

EXPLORING EFL LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC FAILURE: PERSPECTIVES FROM MOROCCAN EFL TEACHERS

Abdelfattah Abidi, Sultan Moulay Sliman
University, Faculty of Arts and
Humanities, Beni Mellal, Morocco
abidiabdelfattah93@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Lalla Meriem Ouahidi, Sultan
Moulay Sliman University, Faculty of Arts
and Humanities, Beni Mellal, Morocco
Louahidi@usms.ma

Prof. Dr. Hassan Zaid, Faculty of Arts and
Humanities, Sultan Moulay Slimane University,
Beni Mellal, Morocco.
zaidhassan37@gmail.com

Received Date: 12/5/2025,

Accepted Date: 15/6/2025,

Published Date: 1/9/2025

Abstract:

Acquiring a language necessitates not only exposure to isolated lexical items and grammar rules but also rules of language use in different contexts. Such input is profusely available in mother tongue acquisition. However, in foreign language learning contexts, students are often bombarded with grammar rules but receive little to no exposure to pragmatics. Therefore, when they happen to communicate with native speakers, they often experience communication breakdowns. To compensate for this apparent deficiency, teaching and developing EFL students' pragmatic competence is desirable. Using a semi-structured interview, the current paper explores Moroccan EFL teachers' perspectives on the place of pragmatics in Moroccan EFL textbooks and sheds light on EFL learners' pragmatic failure. It also explores teachers' views on the impact of instruction on EFL learners' pragmatic competence. Moreover, this paper examines the challenges that teachers face in teaching pragmatics. The findings revealed that Moroccan EFL teachers are not satisfied with the pragmatic content in textbooks and advocate for explicit instruction to address students' pragmatic failure. Additionally, teachers reported that they face several challenges in teaching pragmatics. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for developing students' pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Communication, EFL learners, pragmatic competence, pragmatic failure.

استكشاف الإخفاق التداولي لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: وجهات نظر من أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في المغرب

عبد الفتاح عابدي

جامعة السلطان مولاي سليمان، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، بني ملال، المغرب

الأستاذة الدكتورة لالة مريم واحيدي

جامعة السلطان مولاي سليمان، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، بني ملال، المغرب

الأستاذ الدكتور حسن زايد

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة السلطان مولاي سليمان، بني ملال، المغرب

تاريخ النشر: ٢٠٢٥/٩/١

تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٥/٦/١٥

تاريخ الاستلام: ٢٠٢٥/٥/١٢

الملخص:

لا يقتصر تعلم اللغة على اكتساب المفردات والقواعد النحوية فحسب، بل يتطلب أيضا فهم قواعد استخدامها في سياقات مختلفة. وبينما يحصل مكتسبوا اللغة الأم على هذا النوع من المعرفة بشكل طبيعي وكافي، يعاني متعلموا اللغات الأجنبية وفي مقدمتهم طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية من ضعف في هذا الجانب بسبب التركيز المفرط على القواعد النحوية وغياب الجانب التداولي في المحتوى التعليمي. ونتيجة لذلك، كثيرا ما يواجه هؤلاء المتعلمون صعوبات في التواصل الفعال مع الناطقين الأصليين للغة. وفي هذا الإطار، يسعى هذا البحث من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة إلى استكشاف آراء أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية بالمغرب حول موقع التداوليات في المقررات الدراسية المغربية. كما يسلط الضوء على مظاهر الإخفاق التداولي لدى المتعلمين. إضافة إلى ذلك، يناقش البحث تصورات الأساتذة حول أثر التدريس على تنمية الكفاءة التداولية وكذا التحديات التي تواجههم في هذا المجال. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الأساتذة غير راضين عن المحتوى التداولي في الكتب المدرسية ويؤكدون على ضرورة إدماج تعليم التداوليات بشكل صريح ومنهجي لتعزيز قدرة المتعلمين على التواصل الفعال. وعبر المشاركون عن عدد من التحديات التي تحول دون تحقيق هذا الهدف. ويختتم البحث بجملة من التوصيات التي من شأنها الإسهام في تطوير الكفاءة التداولية لدى المتعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التواصل، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الكفاءة التداولية، الإخفاق التداولي.

1. Background

Research in linguistics and anthropology had a major effect on language teaching methods and approaches. The seventies of the twentieth century witnessed a major paradigm shift in focus in the field of language teaching. Educators have realized the significance of developing students' ability in communication. The latter was first introduced by the sociolinguist, Hymes (1972), who criticized the Chomskyan narrow notion of linguistic competence (LC). The Chomskyan (1965) LC describes a native speaker's idealized knowledge of the grammar of his/her language. However, this competence is, to a

large extent, limited because it neglects the social use of language. As a supplementary notion to LC, Hymes (1972) proposes a broader image of a speakers' language competence, which he names "Communicative Competence" (CC). This broad notion encompasses not only speaker's mushrooming knowledge of grammar but also awareness and ability to use it in real contexts. Since then, an ample of CC models have emerged (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman & Palmer, 1982; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990, among others).

One of CC's important constituents is pragmatic competence (PC). Thomas (1983) describes it as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (p. 92). In other words, it refers to language users' ability to appropriately interpret and produce linguistic acts in accordance with social contexts. More specifically, PC involves awareness of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Thomas, 1983; Leech, 1983). Pragmalinguistics relates to "the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying pragmatic meaning (illocutionary and interpersonal)" (Bublitz & Norrick, 2011, p 9), while sociopragmatics refers to the "sociological interface of pragmatics" (Leech 1983: 10). Simply put, pragmalinguistics is concerned with the linguistic devices needed for performing a communicative act, whereas sociopragmatics deals with the social rules governing language use. Thus, appropriate performance of a certain speech act requires the selection of the right linguistic form in conformity with the given social context. Gaps in any of these two components of PC result in pragmatic failure.

Research in interlanguage pragmatics showed deficiencies in EFL learners' PC. Roughly speaking, EFL learners are more direct than native speakers of English due to several reasons such as pragmatic interference and lack of instruction in pragmatics. When EFL learners happen to communicate with English native speakers, they often fall into communication breakdown. Therefore, instruction in this salient language aspect is mandatory. In this respect, the present paper sheds light upon the place of pragmatics in Moroccan EFL textbooks and

discusses EFL learners' pragmatic failure. It also delves into the role of instruction in developing EFL learners' PC. Moreover, it sheds light on some challenges that impede the inclusion of pragmatics in EFL teaching contexts. Some beneficial activities and techniques for teaching pragmatics are also proposed. The current paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is pragmatic content presented in Moroccan EFL textbooks?
2. What types of pragmatic failure do Moroccan EFL learners experience?
3. How do Moroccan EFL teachers perceive the role of instruction in enhancing students' PC?
4. What challenges do Moroccan EFL teachers face in teaching pragmatics?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Place of Pragmatics in Moroccan EFL Textbooks

With the demands of learning English for both instrumental and integrative purposes (Gardner & Lambert, 1985), The National Charter for Education and Training (1999) puts special emphasis on the mastery of functional use of English. Moroccan EFL learners are expected to know how and be able to use language both accurately and appropriately to achieve their communicative goals. Therefore, Moroccan EFL textbooks are expected to align with this purpose by including the pragmatic features of the target language (TL). Baccalaureate students are taught a variety of speech acts, including requesting, apologizing, and complaining, to name but a few. These speech acts, however, are taught and presented in a very mechanic way. That is to say, Moroccan EFL textbooks include only one or two strategies for each function. Students, thus, memorize those limited strategies and employ them regardless of the social context. Now, let's have a look at the following exchange in *Ticket to English 2* by Hammani et al. (2007, p. 25):

Woman: Your music is disturbing the other passengers, would you mind reducing the volume?

Boy: Yes, sure. I wasn't aware it was too loud.

Students are required to read the exchange above and decide whether the woman is asking the boy for permission, addressing an order, or asking him to do something for her. Such an inductive approach does allow students to notice the target function and observe how it is constructed. Nevertheless, they are not provided with such social factors that determine the use of the given strategy as relative power, social distance, and the degree of imposition embedded in the communicative act (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kasper & Rose, 2001).

The request strategy used in the exchange is a *conventional preparatory* strategy (e.g., *Would you mind...?*), which is only one of many other request strategies. Unfortunately, the textbook does not include other strategies, such as *mood derivable* (e.g., *Reduce the volume*), *explicit performative* (e.g., *I'm asking you to reduce the volume*), *hedged performative* (e.g., *I would like to ask you to reduce the volume*), *obligation statement* (e.g., *You will have to reduce the volume*), *want statement* (e.g., *I really wish you'd reduce the volume*), *suggestory formula* (e.g., *How about reducing the volume?*), and *hint* (e.g., *The passengers are disturbed*).

Similarly, the same function is inappropriately presented in *Gateway to English 2*. The following are instances of requests presented in the textbook (Hassim et al., 2007, p. 13):

1. John! Would you come to my office, please? I've got something very important to tell you about the contract.
2. It is cold in here. Would you mind closing that window, please?
3. Altax Tours. Can I help you?
4. Ok, let me see... Would 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday be okay for you, Mr. Lynch?

In the first example, the speaker opened his/her request with *an alerter* (John) to call the addressee's attention and then produced *the head act*

(Would you come to my office, please?) followed by *a supportive move* (I've got something very important to tell you about the contract) by which he/she justifies the need for accepting the request. The semantic formula of this request is somehow rich and, therefore, is likely to develop learners' pragmalinguistic competence. However, the textbook provides no explicit information about the factors that led the speaker to use the semantic formula. Thus, it cannot effectively enhance students' sociopragmatic competence. The second request is composed of *a grounder* (It's cold in here), which can stand by itself and functions as the main act, and *the head act* (Would you mind closing the window, please?). The politeness marker "please" is *a lexical downgrader* used to soften the request and increase the likelihood of accepting it by the hearer.

As *Ticket to English 2* (2007), *Gateway to English 2* (2007) does not include various request strategies to use in different contexts with different addressees for different communication purposes. As observed, *query preparatory* is the only request strategy presented in the lesson. Several research showed that native speakers of English do not only use *conventional indirect requests* but also employ *direct and non-conventional strategies*, depending on the social context in which communication takes place (Bloom-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Cook & Liddcoat, 2002; Hammani, 2019; Abidi, 2022a, among others).

In fact, bombarding students with all this information is not recommended, as it is likely to cause anxiety and boredom. However, students need to be exposed to a variety of strategies and understand how, when, and with whom to use a particular strategy to achieve their communicative goals (Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1982; Thomas, 1983). When students are provided with only one strategy for realizing a certain speech act, they are likely to use it in all contexts or negatively transfer their pragmatic knowledge from the first language (L1). In this regard, research showed that languages and cultures differ in interpreting the social factors of power, degree of imposition, and social distance



(Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, it can be concluded that these textbooks' content does not raise students' awareness of the differences between the first and target language (TL) in realizing speech acts.

2.2. FL Learners' Pragmatic Failure

Pragmatic failure is what happens when a speaker fails to use appropriate linguistic devices for performing a certain speech act and/or fails to correctly assess the social context in which communication takes place. In this regard, Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic failure as "the inability to understand what is meant by what is said" (p. 91). This definition is somewhat limited in the sense that it mainly focuses on perception and ignores production. In their explanation of this point, Thomas (1983) and Leech (1983) distinguish between pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. The former occurs when a speaker selects a pragmatic form that is not conventionally used by native speakers in their performance of a certain speech act, whereas the latter arises when a speaker's utterance breaks the social norms and parameters of the culture of the TL.

EFL learners often experience pragmatic failure due to their pragmatic deficiency and/or pragmatic negative transfer (Shen, 2013; Loutfi, 2016; Ezzaoua, 2021; Hmouri, 2021; Abidi, 2022a, 2022b). Shen's (2013) study on factors that contribute to Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic failure showed that teacher-centered instruction, lack of authentic input, disregard of cultural differences, and overemphasis on LC all lead to pragmatic failure. Shen (2013) states that students are not actively involved in the learning process, but they just repeat after the teacher. The latter over-explains the meaning of words and sentence structure, whereas students in turn are required to use a set of given vocabulary items to construct grammatically correct sentences. This method, according to Shen (2013), does not develop students' CC, as it only emphasizes memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, which students are likely to use regardless of the social context. Furthermore, Shen (2013) claims that students are not exposed to authentic input that can enhance their PC, and the textbooks' content mainly aims at



developing students' LC and reading skills. This study revealed how neglect of cultural content and overemphasis on the linguistic system contribute to learners' pragmatic failure. Indeed, a course that disregards such significant elements as similarities and differences between the L1 culture and the TL culture impedes students' pragmatic development process.

In his study, "Pragmatic Transfer in Moroccan EFL Learners' Requests", Loutfi (2016) compared the average frequencies of direct and indirect request strategies used by 40 Moroccan EFL university students and 20 English speakers through a discourse completion test (DCT) that was composed of seven situations, which described social distance, social status, and degree of imposition. The findings of the study showed that Moroccan EFL learners differed from English speakers in their production of the speech act investigated. Moroccan EFL learners' requests were more direct than those of English native speakers, as they failed to assess the social parameters in the same way as native speakers did. Moroccan EFL learners' pragmatic transfer was apparently observed, resulting in pragmatic failure.

Likewise, Ezzaoua's (2021) study on Moroccan EFL learners' production of the speech acts of complaint and apology showed that Moroccan EFL learners' performance of the speech acts investigated differed in several ways from that of American native speakers. Moroccan EFL learners' were found to be more sensitive to contextual variables in their production of complaints, whereas American native speakers showed a tendency towards indirectness and external modifications. In their production of complaints internal modifications, Moroccan EFL learners preferred lexical downgraders more than syntactic downgraders that were favored by American native speakers. In this regard, Ezzaoua (2021) argues that "EFL learners tend to be over-verbose in their attempt to compensate for their pragmatic incompetence" (p. 154). With regards to the speech act of apology, Moroccan EFL learners produced fewer strategies compared to American native speakers except for the use of the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) that



was overused by learners due to their pragmatic transfer and “the way speech acts are instructed in Moroccan EFL context with more focus on overlearned structures “*I am sorry*” with no consideration for context” (p. 198).

In the Moroccan context, two other recent studies by Hmouri (2021) and Abidi (2022a) support the previous research findings. Using a mixed-methods approach, Hmouri (2021) collected data from 100 Moroccan university students through a multiple-choice questionnaire and unstructured interviews in his investigation of Moroccan EFL learners' pragmatic failure. The results of this study revealed that Moroccan EFL learners were pragmatically incompetent while performing expressives in the sense that they failed to distinguish between expressions for formal and informal contexts. Similarly, Abidi's (2022a) comparative study on American native speakers of English and Moroccan EFL learners' production of the speech act of request showed several deficiencies in Moroccan EFL learners' PC. To illustrate, learners were found to be more direct than native speakers. Besides, they outperformed native speakers in their use of hearer-oriented requests, whereas they used fewer speaker-oriented requests compared to native speakers.

2.3. The Impact of Instruction on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence

Thanks to their daily interaction with native speakers of the TL, English as a second language (ESL) learners are likely to foster their acquisition of the pragmatic features of the TL. However, EFL students are rarely, if ever, exposed to such input. Therefore, if they happen to communicate with native speakers, they often experience communication breakdowns. To address this issue, many researchers recommended the inclusion of pragmatics in pedagogical programs. In this regard, several recent interventional research proved a positive effect of instruction on learners' pragmatic development (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Soler, 2005; Mohammed, 2012; Rajabia et al., 2015, among others). Generally, two types of instruction have been used to develop students' PC: explicit and

implicit instruction. In the former, the teacher explicitly refers to the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic rules of language to raise students' awareness of differences and similarities of how language is used in the L1 and L2. In the latter, however, students are exposed to the pragmatic features of the TL without focusing on the rules. Students, thus, are expected to deduce themselves how the linguistic devices are appropriately used to perform an act according to the given social contexts.

Rajabia et al.'s (2015) investigation of the effect of explicit instruction on Iranian EFL learners at intermediate and advanced levels' production of the speech act of request showed that both groups improved their PC. In the pre-test, the results of the experimental group of intermediate-level students were similar to those of the control group. Similarly, the experimental group of advanced-level learners' performance resembled that of the control group. The post-tests, however, revealed that, unlike the control group participants who didn't receive any instruction on the speech act investigated, the experimental groups of both intermediate and advanced learners performed better than the control group, indicating that explicit instruction of pragmatic features has a positive effect on their PC regardless of their current level of proficiency.

Likewise, in their study of the impact of instruction and feedback on English-speaking Spanish language learners' production and recognition of suggestions and suggestion responses, Koike and Pearson (2005), divided a total number of 99 participants into five groups. The control group consisted of 32 participants, while the treatment groups were 67 learners: 18 received explicit instruction and explicit feedback, 20 received explicit instruction and implicit feedback, 17 received implicit instruction and explicit feedback, 12 received implicit instruction and implicit feedback. The pre-test results showed no significant differences among the groups. Nevertheless, the post-test findings revealed that the group that received explicit instruction and explicit feedback generally performed better than the other experimental and



control groups in multiple choice questions, whereas those who benefited from implicit instruction and implicit feedback were better than the other groups in their performance in open-ended dialogues. Although the delayed post-test showed that learners could not retain the information received in the program, the post-test revealed that instruction and feedback, be they implicit or explicit, developed students' PC.

In the same vein, Mohammed's (2012) three-week pragmatic program of explicit instruction of the speech acts of request and refusal revealed a positive relationship between explicit instruction and PC. The study involved 40 Iraqi EFL university students who were equally divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The discourse completion pre-test results showed that both groups produced the two speech acts inappropriately. The majority of the participants' requests and refusals were too direct, failing to consider social hierarchy, solidarity, and face. After receiving explicit instruction on requests and refusals, the experimental group, in the post-test, produced the speech acts appropriately, unlike the control group. Their responses resembled those of native speakers, as they employed different strategies based on contextual factors.

In line with the previously mentioned research, Soler (2005) investigated the effect of implicit and explicit instruction on Spanish EFL learners' pragmatic ability. A total of 123 EFL students were equally divided into three groups. One experimental group received explicit instruction, while the other received implicit instruction. The control group, however, did not receive any treatment. The pre-test and post-test findings showed that the control group's performance remained unchanged. Nevertheless, both treatment groups displayed statistically significant differences before and after instruction, indicating that both types of instruction affected their knowledge and ability to use request strategies. More interestingly, although the differences were not statistically significant, the experimental group that received explicit instruction outperformed the group that received implicit instruction in their understanding of the impact of social variables on strategy choice.



2.4. Challenges in Teaching Pragmatics

Like the teaching of other language components and skills, the teaching of pragmatics requires both knowledge (what to teach) and art (how to teach). However, most language teacher training programs do not include specific courses for teaching pragmatics. In their investigation of the place of pragmatics in 94 master's level TESOL programs in the USA, Vasques and Sharpless (2009) found that only a few programs include pragmatics in their courses. Although it is taught in other modules such as Sociolinguistics, Introduction to Linguistics, and SLA, they asserted that very little attention is dedicated to pragmatics. In such courses, pragmatics is dealt with in a very general or theoretical way. Similarly, Hagiwara (2010) notes that "most of us have never studied pragmatics as an independent subject or course at the university we attended" (p. 4). Likewise, in the Moroccan context, EFL teachers' training programs mainly offer courses on teaching the four skills, grammar, English language teaching methods, and assessment, but they dedicate no module to pragmatics. In Moroccan higher education, courses on pragmatics are more theoretical in nature than pedagogically based.

Tan and Farashaivan's (2016) study on Iranian EFL teachers' challenges in teaching pragmatics showed that that lack of instructional media facilities, teachers' insufficient pragmatic knowledge, and lack of time are the most apparent barriers that hinder pragmatics instruction. Firstly, the study revealed that teachers were not provided with such facilities as films and videos. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, films and sitcoms provide learners with a great opportunity for noticing how pragmatic features are used by native speakers in "real" contexts. Hence, institutions are required to equip EFL teachers with such facilities, as they play a significant role in exposing students to "authentic" input. Secondly, teachers' lack of pragmatic knowledge is also a major affecting factor. Tan and Farashaivan (2016) concluded that teachers were not trained in this aspect, as the focus of their training has been

mainly centered on the teaching of grammar and the four skills. These results are also reported in other studies (Bella, 2012; Al Falasi, 2007, as cited in Tan & Farashaivan, 2016). Thirdly, informants of the study complained about the lack of time, stating that they had limited time per lesson. Thus, they mainly cover aspects related to grammar or the four skills. This challenge is also relevant to the Moroccan context, where teachers are required to cover a long lesson in one hour. Sometimes, teachers do not even reach the production stage. Therefore, it would be challenging to address the pragmatic aspect of the TL.

3. Method

3.1. Participants:

The researchers used purposeful sampling by selecting "information-rich" individuals capable of providing valuable insights into the study (Cresswell, 2012, p. 206). The sample consisted of ten Moroccan high school EFL teachers: three females and seven males. Among them, three had more than three years of teaching experience, while seven teachers had over seven years. They were contacted directly and invited to participate in the research. All participants stated that they had never received training in teaching pragmatics and had never lived in an English-speaking country.

3.2. Data Collection Method

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The participants were first informed about the purpose of the study. A total of ten interviews were conducted. Each lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The informants were asked questions about pragmatic content in Moroccan EFL textbooks, students' pragmatic failure, the impact of instruction on pragmatic development, activities and techniques for teaching pragmatics, and the challenges they encounter in teaching this subtle aspect of language.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis techniques. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts while highlighting key points relevant to the research questions. Next, they generated initial codes based on themes such as pragmatic limitations in Moroccan EFL textbooks, cultural differences, types of pragmatic failure, teachers' beliefs about explicit and implicit instruction, and challenges in teaching pragmatics. These codes were then reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader patterns within the data. For example, cultural differences were identified as a source of pragmatic failure, while the theme of teachers' beliefs about explicit and implicit instruction was incorporated into the broader theme of the role of instruction in developing students' PC. Finally, comprehensive reports were written, with each theme discussed in relation to the research questions and supported by relevant examples from the interviews.

4. Findings

Participants' responses to the interview questions were categorized into four main themes: pragmatic content in Moroccan EFL textbooks, students' pragmatic failure, the role of instruction, and challenges they face in teaching pragmatics.

4.1. Pragmatic Content in Moroccan EFL Textbooks

The majority of participants claimed that Moroccan EFL textbooks are exam-oriented. They reported that textbooks focus more on grammar and vocabulary but neglect pragmatic content. They stated that even the limited pragmatic content is often indirect and implicit.

"Many EFL textbooks don't always explicitly cover pragmatic content like speech acts and politeness strategies. When they do, it's often more indirect, focusing on functional language (requests, offers, apologies) within dialogues".

Moreover, they asserted that the textbooks superficially introduce pragmatics but lack differentiation in speech act strategies according to various contexts that learners may encounter in real life. They also noted that textbooks rarely highlight cultural differences. Participants also complained about the scarcity of socio-cultural content in learners' L1 and TL, as well as the lack of authentic activities that help learners link what they do in the classroom to what they encounter outside.

"There is a little explicit teaching of pragmatic rules, and also there isn't enough speech acts to teach. In addition, students don't have enough opportunities to practice and use pragmatic skills in authentic situations".

Interviewees were also asked how they supplement or adopt textbook content to better teach pragmatics. Most of the participants claimed that they use their own worksheets, authentic materials, and role-plays. Nevertheless, a few teachers admitted that they do not focus on pragmatics and adhere strictly to the official textbooks. These teachers argued that designing material falls outside their responsibilities. They thought their main duty is to teach what they have in the textbooks and confessed that they themselves are not equipped with sufficient pragmatic knowledge of the L2.

4.2. Pragmatic failure

The informants were also asked about the most common types of pragmatic failure they observe in their students' speech and their underlying causes. They reported that they notice different instances of pragmatic failure, including frequent interruption, overly direct speech

acts, tone misuse, cultural misinterpretation, difficulty in adjusting communication to formal and informal contexts, and inability to recognize and interpret indirect speech acts. They attributed these deficiencies to linguistic limitations, cultural differences, L1 interference, lack of real-world exposure, insufficient pragmatic input in the textbooks, and teachers' limited knowledge of pragmatics. Foreign language anxiety was also identified as a major barrier that makes students hesitant to use a range of pragmatic strategies for fear of making mistakes.

"As Moroccans, we often interrupt speech and that's okay as it can even show some kind of engagement and interest in the conversation. However, this sounds impolite in English. In Morocco, silence might indicate agreement. Yet, it can show disagreement in the target language culture".

The participants also shared some concrete instances of their students' pragmatic failure stemming from cultural differences. The following are examples from the interview:

"When teaching idioms, I asked them to infer the meaning of the idiom "green" from the sentence 'she's too green to do this job' and instead of saying 'unexperienced', they said that she doesn't know how to talk properly, which is influenced by Moroccan meaning".

"During a speaking activity, I asked students to express disagreement politely. One student responded to a classmate's opinion by saying 'No you are wrong'. The other student looked a bit uncomfortable. Being this direct in Moroccan Arabic might be acceptable, especially in casual conversations. However, it sounds rude in English. Here, I explained to the student that we can disagree but in a soft way like saying 'I see your point, but I think that.....'".

"Once, we received in class some native speakers as guests, and students failed to keep the greeting patterns short; and they started

asking the guests about family, health, kids, work, and many other things as if they were greeting Moroccans”.

4.3. Impact of instruction

The researchers asked the interviewees about their perceptions of the effect of instruction and which type they believed had a major impact on learners' pragmatic development. The majority of informants agreed that instruction plays a crucial role in improving students' PC. Most of the informants preferred explicit over implicit instruction, claiming that the former fosters improvement and raises students' awareness of pragmatic rules.

“When it comes to pragmatics, learners usually find it difficult to notice implicit instructions. They fail to see, for example, that the difference between two sentences is because they are used in different situations; hence using them interchangeably in their output. Teachers must raise students' attention to such differences and make it explicit”.

However, some teachers preferred implicit instruction. They claimed that it is more natural and develops critical thinking and autonomous learning. On the other hand, others favored a combination of the two types of instruction, believing that they complement each other.

Although all informants recommended pragmatic instruction in the classroom, they all agreed on the fact that classroom instruction alone is not sufficient to develop PC. They emphasized that real-world exposure is necessary, as it facilitates the natural acquisition of the pragmatic and cultural nuances of the TL.

“Real-world exposure is necessary because of time constraints. We can't keep explaining the multitude of meanings of everything we say”.

"When it comes to pragmatics, real-world exposure is necessary. Contrived situations in the classroom can never be authentic no matter how we try".

4.4. Challenges in teaching pragmatics

Participants claimed that they face numerous challenges when teaching pragmatics, including lack of interest, insufficient material, limited input in textbooks, limited class time, and students' lack of motivation. However, they stated that they try to overcome these challenges by incorporating authentic written and spoken materials and encouraging students to engage in role-plays, presentations, and interviews. They also recommend that students learn autonomously by watching movies, TV shows, podcasts, and chatting with native speakers through different social media platforms.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research showed that teachers are dissatisfied with the pragmatic content presented in Moroccan EFL textbooks. The participants asserted that the different textbooks used in high school focus more on the linguistic aspects of the TL while offering little, if any, attention to pragmatic features. This claim contradicts the philosophy outlined in The National Charter for Education and Training (1999). The textbooks do not include explicit information about the social factors governing language use. Learners need to be exposed to various strategies for producing each speech act and know when, how, and why they should use a particular strategy over another. The insufficient pragmatic content in the textbooks significantly contributes to learners' pragmatic failure. The examples provided earlier in the literature review section show the limited pragmatic content in *Ticket to English 2* and *Gateway to English 2*. These textbooks are also outdated, failing to align

with both current global and local issues and the skills required for the 21st-century job market.

The results showed that learners are over-direct, struggle to vary communication across different contexts, and cannot take turns properly. These deficiencies may lead to communication breakdowns. Teachers attributed these issues to several factors, including lack of real-world exposure, linguistic limitations, negative pragmatic transfer, cultural differences, poor input in the textbooks, teachers' limited pragmatic knowledge, and foreign language anxiety. Most of these claims align with those of Shen (2013), who reported that Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic failure stems from the lack of authentic input, absence of reference to cultural differences, and pragmatic interference. Moreover, Moroccan EFL learners' pragmatic interference was also observed in Loutfi's (2016) and Abidi's (2022a) studies that showed learners' over-reliance on direct requests compared to native speakers of English who preferred indirectness. In line with this, Ezzaoua's (2021) findings revealed that Moroccan EFL learners tended to use lexical downgraders more frequently, while English native speakers preferred syntactic downgraders in their production of the speech act of complaining. Learners were also found to use fewer apology strategies compared to native speakers of English. Pragmatic interference and poor pragmatic content in textbooks were identified as the main causes of learners' pragmatic failure. Furthermore, Hmouri (2021) also found that Moroccan EFL university students failed to distinguish between expressions in formal and informal settings.

In line with previous research (Koike & Pearson, 2005; Soler, 2005; Mohammed, 2012; Rajabia et al., 2015), all participants in the current study agreed on the important role that instruction plays in improving students' PC. The majority favored explicit instruction over implicit instruction. In essence, instruction, be it implicit or explicit, has been reported to be effective in developing EFL learners' PC. Therefore,



EFL teachers should incorporate pragmatic features into their lessons and expose their students to authentic pragmatic input. As Schmidt (1993) states, “consciously paying attention to the relevant features of input and attempting to analyze their significance in terms of deeper generalizations are both highly facilitative” (p. 35). That is, consciousness-raising through noticing is a prerequisite for pragmatic input to become intake.

Research in interlanguage pragmatics has been repeatedly suggesting the inclusion of pragmatics in EFL classrooms to help students overcome their pragmatic deficiencies, which often lead to communication breakdowns. However, in practice, EFL teachers face many different obstacles that impede the implementation of these research recommendations. Among the challenges reported in the current and previous research are teachers' lack of pragmatic knowledge, which results from its neglect in teacher training programs (Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009), the absence of instructional media facilities, lack of time, and teachers' insufficient pragmatic knowledge (Tan & Farashaiyan, 2016).

Techniques for Teaching Pragmatics

With the emergence of communicative teaching approaches, language teaching has witnessed a major paradigm shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness. Learners are no longer considered passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they are viewed as knowledge constructors. Thus, teachers have become facilitators, guides, and prompters. In this context, EFL teachers can opt for a variety of activities and techniques to help students learn the pragmatic features of the TL. In her article, Hilliard (2017) proposed twelve activities for teaching the speech act of complaining. These activities include discussion of speech acts, complaints comparison in L1 and L2, reading texts or listening to passages about complaining in other cultures, presenting L2 strategies for complaining, and analyzing and repairing



pragmatic errors, to name just a few (for more details on these activities, see Hilliard, 2000). These activities can be adapted to teach other speech acts to raise students' awareness of the pragmatic differences between the L1 and the L2.

Teachers can also use other consciousness-raising tasks with audio-visual aids to focus students' attention on such social variables as social distance, status, and relative power between interlocutors. Students are likely to benefit not only from the content of the pragmatic features of the TL produced by native speakers but also from the use of facial expressions, body language, and supra-segmental features of the TL in the performance of communicative acts when presented in the form of videos. Furthermore, other productive activities such as role-plays, structured conversations, and discourse completion tests are also advantageous (Taguchi, 2011). In a role-play activity, for example, student A acts as a boss, and student B adopts the role of an employee by asking the student A (the employer) an increase in pay. In this way, student B (the employee) should politely make the request by choosing the appropriate pragmalinguistic devices needed for producing the request, considering the high status and power of student A (the employer). Student A, on the other hand, can accept or refuse the request, using the appropriate strategy required for the given context.

Other tasks mentioned by Ishihana and Cohen (2010) are also relevant here. Among the activities likely to be effective for EFL learners in noticing and understanding the use of pragmatic features of the TL are the analysis and practice of speech acts strategies, discourse organization, discourse markers, and tone. Other activities such as identifying and analyzing the language used and the context for the speaker's goals and the listener's interpretation, analyzing instances where one function can be performed in different forms, and understanding how one form can have multiple functions are likely to develop students' sociopragmatic competence. An equally efficient task that can, to a large extent, enrich EFL learners' pragmatic repertoire is pragmatic data collection (Ishihana & Cohen, 2010). EFL teachers can suggest English films or sitcoms from



which students can collect various pragmatic features such as speech acts, discourse markers, and discourse organization. Thus, EFL students will be exposed to pragmatic features of the TL from native speakers. Although such input is not entirely authentic due to its artificial nature for artistic purposes, learners will still notice and understand how native speakers use the target features to achieve their communicative purposes. In this way, learners are likely to enjoy their discovery journey, especially if the suggested films or sitcoms meet their interests.

The interactional activities mentioned above do not only provide students with the opportunity to notice, understand, and interact, but they also enrich their pragmatic repertoire. That is, when learners interact in the TL, they probably encounter difficulties, be they related to grammar, vocabulary, or pragmatics. Therefore, even when they use their strategic skills to compensate for gaps, they will likely later search for what they lacked. The future production of the newly learned item (output) can, in return, serve as input for the learner, which again may serve as intake. Besides, such interactional opportunities help retain already stored information, leading to fluency development (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

Among the limitations of this study is the small number of participants. Only ten teachers were interviewed and their experience ranged from three to fourteen years. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was the sole research instrument used for data collection. A mixed-methods design could have provided more insightful and reliable findings.

Conclusion

All things considered, pragmatics is as important as language skills and components for every foreign language learner. The present study showed that pragmatic input in Moroccan EFL textbooks is limited

and implicit, leading to students' pragmatic failure. Students' pragmatic failure was claimed to be evident in their overreliance on directness, inability to interpret and produce indirect speech acts, and cultural misunderstanding. Such a failure was reported to be due to a lack of explicit instruction, pragmatic interference, poor input in the textbooks, and teachers' limited knowledge in pragmatics. Textbook designers should incorporate the pragmatic features of the TL. Moreover, EFL teachers need training in how to teach this crucial language component, as they need to be equipped with the necessary resources to implement pragmatics instruction effectively.

- 1- **Data Availability Statement:** (The manuscript includes all the data used in the study.)
- 2- **Conflict of Interest Statement:** (The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could affect the content of this research.)
- 3- **Funding Statement:** This research was fully funded by the authors without any financial support from other entities.

References

- Abidi, A. (2022a). A Comparative study of American Native speakers of English and Moroccan EFL University students' production of the Speech Act of Request. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 4(1), 331–349.
- Abidi, A. (2022b). Request modifications as produced by Moroccan EFL learners and American Native Speakers of English. *Studies in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*, 3(2), 15–31.
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1982). The construct validation of some components of communicative proficiency. *TESOL quarterly*, 16(4), 449-465.
- Bachman, L.F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



- Basturkmen, H., & Nguyen, T. T. M. (2017). Teaching pragmatics. *The Routledge handbook of pragmatics*, 563-574
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied linguistics*, 5(3), 196-213.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies. Norwood. NJ: Ablex.
- Brown, P., Levinson, S. C., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge university press.
- Bublitz, W., & Norrick, N. R. (Eds.). (2011). *Foundations of pragmatics* (Vol. 1). Walter de Gruyter.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In: J.C. Richards, & R.W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). Harlow: Longman.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge Multilingual Matters: MIT Press.
- Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Cook, M., & Liddicoat, A. (2002). The development of comprehension in interlanguage pragmatics: The case of request strategies in English. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 25, 19-39.
- Ezzaoua, O. (2021). *A Study of Moroccan EFL learners' complaint-apology sequence: An interlanguage approach* (Unpublished thesis). Kenitra: Ibn Tofail University.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Arnold.

- Hagiwara, A. (2010). Journal watch. *Pragmatic Matters*, 11(1), 3-4.
- Hammani, M., Ahssen, S., & Tansaoui, L. (2007). Ticket 2 English. Casablanca: D.I.O. El Hadita.
- Hassim, M., Blibil, M. & Rasmy, A. (2007). Gateway to English 2. Rabat: Nadia Edition.
- Hilliard, A. (2017). Twelve activities for teaching the pragmatics of complaining to L2 learners. *English Teaching Forum*, 55(1), 2-13.
- Hmouri, Z. (2021). A study of Moroccan university EFL learners' pragmatic failure: The case of using expressive speech acts. *Studies in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*, 2(1), 1-10.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: Selected readings* (pp. 269-293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet* (1st ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson Longman.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (Eds.). (2001). *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 33-60). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kingdom of Morocco: Ministry of National Education. (1999). Charte Nationale d'Education et de Formation (National Charter of Education and Formation). Rabat, Morocco.
- Koike, D. A., & Pearson, L. (2005). The effect of instruction and feedback in the development of pragmatic competence. *System*, 33(3), 481-501.
- Leech, G. (1983). *The principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Loutfi, A. (2016). Pragmatic Transfer in Moroccan EFL Learners' Requests. *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning (AJEEL)* 4, Volume 4, 15-24.
- Mohammed, M. M. (2012). Teach ability of Pragmatic Competence: The Impact of Explicit Instruction on the Development of Iraqi Freshmen EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence. *The Arab Gulf*, 40(1-2).

Rajabia, S., Azizifara, A., & Gowhary, H. (2015). The effect of explicit instruction on pragmatic competence development; teaching requests to EFL learners of English. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 231-239.

Saville-Troike, M. (1982). Communicative tactics in children's second language acquisition. In F.R. Eckman, K.H. Bell & D. Nelson (eds.). *Universals of second language acquisition* (pp.60-71). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Schmidt, R.W., 1993. Consciousness, learning, and interlanguage pragmatics. In: Kasper, G., Blum- Kulk, S. (Eds.), *Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 21-42.

Shen, Q. Y. (2013). The Contributing Factors of Pragmatic Failure in China's ELT Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 6(6), 132-136.

Soler, E. A. (2005). Does instruction work for learning pragmatics in the EFL context?. *System*, 33(3), 417- 435.

Taguchi, N. (2011). Teaching pragmatics: Trends and issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 289-310.

Tan, K. H., & Farashaiyan, A. (2016). Challenges in teaching interlanguage pragmatics at Private EFL institutes in Iran. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 24, 45-54.

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 91-112.

Vasquez, C., & Sharpless, D. (2009). The role of pragmatics in the master's TESOL curriculum: Findings from a nationwide survey. *Tesol Quarterly*, 43(1), 5-28.