
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Association between Moroccan EFL College Students' Language Development, Appropriate Language Use & Experiential Learning: A Correlational Study

Atimade Chankob¹ ✉ and Youcef Hdouch²

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Language and Society Research Laboratory, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts/ Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

²Full Professor of Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and ESP at the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Atimade Chankob, **E-mail:** atimade.chankob@uit.ac.ma

ABSTRACT

This study is largely driven by the assumption that much of human learning is caught, not taught (Davies, 1998). This assumption indicates that human learning is inextricably context specific and experience based. Conveniently, this study intervenes to investigate the correlation, if any, between context and experience and Moroccan EFL college students' of language use and appropriacy. More specifically, the study investigates the association between 1) having direct contact and meaningful interactions with others and being exposed to the language in Moroccan EFL students' day to day experience and 2) their linguistic and pragmatic development. This study largely reflects on Schön's knowledge in action (1983) and Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984), which view learning as a product of our experiences and actions. The findings of the study reveal that Moroccan EFL students' language development is associated with their everyday experiences and actions. Expectedly, the findings demonstrate that the participants' day to day experience has significantly 1) contributed to their language development, 2) enhanced their appropriate language use, and, importantly 3) promoted their intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, the linguistically and culturally-rich learning experiences that the participants go through and the opportunities of genuine contact and exposure to authentic language in its meaningful context they experience significantly foster the participants' language development in general and appropriate use in particular.

KEYWORDS

Experiential Learning, Knowledge in Action; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Language Development; Appropriate Language Use

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Departing from the assumption that knowledge of language is not strictly limited to the knowledge of vocabulary and syntax and that knowing how to use the language appropriately and effectively in multicultural contexts to address different audiences is of paramount importance, this study intervenes to investigate the association between experience and context and Moroccan EFL college students' English language development and appropriacy. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study intervenes to investigate the association that lies between experiences and knowledge construction. It looks at the influences of Moroccan EFL College students' daily experiences on their language development. More specifically, the study examines the correlation between participants' direct contact, exposure to the language and, meaningful interactions and their language development. The main purpose is to arrive at a deeper understanding of the role of experiential learning in language development.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by the following underlying theories: *Experiential Learning Theory*, *social learning theory* and *Knowledge in action theory*. The use of theories that are externally triggered to account for the association between experience and Moroccan EFL college students' language development is explained by the fact that human learning is, in its essence, a social product fostered by our experiences (Wenger, 1998).

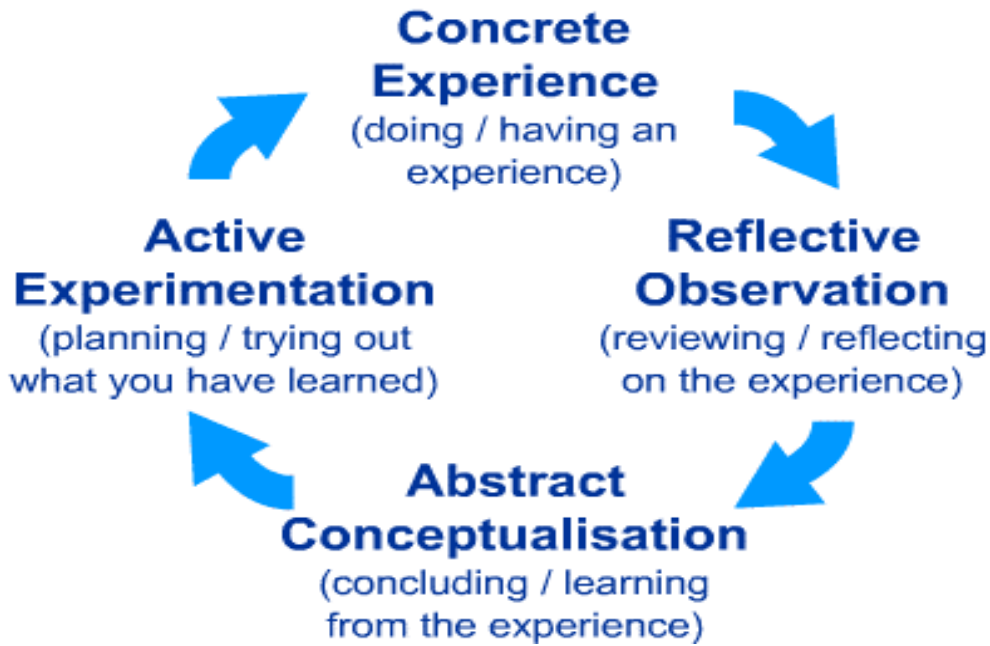


Figure 1 Kolb's four-stage learning cycle (1984)

Kolb's model of learning assumes that human learning is cyclic and learners go through four main stages before constructing new knowledge. The first stage is concrete experience, in which learners encounter new experiences and events, which causes a state of 'unequilibrium'. The second stage is reflective observation. In this stage, Learners critically reflect on their newly encountered events and experiences. This stage is followed by abstract conceptualization, in which learners internalize new ideas. The final stage is active experimentation, in which learners put into practice their newly learned actions and experiences.

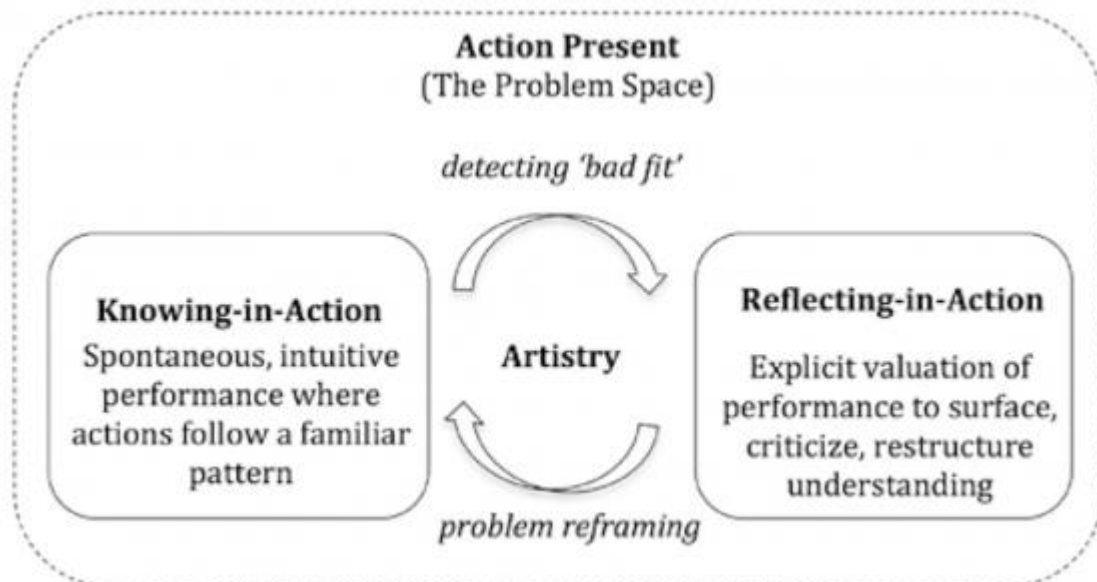


Figure 2 Schön's notion of knowledge in action

Like Kolb's model of learning, Schön's notion of knowledge in action assumes that much of human learning takes place through experience. The two models hold the same idea that experience fosters and shapes our knowledge and considers reflection as a critical aspect of our learning.

3. Literature Review

The experiential theory of learning suggests that human learning is shaped through our daily experiences. The essential idea that learning is inextricably linked to our experiences is closely linked to Schön's (1983) assumption of knowledge-in-action. Interestingly, the idea that our learning and understanding are shaped and fostered in our daily experiences is manifested by Zuber-Skerritt (1992), who asserts that "learning is a process as well as an outcome" (p.103). Similarly, Knutson (2003) and Kolb (1984) argue that learning takes place when we constantly reflect on our experiences and transform them into new knowledge. More specifically, Kolb (1984) believes that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Additionally, he asserts that there is a direct relationship and connection between our lived experiences and the construction of our knowledge. He further argues that "the experiential learning model pursues a framework for examining and strengthening linkages among education, work and personal development" (p. 04). Therefore, our daily lived experiences largely contribute to our knowledge construction and understanding. The same position is held by Bouaissane et al. (2022) and Bouaissane et al. (2023), who convincingly argue that human learning is context specific and that knowledge is jointly constructed in the social context and through experience.

Relatedly, this study adopts the experiential learning approach to investigate the association between our daily lived experiences, language development and appropriate language use. According to Mollaei & Rahnama (2012), experiential learning contributes largely to our language development because it is "adaptable of individual styles, preferences, strengths, directions" (p.1). This position is also held by Raschick, M., Maypole, D. E., & Day, P. A. (1998), who assert that due to its flexibility and meaningfulness, experiential learning is often viewed by students as the most preferred type of learning. They even believe that integrating the principles of the experiential learning approach can significantly improve the field of education and increase learners' outcomes and gains.

Though Kolb's experiential learning cycle is an influential and widely cited model in the field of education, a lot of criticism has been levelled at this model. In his systematic review and revision of Kolb's model, Morris (2020) asserts that there is "a lack of clarity regarding what constitutes a concrete experience" (p. 1)

4. Methodology

This study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, which is a type of design in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed sequentially, and then the findings are interpreted. Quantitative data was obtained from 164 Moroccan EFL college students using a questionnaire consisting of three sections.

Semi-structured interview participants were a purposive, non-random sample of 8 Moroccan EFL college students. The qualitative data gathered was extensively employed to 1) explain quantitative data and 2) provide further insights into the lived experiences of the participants regarding the role of experiential learning on their language development.

The rationale behind mixing methods and using both quantitative and qualitative data is that combining numeric and qualitative data will result in a deeper understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012) and (Creswell, 2014).

4.1. Research gap

Though the experiential learning approach is commonly used and constitutes a plausible basis to account for human learning, it is a "much neglected approach to teaching and developing people of all ages" (Mollaei & Rahnama, 2012, p. 1); this study, therefore, intervenes to bridge this deficiency and gap in the literature by investigating the association, if any, between students' daily lived experiences and their linguistic and pragmatic growth.

4.2 Research Questions

The present study aims at answering the following two questions:

1. To what extent do students' lived experiences contribute to their language development?
2. To what extent do students' lived experiences correlate with their language appropriate use?

4.3 Research Site and Participants

This study is based on the Data collected from 164 (henceforth, N=164) Moroccan EFL college students from different Moroccan Universities, using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, female students represented a larger proportion (62.8%; n=103) than male students (37.2%; n=61). The questionnaire elicited both quantitative data through closed-ended questions and

qualitative data through open-ended questions (selection and supply method). Eliciting data from a large sample size will ideally allow us to make generalizations about the association, if any, between experiential learning and participants' linguistic and pragmatic development.

Table 1 Participants' demographic information

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	61	37.2
Female	103	62.8
Age		
20-30	70	42.7
31-41	78	47.6
42-52	16	9.7
Educational Level		
Bachelor	89	54.3
Master's	6	7.3
Ph.D.	63	38.4
Total	164	100.0

4.4 Overview of the Data Analysis Techniques Employed

The present study aims to investigate the correlation, if any, between Moroccan college students' language development, on the one hand, and their lived experiences, on the other. To do so, correlation and regression will be the main statistical tests that will be used throughout this study.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Participants attitudes towards the contribution of experience to their Language development and appropriacy



Figure 3 Word cloud generated by Moroccan EFL students' description of the contribution of experience to their language development

The results in the word cloud above demonstrate that Moroccan EFL students hold very positive attitudes towards the role of experience and its contributions to their language development. The participants believe that their language development and appropriacy are largely attributed to the experiences they go through on a daily basis. Relatedly, the participants believe that their understanding and learning are shaped through experience within a social context. These findings broadly support the findings of

previous research (see., Bandura, 1977; Bouaissane et al., 2022; Bouaissane et al., 2023; Schön, 2002; Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, the participants assert that experience is important, crucial and necessary, suggesting that our knowledge is jointly constructed in our every day to day experience.

The assumption that experience significantly contributes to language development, as well as language appropriacy, is further explained by the following excerpts from different participants:

- ✓ I think my language development is inextricably linked to the experiences I have gone through. Being fully exposed to the language through experience has allowed me not only to develop my language at the level of vocabulary and syntax but also at the level of appropriacy. I have learned how to speak appropriately and effectively in multicultural contexts depending on my audience and purpose (Participant 1)
- ✓ Unlike in formal instruction, learning through experience and having direct contact with people in real life experience has taught me how to tailor my language to suit the context and people. I believe that the experiences I have had with people have allowed me to pick up phrases and sentences appropriate in specific contexts. It is something I would not be able to do at school. (Participant 2)
- ✓ I am a firm believer of learning by doing. My experience abroad has largely contributed to my pragmatic competence. To be honest, I learned through my everyday experience and direct contact with Americans in a short period of time more than I have learned at school for years. I learned what to say, when to say it and how to say it. Experience is a good teacher. (Participant 3)
- ✓ I think learning English in class is artificial. However, learning through experience by listening to native speakers talk or by having direct contact with them has allowed me to develop my communication skills. I also think that learning English on the spot makes one acquire an authentic language. I always listen to native speakers carefully when they talk. I learned to respect turn taking, listen attentively and also to speak politely. These are things I did not learn at school. (Participant 4).

Participants indicate that due to its flexibility, meaningfulness and adaptability, what they attain through experience and in action is more than their attainment in informal instructions and education. This interesting finding supports the findings of previous research (see., Bouaissane et al., 2023).

5.2 Experiential Learning and Language Development

Departing from the assumption that experiences shape our understanding and that the knowledge we have is purely the result of transformations of the experiences we have been through, this section looks specifically at the influence of Moroccan college students' lived experiences on their language development.

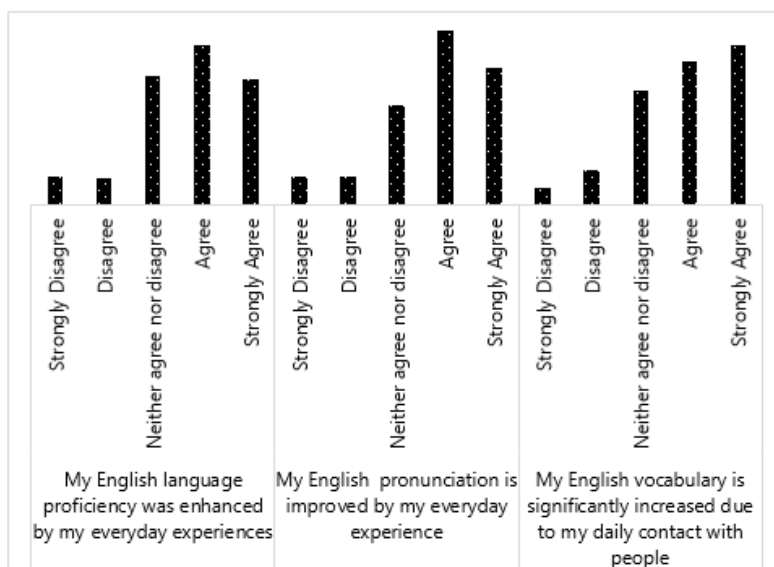


Figure 4 the impact of Moroccan college lived experiences on their language development

The findings in the figure above indicate that the lived experiences of Moroccan college students largely contribute to their language development. Relatedly, a large proportion of the participants agree and/or strongly agree (34,1% and 24,8%, respectively) that their English language proficiency is enhanced by their everyday experiences. Similarly, 37.2% of the total population assert that their English pronunciation is improved by their everyday practice of English. Contact with people in participants' everyday lives has significantly enlarged their lexicon. Relatedly, the majority of Moroccan EFL college students agree and/or strongly agree (30.5% and 34.1%, respectively) that their vocabulary repertoire is significantly increased due to their daily contact with people in their everyday experiences. This suggests that they pick up important expressions and words in meaningful contexts through contact with people. This interesting finding broadly supports the findings of previous research (see., Knutson, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Mollaei, F., & Rahnama, 2012; Morris, 2020; Raschick, Maypole & Day, 1998; Schön, 2002).

5.3 Regression: Predicting the value of participants' language development on experience related factors

This section looks at the association between the participants' language development and three main predictor variables, namely, meaningful interactions, exposure to the language and direct contact using linear regression.

Regression tests whether participants' daily experiences carry any significant impact on their language development. The value of the dependent variable, participants' language development, was predicated on the following predictor variables: Meaningful interactions, direct contact and exposure to the language. The three predictor variables explained a moderate amount in participants' language development, $F(27,068) = p < 0.001$, which indicates that the predictor variables investigated have a significant but moderate influence on Moroccan EFL college students' language development. Moreover, the *adjusted R square* = .324 depicts that the model explains 32.4% of the total variance in participants' language development. The findings obtained clearly demonstrate that the participants' daily experiences contribute to the participants' language development. This is shown by the following charts:

Table 2 shows the correlation between participants' language development and predictor variables

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47,413	3	15,804	27,068	,001 ^b
	Residual	93,422	160	,584		
	Total	140,835	163			

a. Dependent Variable: Participants' Language Development

b. Predictors: (Constant), Meaningful interactions, Exposure to the language, Direct Contact

Table 3 Total variance in language development accounted for by the predictor variables.

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	,580 ^a	,337	,324	,76412	,337	27,068	3	160	,001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Meaningful interactions, Exposure to the language, Direct Contact

b. Dependent Variable: Participants' Language Development

In terms of relationships between the independent variables and participants' language development, multiple regression reports both significant and nonsignificant findings. Direct contact ($t = 7,400, p < .001$) and exposure to language ($t = 2,716, p < .007$) each significantly predicted participants' language development. Put slightly differently, one unit of increase in participants' direct contact with people increases their language development by 7.4%. Similarly, a unit of increase in exposure to the language increases their language development by 2.71%. Combined together, the two variables explained 32.4% of shared variability.

Interestingly, no significant relationship was predicted between the independent variable and meaningful interactions ($B=0,096$, $p>0.05$), as indicated in the table below:

Table 4 *Individual relations between outcome and predictor variables*

Model		Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-,832	,592		-1,405	,162	-2,000	,337
	Direct Contact	,774	,105	,495	7,400	,000	,567	,980
	Exposure to the language	,265	,098	,181	2,716	,007	,072	,458
	Meaningful interactions	,096	,098	,064	,977	,330	-,098	,290

a. Dependent Variable: Participants' Language Development

5.4 Correlation: *The correlation between language development, direct contact and exposure to language*

Multiple regression indicates that there is a positive correlation between direct contact, exposure to the language and participants' language development. This section, therefore, delves into the relationship between the two variables.

Table 5 shows the total variability in language development explained by direct contact.

		Correlations	
		Participants' Language Development	Direct Contact
Participants' Language Development	Pearson Correlation	1	,548**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001
	N	164	164
Direct Contact	Pearson Correlation	,548**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	
	N	164	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows the total variability in language development explained by exposure to the language.

		Correlations	
		Participants' Language Development	Exposure to the language
Participants' Language Development	Pearson Correlation	1	,311**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001
	N	164	164
Exposure to the language	Pearson Correlation	,311**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	
	N	164	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation further confirms the findings obtained by multiple regression; the results attained through correlation indicate that there is a statistically significant correlation between participants' language development on the one hand and direct contact and exposure to the language on the other hand. Relatedly, direct contact and exposure to the language explain 54.8% and 31.1%,

respectively, of the participants' language development. The results obtained support previous findings (see., Knutson, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Mollaei, F., & Rahnama, 2012; Morris, 2020; Raschick, Maypole, & Day, 1998; Schön, 2002).

5.5 Experiential learning and Moroccan EFL college language appropriate use

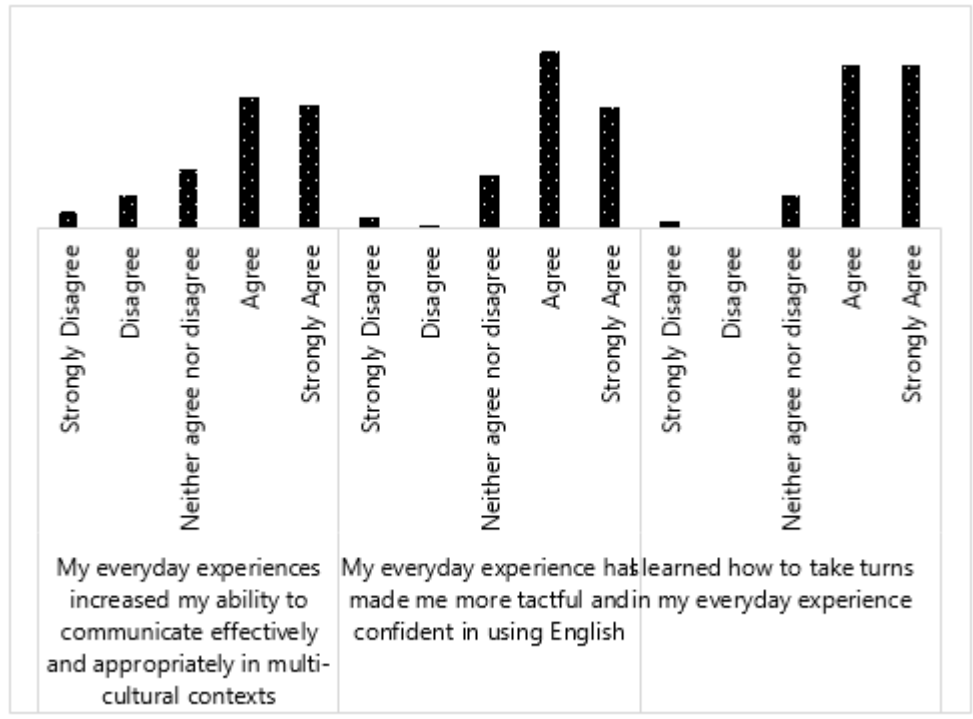


Figure 5 Experiential learning and appropriate language use

The findings obtained in the figure above indicate that participants' language appropriate use is increased by their daily experiences. Relatedly, over 30% of the participants agree and/or strongly agree that their experiences have increased their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in multi-cultural contexts. Similarly, over 48% of the participants agree that their daily experiences have made them more tactful and confident in their language use. Equally important, over 44% of the participants agree and/or strongly agree that turn taking was a communication skill they have learned through their daily experiences.

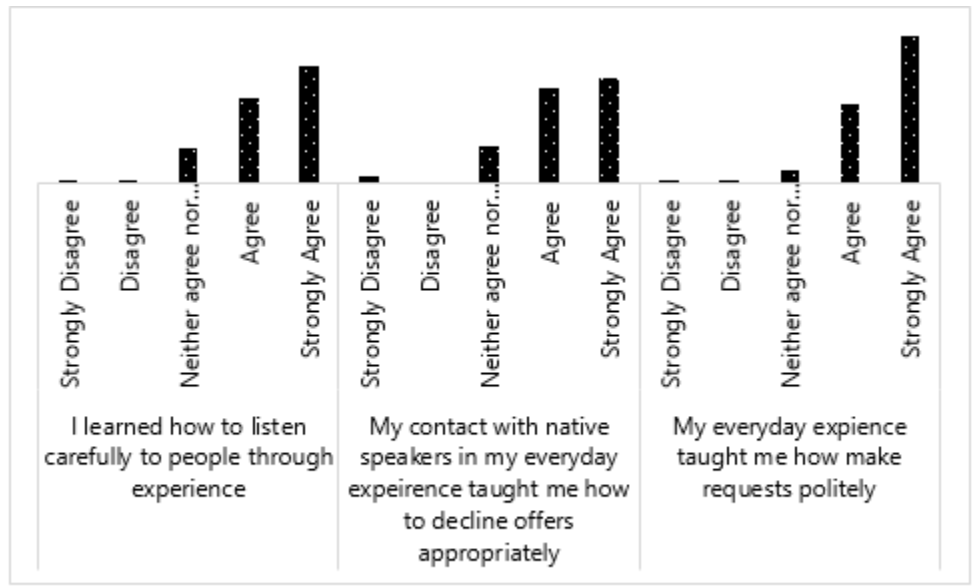


Figure 6 appropriate language use obtained through experience

The result in the figure above further unveils the appropriate language skills obtained through experience. Relatedly, over 48% of the participants strongly agree that they have learned how to listen carefully to people through experience. Similarly, over 43% of the participants strongly agree that their contact with native speakers in their everyday experiences has taught them how to decline offers appropriately. Finally, a large proportion of the participants strongly agree (61%) that their everyday experiences have taught them how to make requests politely. These interesting findings that participants' appropriate language use is obtained and fostered through experience is in line with previous research (see., Knutson, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Mollaei, F., & Rahnama, 2012; Morris, 2020; Raschick, Maypole, & Day, 1998; Schön, 2002).

5.6 Regression: Predicting the value of participants' language appropriate use on experience related factors

This section, interestingly, investigates the association between participants' appropriate language use and their daily lived experiences. The findings below indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the participants' language appropriacy and their experiences $p=0,001$.

Table 7 shows the correlation between participants' appropriate language use and their lived experiences.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18,236	3	6,079	17,104	,001 ^b
	Residual	56,862	160	,355		
	Total	75,098	163			

a. Dependent Variable: Participants' appropriate language use

b. Predictors: (Constant), Meaningful interactions, Exposure to the language, Direct Contact

Table 8 Total variance in participants' language appropriacy explained by predictor variables

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,493 ^a	,243	,229	,59614	,243	17,104	3	160	,001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Meaningful interactions, Exposure to the language, Direct Contact

b. Dependent Variable: Participants' appropriate language use

Interestingly, though the findings indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between participants' appropriate language use and their daily lived experiences, the findings in the table above indicate that the adjusted R square=,229, which indicates that the model explains only a small amount of variance (22.9%) in participants' language appropriate use.

Table 9 The relationship between individual variables and participants' appropriate language use

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1,231	,462		2,666	,008	,319	2,143
	Direct Contact	,481	,082	,421	5,895	,001	,320	,642
	Exposure to the language	,097	,076	,091	1,277	,204	-,053	,248
	Meaningful interactions	,158	,077	,143	2,062	,041	,007	,310

a. Dependent Variable: Participants' appropriate language use

In terms of individual relationships between different variables, multiple regression reveals the existence of both significant and non-significant relationships. Direct contact ($t=5,895$, $p=0,001$) and meaningful interactions ($t=2,062$, $p=0,041$) were found to be the main predictors of participants' appropriate language use. More specifically, one unit of increase in participants' direct contact results in a 5,89% increase in their appropriate language use. Similarly, one unit of increase in participants' meaningful interactions

results in a 2% increase in their appropriate language use. This interesting broadly supports previous research (see., Knutson, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Mollaei, F., & Rahnama, 2012; Morris, 2020; Raschick, Maypole, & Day,1998; Schön, 2002).

5.7 Correlation: The correlation between language appropriacy, direct contact and meaningful interactions

Multiple regression reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between participants' appropriate language use, direct contact and meaningful interactions. This section, therefore, further investigates this relationship using correlation.

Table 10 shows the correlation between participants' Language appropriacy and direct contact.

		Correlations	
		Participants' appropriate language use	Direct Contact
Participants' appropriate language use	Pearson Correlation	1	,462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,001
	N	164	164
Direct Contact	Pearson Correlation	,462**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	
	N	164	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11 shows the correlation between participants' Language appropriacy and meaningful interactions.

		Correlations	
		Participants' appropriate language use	Meaningful interations
Participants' appropriate language use	Pearson Correlation	1	,204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,009
	N	164	164
Meaningful interactions	Pearson Correlation	,204**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	
	N	164	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings obtained through correlation largely reflect the findings obtained through regression. Put slightly differently, the findings indicate that there is indeed a statistically significant relationship between participants' language appropriacy, direct contact and meaningful interactions. However, the findings also confirm that direct contact explains a moderate amount of variance in participants' language appropriacy (46.2%), whereas meaningful interactions explain a small amount (20.4%) of variance in participants' language appropriacy.

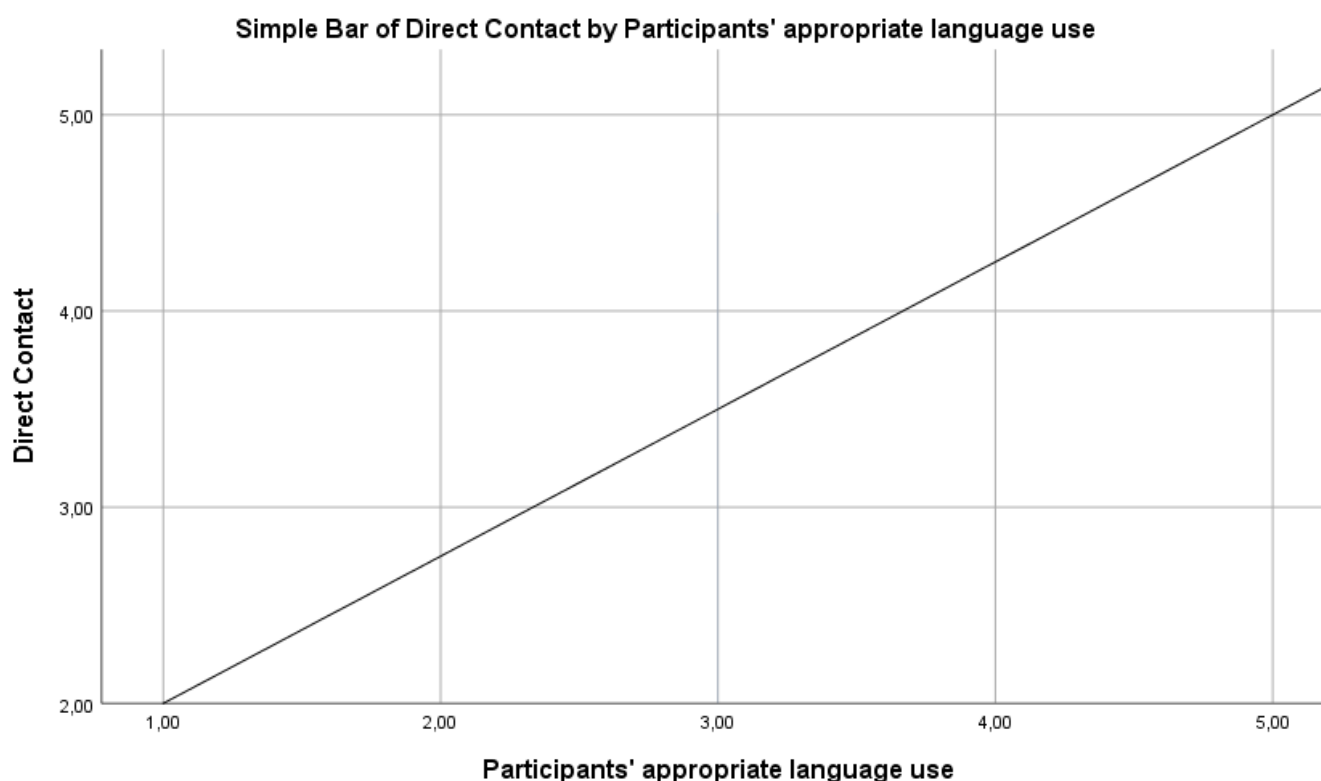


Figure 4 The strength of association between direct contact and participants' language appropriacy

The pp plot above further demonstrates the association between participants' language appropriacy and direct contact. The regression line moving upwards indicates that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. To put it slightly differently, as the participants' direct contact goes up, their ability to communicate appropriately also goes up.

5. Conclusion

As previously mentioned, this study is based on the assumption that much of human learning is caught, not taught and that our understanding and knowledge are shaped and fostered through our daily experiences. With this being said, this study intervenes to investigate the correlation between Moroccan EFL college students' language development, language appropriacy and their daily lived experiences.

The findings obtained demonstrated that there is a statistically significant correlation between students' experiences and their language development. Put slightly different, participants' experiences largely contribute to their language development and language appropriacy.

Interestingly, the findings obtained quantitatively were also supported by qualitative data. The participants asserted that due to the flexibility, meaningfulness and stress-free nature of experiential learning, the amount of knowledge they construct experientially is more than what is attained in formal instructions and education. It is hoped that the findings of the study will shift the attention of policy makers and educationalists in Morocco to the importance of learning through experience and, ideally, integrate experiential learning approach in our EFL classes.

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ORCID iDs

Atimade Chankob: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8269-3953?lang=en>

Dr. Youcef Hdouch: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6184-3632>

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About the Authors

Atimade Chankob (corresponding author) is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts (FLLA) Ibn Tofail University (ITU), Kenitra, Morocco. She is a member of 'Language and Society' research Lab at ITU. Email: atimade.chankob@uit.ac.ma

Dr. **Youcef Hdouch** is full Professor of linguistics, discourse analysis and ESP at the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco. He is the author of many books on the phonology and morphology of Amazigh, dozens of articles on political discourse analysis, ESP, etc. Currently, he is acting as the Head of the English Studies Department and counselor of the president of the university. He is also the coordinator of the vocational programs TEFL and Soft Skills in the Global Workplace. He is involved in many exchange programs with the European Union (Tempus SWING and ERASMUS + PACES, INSIDE? DIALANGUES. He is also the coordinator of the program Virtual Tabadul, an exchange program in collaboration with Florida International University, funded by the Stevens Initiative.

Email: youcef.hdouch@uit.ac.ma