacher concluded, "The main challenge is discipline", which implies that without explicit advice to manage the "ordered chaos" of an inquiry classroom, many teachers will revert to traditional strategies to keep the class under control and to cover the curriculum.

8. Discussion

This study sought to understand Moroccan English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' views of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), their implementation of IBL in secondary classrooms, and the constraints that affect their practices. The results paint a picture of a "rhetoric-reality gap". Though teachers show a deep conceptual understanding of IBL and strong pedagogical belief, its

enactment is qualified by the socio gestalt constraints of the Moroccan education system. This analysis examines these results from the perspectives of teacher cognition and the "Triple A" model.

8.1 IBL Promotes Autonomy and Motivation

The respondents in this study overwhelmingly endorsed IBL as a change agent, indicating that the "Increased student ownership and motivation" is the most significant change (see Figure 2). This finding is consistent with the seminal work of Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978) that suggests learning is meaningful when students are active participants in the process of knowledge construction. In agreement with Bybee et al. (2006) and Caputo (2014), teachers indicated IBL turns English from an object of study to a tool of discovery. The 'democratising' effect of the inquiry cycle, where the questions are posed by students, directly addresses the Moroccan Strategic Vision 2015-2030 (CSEFRS, 2015), which calls for learner-centredness. But, as data show, embracing this vision intellectually is the first step in a negotiation process.

8.2 The Interplay of Agency and Anxiety in the Facilitator Role

One contribution of this study is the 'internal battle' teachers experience in a facilitator role. While 63.9% felt at ease with providing student autonomy (see Figure 4), many teachers reported feeling anxious about classroom control and discipline. This predicament reflects the "Ecological Agency" approach of Priestley et al. (2015) which suggests a teacher's innovation potential is limited by their workplace. In Moroccan classrooms, which are often full with more than 40 students, the shift to facilitation is seen not only as a pedagogical innovation but a potential risk to discipline.

Our research also found fear of a 'Linguistic Threshold'. In Figure 3, 16.7% of teachers voiced fears that discovery-based learning may lead to a "fossilization of errors" as students focus more on completing tasks than on grammatical accuracy. This shows a clash between the objective of communicative fluency (supported by 77.8% of respondents) and institutional demands for linguistic accuracy. This finding is consistent with Borg (2006) and Phipps and Borg (2009) who suggest teacher cognition is not a straightforward process but rather a complex interaction between personal pedagogic ideals and institutional constraints.

8.3 Persistent Systemic Barriers and the Rhetoric-Reality Gap

The barriers identified show that IBL implementation is constrained by systemic factors. The most recurrent barrier - Curricular Time Constraints and Time (58.3% in Figure 5) - points to a tension between the "slow" social and embedded nature of inquiry and the "fast" national curriculum. Teachers seem to be in a state of "professional paralysis" caught between the push for change and the "washback effect" of the baccalaureate exams.

The material constraints of the Moroccan public school, such as large classes and lack of resources, compound this. Participants reported that current professional development is still too theoretical and does not consider the school culture and school conditions as described by Amghar (2020). The qualitative demands for "ready-to-use materials", and "strategies for large classes" show that teachers are not opposed to the philosophy of IBL, but to the lack of support needed to apply it in difficult contexts.

8.4 Bridging the Divide Between Pedagogical Vision and School Realities

Overall, the findings indicate that although Moroccan teachers are open to implement IBL, the system is not. This is captured by the "Triple A" of Autonomy, Agency and Anxiety. The teachers' attempts to "localise" IBL into "mini-projects" or "problem-solving tasks" (Savery, 2006) are an expression of their high level of professional creativity, but remain "truncated" versions of inquiry.

To bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality, the Moroccan system needs to shift its focus: a reduced curriculum, relevant materials, and a culture that prioritises inquiry processes over the final product of language. Without these reforms, IBL will remain the "pedagogical privilege" of a select few, rather than a transformative norm as foreseen by the Strategic Vision (CSEFRS, 2015).

9. Implications

This study has some significant implications for the design of teacher education, school administration, and curriculum in the context of EFL in Morocco. Although this study highlights a pedagogic desire to embrace Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), it also highlights that effective implementation cannot be left solely to the teachers' initiative. The implications below concern the systemic and psychological changes needed to transform IBL activities into a systemic practice.

9.1 Responsive Professional Development

The first implication is the re-conception of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Our survey shows teachers are pedagogically strong but administratively burdened. Teacher education needs to transition from "theoretical pedagogy" to "practical pedagogy." In particular, teachers need professional development that offers strategies for facilitating inquiry in large classes (40+ students) and plans for supporting inquiry for students with limited English proficiency (30.6% of respondents listed this as a concern). Instead of pedagogical talks, teachers need "simulated inquiry" training that demonstrates how to guide discovery in a 50-minute Moroccan class.

9.2 Leadership and Resource Allocation at the School Level

School leadership and inspectors play a critical role in overcoming pedagogical anxiety reported in this study. Given that 33.3% of teachers felt uneasy about classroom management and discipline during IBL, school leaders should promote a positive school culture that embraces the "productive noise" of student questions. Also, considering that "ready-to-use materials adapted for the Moroccan syllabus" were highly sought after, schools should consider establishing a shared "Inquiry Resource Bank". Offering basic infrastructural support (such as internet connections for student research and flexible furniture) would enable teachers to exercise their "agency without fear of failure".

9.3 Curriculum and Assessment Reform

Curriculum and policy makers need to resolve the "Rhetoric-Reality Gap" of dense curriculum. Given 58.3% of teachers list curricular constraints as their biggest challenge (see Figure 5), it is essential to slim down pacing guides. IBL should not be "tacked-on" to an already overdeveloped textbook; rather, it should be the means of delivering key skills. Moreover, standardised rubrics for evaluating the process of discovery (not just the outcome) would alleviate the assessment uncertainty experienced by many and ameliorate concerns about linguistic accuracy.

9.4 Systemically Overcoming the Linguistic Threshold

The "Linguistic Threshold" and Implementing IBL as a Process Policymakers should focus on "Guided Inquiry" (with more teacher support) at lower-proficiency levels, and only progress to "Open Inquiry" as language skills improve. This continuum would obviate the fear (mentioned by 16.7% of teachers) that inquiry results in error fossilisation. Class-size ratio must be improved in all schools, especially urban public schools, to make the facilitator role viable in the long term.

Overall, these implications suggest that the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 can only be a success with a balanced approach to support for Autonomy, Agency and Anxiety. By matching support to teachers' beliefs, the Moroccan system can create the right conditions for inquiry-based pedagogy to be no longer a source of anxiety, but a consistent driver of learning.

10. Conclusion

This research examined Moroccan English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs and practices about Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), offering valuable insights into the understanding, implementation and limitations of this educational approach in secondary school classrooms. The study reveals that teachers are highly committed to IBL as a pedagogic model and see it as an effective means of motivating students, developing their critical thinking skills and enabling them to communicate with confidence. As shown in the survey findings, the overwhelming majority of teachers agree that IBL is in line with the "learner-centered" objectives of the Moroccan Strategic Vision 2015-2030 and can provide a way to achieve more meaningful and independent language learning.

Yet the study also highlights a "rhetoric-reality gap" between the idealised notion of inquiry and the reality of the Moroccan classroom. The survey showed that while teachers aspire to be facilitators, they tend to be rooted in a "Triple A" of Autonomy, Agency, and Anxiety. The use of modified "problem-solving tasks" and a generalised anxiety about language and control, point to a negotiation of practice. The systemic constraints - most significantly the curriculum load (58.3%), class size and resource scarcity - are the key factors that restrict the full potential of IBL. These barriers highlight the fact that pedagogical change cannot be technical and requires an infrastructure that supports the "slow" and social nature of inquiry.

The implications of this study highlight a need for systemic alignment. To sustainably integrate IBL in Morocco, there must be a concerted effort between policy makers to simplify the curriculum, school administrators to support a facilitative learning environment and teacher educators to engage in practice-based rather than theoretical teacher preparation.

In short, this study suggests that while there is "will" for inquiry among Moroccan educators, there is still a "way" to go. Further research is needed to complement these findings through studies of student outcomes, the role of IBL in rural and remote

communities, or longitudinal studies of the effects of inquiry-based methods on learner autonomy. These studies will be crucial to ensure IBL becomes more than a pedagogical utopia but rather a pedagogical reality for all Moroccan EFL students.

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