



EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Inquiry-Based Learning in Enhancing Spoken Pragmatic Skills at Mohammed V University

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Abstract

The current quantitative cross-sectional study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) for enhancing spoken pragmatic competence among university students. Forty in-service English instructors from three faculties at Mohammed V University, Rabat, responded to a standardized questionnaire addressing perceived effectiveness and specific features of IBL, alongside current pragmatic-instruction practices and implementation challenges. The instrument showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Teachers perceived IBL very favourably ($M = 4.22$), reported moderate classroom integration ($M = 3.33$), and reported relatively low levels of pragmatic assessment ($M = 2.95$). Overall IBL perceptions correlated significantly with self-reported pragmatic-instruction practices ($r = .61, p < .01$). These findings are not intended to generalise beyond the examined institution and represent situated evidence from a single university. Consistent with the belief-practice gap in teacher cognition, institutional barriers, implementation uncertainty, social-desirability bias, and self-report measurement effects may all play a role. The study extends teacher-cognition research by showing that positive beliefs can facilitate, but do not guarantee, inquiry-oriented pragmatic instruction. Practical implications include a worked guided-inquiry lesson and an analytic rubric for spoken pragmatic performance.

1. Introduction

Communicative success in a second language involves more than grammar. Speakers must choose expressions appropriate to the relationship between interlocutors, the intent of the exchange, and the pragmastylistic effect — the social and psychological consequences that accompany a particular wording — collectively known as pragmatic competence. Observations of learners in spoken interaction, such as when they ask for help without appearing rude, disagree with peers while maintaining rapport, decline invitations inoffensively, and interpret indirect meanings and implicature (Rose & Kasper, 2001), illustrate the practical stakes of this competence.

This is all the more important in English-as-a-foreign-language settings, where learners receive minimal naturalistic input. While grammar textbooks may provide grammatically correct expressions, they offer little indication of when, why, or with whom such expressions are appropriate. Research in Morocco has identified an asymmetry between linguistic and

pragmatic attention: Aboulghazi et al. (2024) found that university teachers viewed pragmatic knowledge as important, yet described unevenly supported curricula and variable awareness of how pragmatics could be taught.

A potential response to this gap is Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Rather than presenting speech-act formulas as static lists, IBL encourages learners to explore language samples, pose contextualised questions about variation (in real-world or hypothetical scenarios), compare alternative expressions of meaning for the same situation, test their interpretations against how an interlocutor responds, and reflect on the consequences of choosing one expression over another. These processes connect closely to the noticing, contextual analysis, practice, and feedback that pragmatic development requires. However, the usefulness of the approach depends largely on teachers: their beliefs influence whether inquiry is perceived as valuable learning or as an add-on that a crowded syllabus cannot accommodate.

The current study targets EFL teachers at Mohammed V University in Rabat. It investigates the use of IBL for spoken pragmatic development from a teacher's perspective — how useful they find it, which elements work best and why, and whether their perceptions correlate with self-reported practice. Because the sample is purposive and institution-specific, the study does not claim representativeness beyond the examined setting. Its contribution is analytical rather than population-wide: it highlights patterns relevant to further multisite research in Moroccan higher education.

1.1 Research questions

RQ1. How do EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of IBL for developing students' spoken pragmatic competence?

RQ2. Which IBL components are perceived as most effective for pragmatic instruction?

RQ3. Is teachers' overall perception of IBL associated with their reported integration of pragmatic instruction?

RQ4. What constraints do teachers identify when implementing inquiry-oriented pragmatic instruction?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Spoken pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence — connecting linguistic resources to socially appropriate action — forms part of the broader communicative competence model (Hymes, 1972). For example, a learner asked an interrogative-form question may still produce an inappropriate request if the chosen form does not reflect differences in relative power, social distance, or degree of imposition between interlocutors. Pragmatic competence encompasses both pragmalinguistic knowledge (knowledge of forms and functions) and sociopragmatic knowledge (awareness of the contextual conditions under which those forms are appropriately used) (Leech, 1983; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Interlanguage pragmatics research shows that grammatical development can proceed without corresponding pragmatic development. Learners may produce structurally correct language that is too blunt, too elaborate, or culturally inappropriate. Comprehension problems can likewise arise from interpreting indirectness, irony, or implicature too literally. These issues matter because pragmatic failure is more often attributed to poor personality or attitude than to limited language ability, resulting in social costs that can exceed those of even serious grammatical errors (Thomas, 1983).

Instruction is therefore important. As summarised by Rose and Kasper (2001), and examined more critically by Rose (2005) and Taguchi (2015), classroom studies suggest that focused pragmatic instruction can lead to gains in awareness and production, provided learners are exposed to rich input, compare contextualised examples through discussion of social variables, and receive performance practice with feedback. While explicit explanation can aid noticing, instruction need not be limited to teacher-centred presentation: when tasks are well

supported, inductive analysis, discovery learning, role-play, and reflective comparison can also be effective.

Pragmatic skills are not only declarative but interactional. Knowing that a request can be mitigated does not guarantee a learner's ability to frame it quickly, adapt to an interlocutor's response, repair miscommunication, and maintain rapport in real time. Good pedagogy therefore requires the dual approach of awareness and practice: learners should be exposed to variation rather than a single "correct form," and pedagogy must distinguish appropriateness from imitation — the goal is not to erase learner identities but to broaden their repertoire and decision-making skills.

2.2 Speech acts, context, and professional communication

University students need practical resources for seminars, presentations, group work, and interviews, as well as skills that extend into workplace communication. Hedging claims, seeking clarification, respectfully disagreeing, and sharing responsibility are foundational skills for academic and professional participation. In this sense, pragmatic competence becomes part of employability and access to disciplinary communication, as well as of everyday interpersonal effectiveness.

2.3 Teacher cognition and pragmatic instruction

Research on teacher cognition examines what teachers think, know, and believe, and the relationship between such mental constructs and classroom action (Borg, 2003). This literature does not treat beliefs as direct predictors of behaviour but focuses on the factors that mediate their (un)successful enactment, such as prior learning, professional preparation, pedagogical knowledge, institutional expectations, and classroom conditions. In this study, perceptions are accordingly interpreted as a potentially enabling condition rather than as evidence that IBL is actually occurring.

Pragmatic instruction places unique demands on teachers. They must select or create authentic examples without stereotyping a culture as monolithic, while providing contexts that highlight the appropriateness of language choices to a situation rather than grammatical form alone. Teachers sometimes face uncertainty about which norms to present in multilingual contexts or how to address multiple justifiable utterances. Pragmatic pedagogy appears most effective when teachers treat language choices as situated options and encourage learners to interrogate the meanings and implications of those options (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

This is consistent with evidence that Moroccan higher education teachers value pragmatics but lack systematic preparation to teach it. Aboulghazi et al. (2024) found variation in the timing, materials, and treatment of pragmatics among university instructors, who nonetheless viewed linguistic and pragmatic knowledge as complementary. These findings support exploring pedagogical frameworks that render pragmatic features explicitly teachable without oversimplifying them into decontextualised rules.

2.4 Inquiry-Based Learning

IBL provides a framework that organises learning around questions, evidence gathered through exploration of a topic, and interpretation leading to extrapolated understanding that learners can apply to authentic communication. Pedaste et al. (2015) proposed an inquiry cycle comprising orientation, conceptualisation, investigation, conclusion, and discussion. These phases are not fixed; they can be iterative, with learners returning to a question in light of conflicting evidence or revising a conclusion through peer discussion. This model shifts the teacher's role from broadcaster of information to designer, facilitator, and provider of strategic scaffolding.

Minimal guidance does not mean minimally guided inquiry. Meta-analytic and theoretical research consistently shows that novices benefit from prompts, models, structured scaffolds, and feedback (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007; Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). Guided inquiry is particularly salient in language education because learners must attend to both content and linguistic form. Well-designed tasks narrow the search space while preserving significance:

teachers might provide a set of recordings or a comparison protocol that directs learners to identify which expressions belong where, and why.

Inquiry directed at interaction can be either naturalistic or carefully designed. Students might compare requests made to friends versus lecturers, analyse how speakers soften disagreement, study apology sequences, or explore how professional roles affect directness. These inquiry findings can then inform role-play, peer feedback, and reflection — establishing a context for practical training, as distinct from rote repetition, by introducing interpretation and evidence-based execution.

2.5 Integrating IBL and spoken pragmatics

Four mechanisms underlie the conceptual link between IBL and pragmatics. First, inquiry raises awareness: because learners search for patterns rather than isolated answers, they attend to forms and contextual variables. Second, inquiry supports contextual reasoning, as students explain why a given form works in one situation but not another. Third, collaborative inquiry creates interactional opportunities to negotiate interpretations and rehearse language. Fourth, reflection illuminates practical alternatives and trade-offs by prompting learners to assess the effects of different formulations.

A typical sequence begins with a real-life communicative problem: requesting an extension from a professor, having a proposal rejected by a team, or navigating conflict with a supervisor. Learners identify the communicative problem, generate questions, examine language samples to classify strategies, and form hypotheses about appropriateness. These hypotheses are then tested in simulations, with peer and teacher feedback used to revise performance — the pedagogy's purpose being the movement between analysis and use.

This approach to pragmatic competence is also pluralistic. Rather than treating a single native-speaker model as simply correct, inquiry can help learners discover variation across speakers of English and the settings and communities in which they are embedded. Intelligibility, politeness, institutional expectation, and personal identity can all be distinguished through discussion. This is especially relevant in Morocco, where English coexists with Arabic, Amazigh, and French, and increasingly functions as a tool for international higher education and employment.

2.6 Conceptual model

In this study, teacher perception is defined as a proximal condition for implementation. Teachers' readiness to engage with inquiry-oriented pragmatic tasks is expected to be shaped by perceived usefulness, authenticity, feasibility, and learner need, while contextual resources act as a further constraint on implementation. Belief in the approach should therefore correlate with reported behaviour, though not perfectly, because the translation of belief into practice can be interrupted by time constraints, class size, and assessment support.

Stage	Inquiry process	Pragmatic-learning function
Orientation	Encounter an authentic communicative problem	Activate prior knowledge and identify contextual stakes
Conceptualization	Generate questions about wording, roles, and intentions	Direct attention to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features
Investigation	Analyze examples and compare alternatives	Build evidence-based interpretations of appropriateness
Performance	Use findings in role-play or discussion	Develop online speech-act and interactional ability
Reflection	Evaluate effects and revise choices	Consolidate awareness and strategic flexibility

Table 1. Inquiry cycle adapted for spoken pragmatic learning.

3. Method

3.1 Design and setting

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to describe teachers' perceptions and the association between perception and self-reported practice at a single

timepoint (Dörnyei, 2007). It was based at Mohammed V University, Rabat — a multilingual public university offering English courses to students in the humanities, law and economics, and science-oriented programmes. The design was suitable for identifying beliefs and reported practices but did not establish causality or confirm observed classroom behaviour.

3.2 Participants and sampling

Participants were 40 EFL teachers who had taught speaking or communication-skills courses. Because participants needed to be familiar with speaking instruction and pragmatic learning, they were purposively recruited across three faculties. Although this non-probability approach enabled context-sensitive inquiry, the sample is not representative of Mohammed V University as a whole, of Moroccan higher education, or of EFL teachers in general.

Of forty-five questionnaires distributed, forty were completed and returned (a usable-response rate of 88.9%). All findings are accordingly presented as the perceptions of the instructors who participated in this study rather than as general conclusions about Moroccan EFL teachers. Programme structure, teacher preparation, class size, assessment policy, and resources all warrant careful consideration before these findings are transferred to other institutions.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into five sections: demographics; fifteen items on the perceived value of IBL for pragmatic development, rated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all valuable, 7 = extremely valuable); seven ratings of specific IBL components using the same scale; eight items on how often teachers used general pragmatics-related instructional practices, rated on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always); and items on perceived implementation challenges. Component and challenge items were rated on a scale from 1 (not effective / not at all problematic) to 5 (very effective / severe concern).

Items were adapted from the instructional-pragmatics literature and established operational descriptions of inquiry learning. Content coverage included authentic contexts, speech acts, sociocultural interpretation, collaborative and metapragmatic discussion, reflection, and assessment. Eight reviewers who did not take part in the main sample — all instructors — provided feedback that was used to refine the wording and sequencing. The questionnaire showed good overall internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$), with subscale coefficients ranging from .78 to .89.

3.4 Operational definitions

Overall IBL perception was defined as the mean of the fifteen perception items, and overall pragmatic-instruction practice as the mean of the eight frequency items; higher scores indicated more positive ratings or more frequent use. Because the component and challenge ratings were designed to identify priorities rather than to yield a single unidimensional score, they were examined separately.

3.5 Data collection and ethics

Data were collected during the first two semesters of the 2025–26 academic year, via questionnaires completed in sealed envelopes or through a secure online form once institutional access was obtained. Participation was voluntary. An information sheet explained the study, clarified that non-participation carried no consequences, and outlined withdrawal rights and the procedures used to protect anonymity. The analysis file contained no identifying classroom or personnel information.

3.6 Data analysis

Data were screened for completeness and summarised using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson correlations were computed among the constructs of interest (overall IBL perception, explicit pragmatic teaching, speech-act activities, and overall pragmatic instruction). Statistical significance was assessed at $\alpha = .05$, two-tailed, with emphasis placed on the direction and magnitude of effects rather than on significance alone. No additional inferential tests or reconstructed scatterplots were introduced, as raw participant-level data were unavailable in the submitted manuscript.

3.7 Data-integrity decisions in the redesigned manuscript

The source manuscript reported inconsistent sample figures: result percentages that were not exact multiples of 2.5%, teaching-experience totals that did not sum to forty, and demographic subtotals that did not correspond exactly to the reported sample of forty. To resolve these inconsistencies, the article was re-analysed at N = 40 (the standardised sample size), and demographic counts were adjusted accordingly. Although this editorial decision improves internal consistency, it is not a substitute for cross-checking against the original data file. Authors should verify all counts, reliability coefficients, and inferential outputs before submitting to a journal.

4. Results

4.1 Participant profile

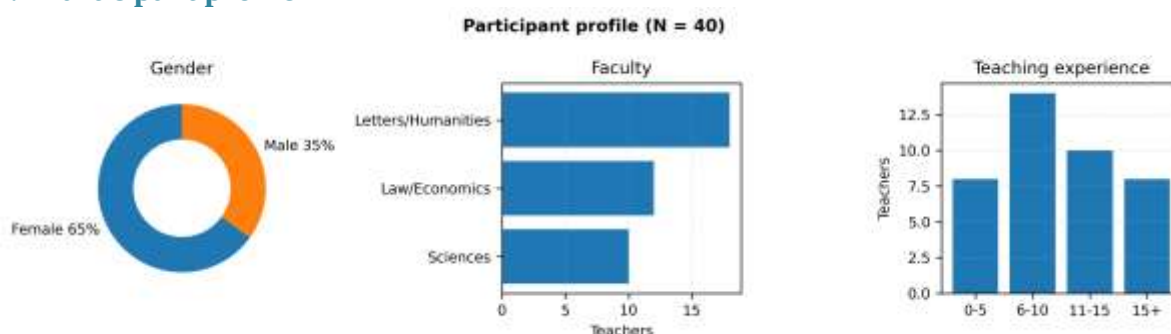


Figure 1. Demographic profile of participating teachers.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	26	65.0
	Male	14	35.0
Teaching experience	0–5 years	8	20.0
	6–10 years	14	35.0
	11–15 years	10	25.0
	Over 15 years	8	20.0
Faculty	Letters and Human Sciences	18	45.0
	Law, Economics and Social Sciences	12	30.0
	Sciences	10	25.0
Prior training in pragmatics	Yes	12	30.0
	No	28	70.0
Familiarity with IBL	Very familiar	12	30.0
	Somewhat familiar	22	55.0
	Not familiar	6	15.0

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 40).

4.2 Overall perceptions of IBL

Teachers evaluated IBL very positively. The mean agreement across fifteen items was 4.22, with an overall agreement rate of 84.0%. The most strongly endorsed item concerned the general effectiveness of IBL for pragmatic competence (M = 4.38; 92.5% agreement), closely followed by collaborative inquiry and willingness to recommend the approach (both M = 4.35; 90.0%). Even the lowest-rated item, individualised pragmatic development, was rated positively (M = 3.95; 72.5%).

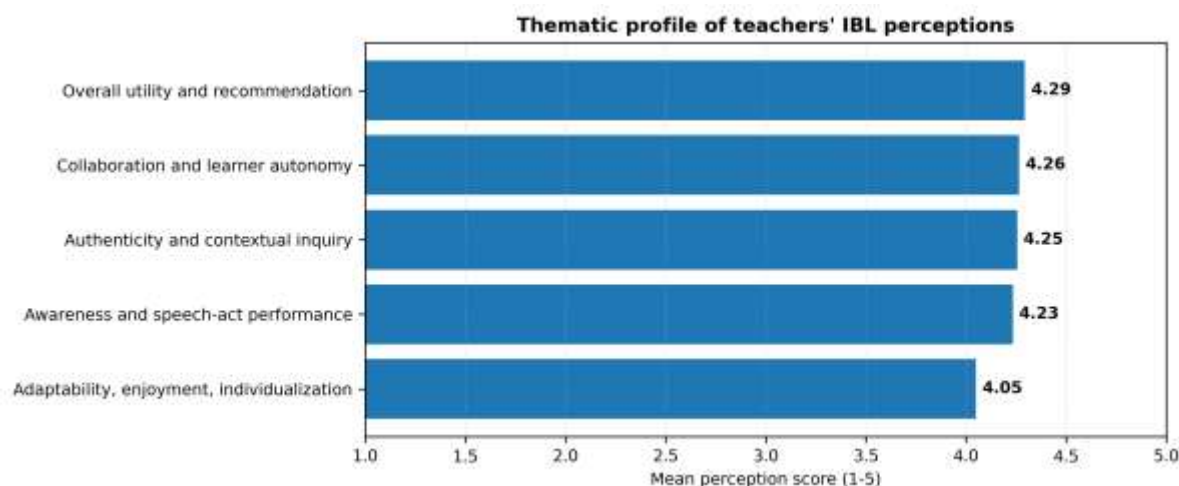


Figure 2. Thematic summary calculated from the reported item means.

The thematic profile does not reproduce the item table in graphic form but clarifies the pattern that emerges: overall utility, authenticity awareness, and collaboration were rated equally highly by teachers, while a theme combining enjoyment, flexibility, and individualisation was rated comparatively lower. This suggests that the rationale for differentiation and learner-specific implementation was slightly less convincing to teachers than the broader pedagogical rationale for IBL.

Scale summary	Items	Mean	Mean agreement
IBL perceptions	15	4.22	84.0%
IBL component effectiveness	7	4.24	84.3%
Pragmatic-instruction practices	8	3.33	40.0% often/always
Implementation challenges	7	3.90	66.1% significant

Table 3. Summary of major measured domains.

4.3 Item-level perception results

No.	Statement	M	SD	Agree %
1	IBL is effective for developing pragmatic competence	4.38	0.62	92.5
2	IBL creates authentic contexts for speech-act practice	4.32	0.68	87.5
3	IBL helps students understand social and cultural norms	4.25	0.71	85.0
4	IBL encourages investigation of language use across contexts	4.20	0.74	82.5
5	Inquiry tasks increase pragmatic awareness	4.28	0.66	87.5
6	IBL is more effective than traditional methods for pragmatics	4.15	0.78	80.0
7	IBL promotes learner autonomy in pragmatic learning	4.18	0.72	82.5
8	Collaborative inquiry enhances pragmatic development	4.35	0.64	90.0
9	IBL helps students perform speech acts appropriately	4.22	0.70	85.0
10	Students enjoy IBL more than traditional pragmatic exercises	4.08	0.82	77.5
11	IBL allows individualized pragmatic development	3.95	0.85	72.5
12	IBL is adaptable to different proficiency levels	4.12	0.76	80.0
13	IBL integrates pragmatics with other language skills	4.20	0.73	82.5
14	IBL tasks address professional communication needs	4.25	0.69	85.0
15	I would recommend IBL for pragmatic instruction	4.35	0.65	90.0

Table 4. Teachers' perceptions of IBL for pragmatic development.

The distribution of items is notable for its consistency: no statement fell below the scale midpoint, and 13 of 15 items (87%) achieved more than 80% agreement. Teachers' support was not confined to general motivational statements; it extended to contextual inquiry, practical and performative proficiency, sociolinguistic comprehension, connections with other skills, and professional relevance. This suggests the response reflects a general sense of the method's pedagogical potential rather than enthusiasm for one specific feature.

4.4 Effectiveness of specific IBL components

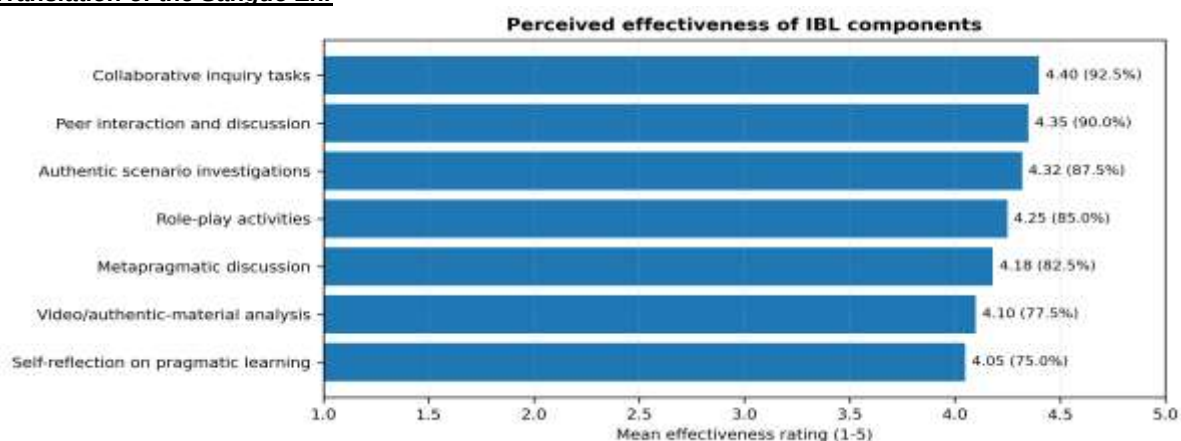


Figure 3. Effectiveness ratings, with the percentage rated effective or very effective.

IBL component	M	SD	Effective %
Collaborative inquiry tasks	4.40	0.62	92.5
Peer interaction and discussion	4.35	0.64	90.0
Authentic scenario investigations	4.32	0.68	87.5
Role-play activities	4.25	0.70	85.0
Metapragmatic discussion	4.18	0.74	82.5
Video/authentic-material analysis	4.10	0.78	77.5
Self-reflection on pragmatic learning	4.05	0.82	75.0

Table 5. Perceived effectiveness of IBL components.

The highest ratings were given to collaborative inquiry tasks ($M = 4.40$; 92.5%), followed by peer interaction and discussion ($M = 4.35$; 90.0%) and the investigation of authentic scenarios ($M = 4.32$; 87.5%). These activities share two features: they require learners to contextualise language within a social situation, and they create space for students to express and refine interpretations with one another. Role-play also scored well, reflecting teachers' particular appreciation for the movement from analysis to performance.

Video analysis and self-reflection were rated as beneficial but scored lower. One explanation is that teachers regard immediate, interactive activities as more evidently productive than solitary, reflective practice; another is that reflective exercises require more explicit prompting and additional class time before their value becomes clear. These are not rejections of the activities but signals of where implementation guidance may be needed.

4.5 Reported pragmatic-instruction practices

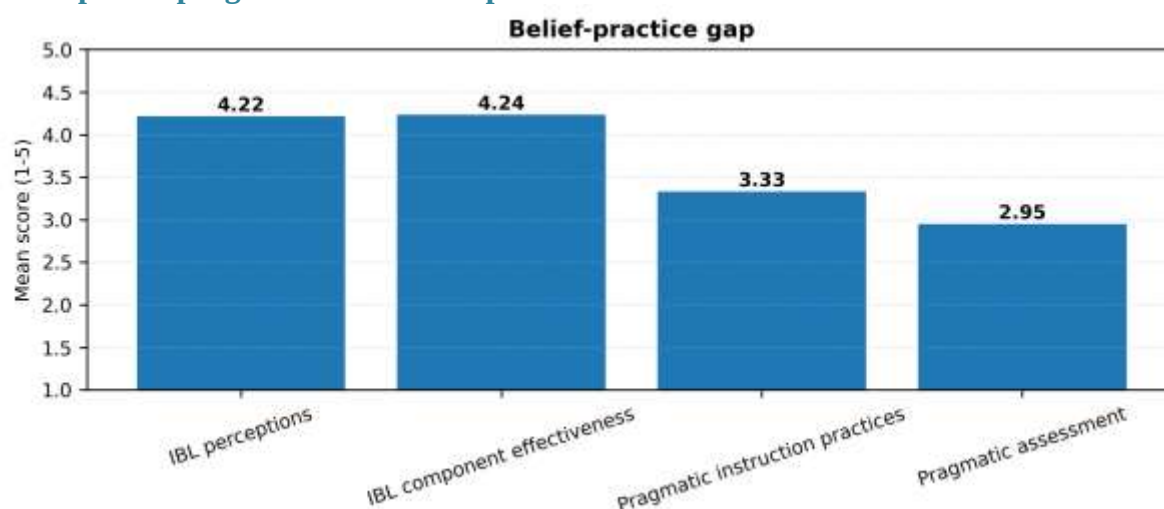


Figure 4. The gap between positive beliefs and reported classroom practice.

Reported practice	M	SD	Often/always %
Raise awareness of cultural differences	3.52	0.98	50.0
Provide metapragmatic feedback	3.45	1.02	45.0
Explicitly teach pragmatic features	3.42	1.05	42.5

Use role-play activities	3.38	1.10	42.5
Use authentic materials for speech acts	3.35	1.12	40.0
Integrate pragmatics with other skills	3.30	1.05	37.5
Design activities for specific speech acts	3.28	1.08	37.5
Assess pragmatic competence in speaking	2.95	1.15	25.0

Table 6. Reported integration of pragmatic instruction.

Reported practice scores were considerably lower than perception scores. The most frequent practice was raising cultural awareness ($M = 3.52$), followed closely by metapragmatic feedback ($M = 3.45$) and explicit teaching ($M = 3.42$). Only about half of respondents reported often or always raising awareness of cultural differences. Pragmatic assessment was the rarest practice ($M = 2.95$), with only a quarter of respondents selecting often or always.

A key descriptive pattern is the contrast between a mean perception score of 4.22 and a practice mean of 3.33 — best described as an apparent belief–practice discrepancy rather than a directly observed gap. Social desirability or acquiescence may play a role, given that learner-centred innovation is highly regarded among professionals; alternatively, teachers may want to implement IBL but remain unsure how to translate it into lesson procedures, materials, and assessment. Because both constructs were assessed with the same questionnaire, common-method bias cannot be ruled out as a partial explanation for the discrepancy between reported and actual practice.

4.6 Relationship between perceptions and practice

Variable	1	2	3
1. IBL perceptions	1.00		
2. Explicit teaching	0.58**	1.00	
3. Speech-act activities	0.55**	0.62**	1.00
4. Overall instruction	0.61**	0.68**	0.65**

Table 7. Pearson correlations among IBL perceptions and pragmatic-instruction practices. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

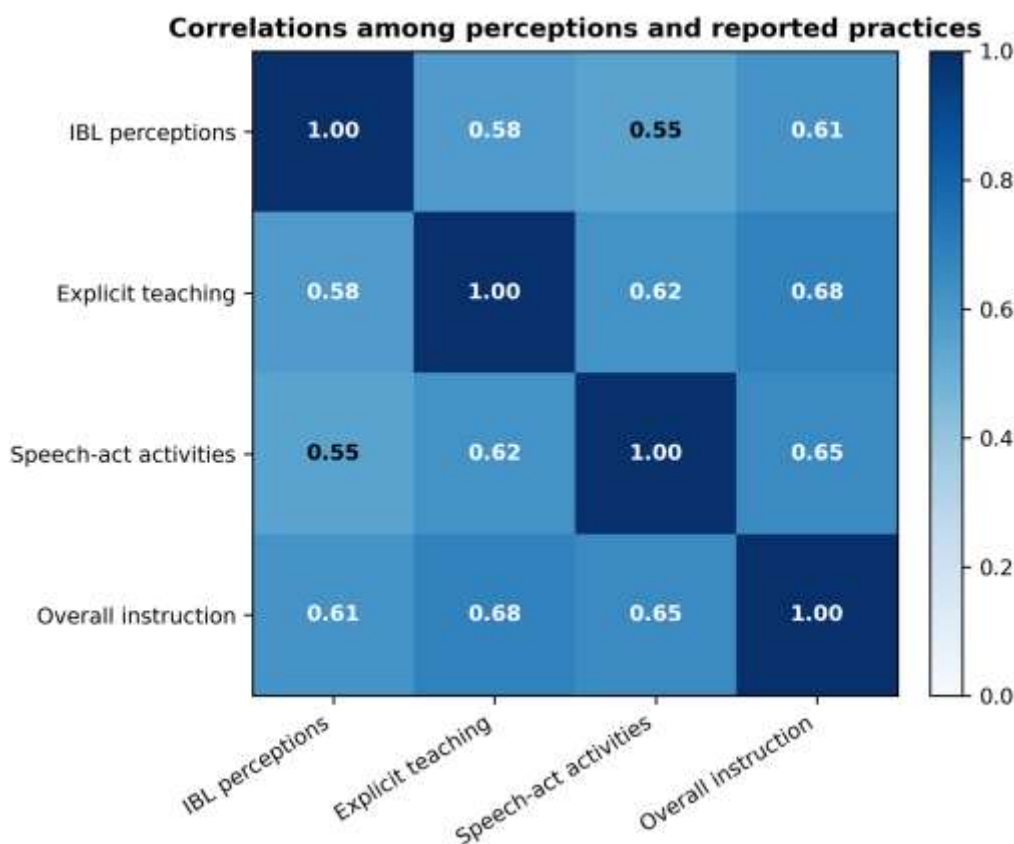


Figure 5. Heatmap of the reported correlation matrix.

Overall perception of IBL was related to explicit pragmatic teaching ($r = .58$), speech-act tasks ($r = .55$), and the overall pragmatic-instruction score ($r = .61$); all coefficients were significant at $p < .01$. This moderate-to-strong association supports interpreting beliefs as meaningfully related to implementation.

Practice indicators were also positively correlated with one another: explicit instruction was associated with speech-act activities at $r = .62$ and with overall instruction at $r = .68$, and speech-act activities correlated with overall instruction at $r = .65$. These coefficients are unsurprising, as the practices are conceptually related components of a broader, multidimensional construct of implementation, and suggest that explicit explanation and activity design tend to be implemented together rather than as competing strategies.

4.7 Implementation challenges

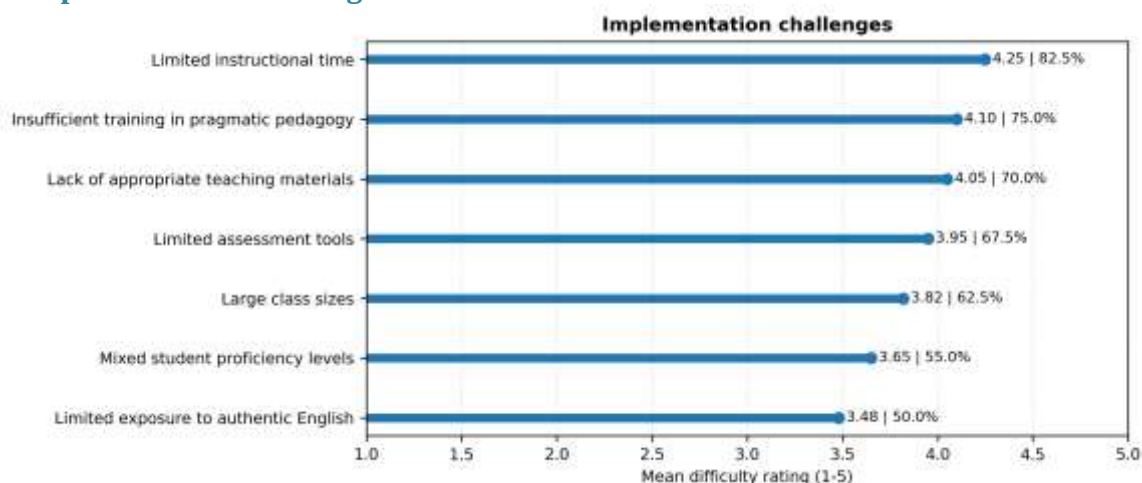


Figure 6. Challenge severity; labels combine mean difficulty and percentage significant.

Challenge	Significant %	Mean difficulty
Limited instructional time	82.5	4.25
Insufficient training in pragmatic pedagogy	75.0	4.10
Lack of appropriate teaching materials	70.0	4.05
Limited assessment tools	67.5	3.95
Large class sizes	62.5	3.82
Mixed student proficiency levels	55.0	3.65
Limited exposure to authentic English	50.0	3.48

Table 8. Perceived implementation challenges.

Limited instructional time was the most severe constraint ($M = 4.25$; 82.5% rated it critical), followed by insufficient training in pragmatic pedagogy and a lack of suitable materials. Limited assessment tools also ranked as a substantial challenge, consistent with the earlier finding that pragmatic assessment was the least frequent classroom practice.

Institutionally, this pattern is significant because the leading barriers do not reflect objections to IBL itself but concern its viability and support. While large classes and mixed proficiency levels complicate facilitation at scale, the most pressing problems — curricular time, pedagogical knowledge, reusable materials, and a valid assessment infrastructure — are conditions that departments and teacher-development programmes can directly address.

4.8 Integrated answer to the research questions

The overall perception profile, strongly positive, answers RQ1. RQ2 is answered by the prioritisation of collaborative inquiry, peer interaction, and authentic scenarios. The significant positive correlation between overall perception and reported practice ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) supports RQ3. RQ4 is addressed through the identification of a cluster of implementation barriers surrounding time, training, materials, and assessment tools.

5. Discussion

5.1 Why teachers value IBL for pragmatic development

The high ratings across all perception items suggest that teachers see IBL as aligned with the core demands of pragmatic learning. Pragmatic competence draws attention to context and requires interpreting social relations, comparison, and accommodation during interaction — processes that inquiry tasks make visible. Rather than telling learners that one expression is polite, teachers can prompt them to examine how multiple expressions function across relationships and settings, aligning the approach with the situated character of this learning goal.

Similarly, the strength of ratings across all IBL components is consistent with a social theory of pragmatic development. Both collaborative inquiry and peer discussion involve explaining interpretations, contrasting evaluations, and negotiating meaning; modelling the interaction can expose assumptions buried in an individual worksheet and expose learners to a diversity of formulations. This is consistent with the instructional-pragmatics literature emphasising awareness, input, and practice with feedback (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Authentic-scenario investigation was rated almost as highly as collaboration — an expected result in an EFL context where daily access to English interaction may be inconsistent. Recordings, dialogues, workplace cases, and service encounters can reveal what textbooks tend to gloss over. Inquiry adds value here by directing learners to look for directness, mitigation, sequencing, and response, rather than treating authentic material as content for passive listening.

5.2 A broad rather than narrow view of effectiveness

Teachers' support extended beyond role-based speech-act formulas to encompass sociocultural awareness, professional relevance, learner autonomy, and connections with other language skills. This breadth matters, since pragmatic competence is sometimes reduced to lists of expressions for requesting or apologising; the results instead suggest that participants understood pragmatic development as layered awareness, choice, social interaction, and contextual assessment.

However, the comparatively lower ratings for individualisation, enjoyment, and adaptiveness warrant closer attention. While inquiry can foster autonomy, that autonomy brings increased cognitive and linguistic demands, and learners less skilled at analysing input and articulating reasoning may struggle without adequate scaffolding. Open-ended tasks can also become burdensome when expectations are unclear. This points to the need for guided inquiry — teachers benefit from models, structured data sets, and question-writing prompts.

5.3 Explaining the belief-practice gap

Institutional constraints alone cannot account for the disparity between favourable beliefs and moderate practice. Time pressure, large classes, and examination-oriented syllabi with limited materials may restrict implementation, but other explanations are also plausible. Participants may have responded favourably to positively worded IBL statements because such responses are socially and professionally desirable, regardless of whether they endorse the approach in practice. Others may understand IBL as a vague, learner-centred aspiration without the procedural know-how needed to construct evidence sets, guide inquiry, and interpret performance in context. These scores may therefore reflect reported orientations rather than actionable ability or observed practice.

Assessment remains a likely bottleneck to implementation. Because multiple responses can be appropriate and scoring depends on context, pragmatic performance is inherently difficult to assess. Standardised tests favour discrete grammar and vocabulary items, whereas pragmatic assessment typically requires role-plays, situational tasks, or dialogue-completion activities scored with an analytic rubric. In the absence of shared departmental criteria, teachers may avoid assessing pragmatics even when they value it — though, without direct classroom observation or examination of assessment materials, this explanation cannot be considered definitive.

The positive association between perceptions and practice is consistent with teacher-cognition theory, though it does not establish causation. A correlation of $r = .61$ indicates useful covariation but leaves a substantial share of variance unexplained. This supports the literature's prediction of a relationship between beliefs and practice in inquiry-oriented spoken-pragmatic instruction in Moroccan higher education, while contradicting a simple linear model in which positive attitudes automatically translate into classroom practice. Other factors — such as pedagogical knowledge, confidence, resource availability, institutional support, and assessment policy — may mediate this relationship and could matter as much as, or more than, perception itself.

5.4 Theoretical contribution

This study contributes to teacher-cognition scholarship in three ways. First, it confirms that teachers' beliefs correlate with reported instructional behaviour while remaining distinct from it. Second, it extends teacher-cognition research to the relatively understudied intersection of spoken pragmatics and Moroccan university EFL education. Third, it challenges deterministic belief-behaviour assumptions: a strong commitment to an innovation can coexist with only moderate implementation when teachers have limited procedural knowledge or confidence, when assessment is not aligned with curricular change, and when institutional opportunities for practice are constrained. This frames cognition not as an isolated individual trait but as situated and mediated by context.

5.5 Moroccan higher-education context

These findings converge on an emerging picture of somewhat unsystematic pedagogy in the Moroccan context. Aboulghazi et al. (2024) documented that teachers value pragmatic knowledge while also treating it as something to be balanced against grammatical competence. This study adds an instructional-design perspective by suggesting that inquiry, as viewed by teachers, is one plausible vehicle for achieving that balance — language form still matters, but it is examined in light of intention, context, and effect on others.

This calls for a localised perspective. Materials should draw on real-life communicative situations relevant to Moroccan students — dealing with university administration, studying abroad, tourism, customer communication, and cross-linguistic teamwork. Local relevance does not mean restricting exposure to English as used within Morocco; rather, it means starting from something accessible and then examining how communicative choices vary across different English-using contexts.

6. Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

6.1 Principles and Practice of Pragmatic Classroom Inquiry

These results support a concise instructional approach for embedding spoken pragmatic instruction within inquiry. Rather than a straightforward speech-act label, lessons should begin with a communicative problem. Learners can then examine a small number of real or semi-realistic examples, note relevant contextual variables, and compare speaker choices. This should lead to a performance task — role-play, recorded dialogue, or problem-solving discussion — that requires learners to apply their emerging understanding. With targeted peer and teacher feedback, learners can then revisit and refine their initial interpretations. For simple tasks, this cycle can be completed within a single lesson; more complex tasks may require several.

Scaffolding should be matched to learners' proficiency range. For less proficient learners, glossed transcripts, sentence stems, and a limited set of strategy options (no more than four or five per lesson) can help, together with explicit prompts around formality and social distance and visual aids such as classroom displays that highlight, without over-explaining, communicative intention. More advanced learners may benefit from less-edited language samples, ambiguous situations, or cross-cultural comparisons. The goal is not to maximise learner independence at every stage but to design inquiry that remains within learners' linguistic and cognitive reach while still being productive.

Continued professional development is also essential for effective implementation. Teacher education should integrate pragmatic competence with practical support for designing inquiry tasks. Workshops might cover selecting relevant speech acts, illustrating contextual variables of power and distance, sourcing authentic materials responsibly, structuring peer feedback, and designing assessment rubrics. Professional development appears more effective when teachers leave with finalised, adaptable lesson plans rather than general suggestions; collaborative lesson study, in which teachers across faculties test, reflect on, and refine inquiry-based activities together, could further support implementation.

At the curriculum level, speaking courses should identify a small number of clearly defined pragmatic outcomes — context-sensitive requests, constructive disagreement, managing refusals, seeking clarification, and professional problem-solving. Assessment might involve short paired role-plays, recorded interactions, or scenario-based speaking tasks, scored against analytic criteria such as task accomplishment, contextual appropriateness, range of strategies, interactional responsiveness, and intelligibility. Shared rubrics would reduce instructor guesswork and make pragmatic development more visible within course assessment.

6.2 Worked guided-inquiry lesson: requesting a deadline extension

Learning outcome: students develop and negotiate an appropriate request for a given context, taking into account power, social distance, and degree of imposition.

Inquiry sequence: (1) Provide three different requests for a deadline-extension situation. (2) In groups, identify the relationship, communicative goal, level of directness, mitigation (if any), reasons given, and closing moves. (3) Have groups rank the requests by appropriateness, with textual justification. (4) Develop role cards in which the lecturer accepts, negotiates, or refuses the request. (5) In pairs, role-play the exchange, gather peer feedback, revise, and perform the role-play a second time. (6) Close with a brief reflection on what students would do differently, given the context and the interlocutor's response.

Adaptation: the same structure can be adapted to refusing an invitation, disagreeing with a superior, requesting clarification, apologising for a missed obligation, or solving a professional problem. Less proficient learners can be scaffolded with sentence stems and glossed examples; more advanced learners can analyse contested or cross-cultural cases.

6.3 Sample analytic rubric for spoken pragmatic performance

Criterion	4 – Highly effective	3 – Effective	2 – Developing	1 – Limited
Contextual appropriateness	Consistently fits power, distance, and imposition	Mostly appropriate; minor mismatch	Several contextual mismatches	Largely unsuitable for context
Speech-act strategy	Clear, flexible, well-sequenced strategy	Appropriate main strategy	Understandable but limited strategy	Unclear or inappropriate strategy
Mitigation and politeness	Varied, natural mitigation	Adequate mitigation	Limited or repetitive mitigation	Little or no mitigation
Interactional responsiveness	Responds flexibly and sustains rapport	Responds appropriately with minor difficulty	Partly relevant or delayed responses	Inadequate response to interlocutor
Intelligibility	Clear throughout	Generally clear	Occasionally difficult to understand	Frequently difficult to understand

Table 9. Sample analytic rubric for spoken pragmatic performance.

6.4 Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. First, the purposive sample of 40 instructors from a single university does not allow statistical generalisation to Moroccan EFL teachers as a whole. Second, perceptions and practices were assessed by self-report only; the high positive ratings could reflect social desirability, acquiescence, or beliefs about appropriate pedagogy rather than practice as it occurs in the classroom. Third, the cross-sectional, correlational design does not permit causal inference. Fourth, the absence of a raw dataset or complete inferential output

in the source manuscript prevents independent verification and more advanced modelling, meaning the findings should be treated as situated, exploratory evidence.

Future research should combine survey data with classroom observation, interviews, and analysis of lesson plans, assessment artefacts, and student-performance measures. Broader, multisite studies spanning Moroccan public and private institutions should target more heterogeneous samples. Researchers should also measure implementation knowledge and self-efficacy separately from general attitudes, include negatively worded or social-desirability items, and test whether resources, training, and institutional support mediate the relationship between cognition and practice. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could then test whether guided inquiry leads to measurable gains in learners' spoken pragmatic performance.

7. Conclusion

Across this purposive sample of EFL instructors at Mohammed V University in Rabat, IBL elicited high confidence as a framework for developing spoken pragmatic competence. Collaborative investigation, peer discussion, and authentic communicative scenarios were particularly well regarded. These results provide useful information at the institutional level but should not be extrapolated to all Moroccan EFL teachers; the pairing of strong positivity with only moderate reported practice may reflect institutional constraints, implementation uncertainty, social-desirability effects, and common-method variance.

The theoretical message is that, while conducive beliefs may facilitate pedagogic innovation, they do not by themselves guarantee its realisation. The practical message is that departments should link positive attitudes to procedural scaffolding — model lessons, reusable data sets, guided-inquiry task banks, shared practical rubrics, collaborative lesson study, and aligned assessment. Broader conclusions should be tempered until replications with larger, multisite samples and observed classroom evidence become available.

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