

| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Project-Based Learning in Moroccan Middle Schools: English Teachers' Perceptions of Opportunities, Practices, and Challenges****Bekou Ali¹, Hamza Belbaraka², and Anass Khadija**¹*EFL teacher at Ministry of National Education and Adjunct professor at ESEF, Ibn Tofail Kenitra, Morocco*²*Belbaraka Hamza, EFL teacher at the Ministry of National Education and a doctoral student at FLLA, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco.*³*Full professor at FLLA, Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, Morocco***Corresponding Author:** Bekou Ali, **E-mail:** ali.bekou@uit.ac.ma, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0619-9156>**| ABSTRACT**

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is being increasingly promoted across global and Moroccan educational reforms as a means of fostering meaningful, student-centered learning. Although Moroccan curricular guidelines advocate project work as a vehicle for autonomy and critical thinking, research indicates that its implementation remains inconsistent and often misunderstood. This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the perceptions of fifteen English teachers in public middle schools in Salé in Morocco regarding the opportunities, classroom practices, and challenges associated with PBL and its implementation. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically. Findings show that teachers perceive PBL as highly beneficial for engagement, communicative competence, and soft-skills development, echoing evidence from Moroccan studies demonstrating PBL's positive impact on learners' critical thinking and collaboration. However, teachers' enactment of PBL is shaped by structural limitations, resulting in adapted, abbreviated forms of PBL similar to patterns previously noted in Moroccan classrooms. Challenges include curricular overload, overcrowded classes, resource scarcity, and insufficient training—constraints also emphasized in national research on project work. The study highlights the persistent gap between policy aspirations and school realities and argues that sustainable PBL integration in Morocco requires systemic reform beyond teacher initiative.

| KEYWORDS

Project-Based Learning, English as a Foreign Language, Moroccan middle schools, teachers' perceptions, phenomenology, thematic analysis, learner-centered pedagogy.

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In recent decades, Morocco has undertaken a series of educational reforms that promote learner-centered pedagogies intended to foster autonomy, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, aligning with global demands for twenty-first-century skills. Among these approaches, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely recognized for its potential to transform classroom dynamics by shifting the focus from teacher-dominated instruction to inquiry-based, student-driven learning (Astaifi, 2024). Internationally, PBL has been shown to enhance problem-solving, engagement, and communicative competence (Bender, 2012). In second and foreign language classrooms, PBL is similarly lauded for creating authentic communicative spaces and opportunities for meaningful language use ((Bouqetyb, 2021; Beckett, 2006).

In Morocco, the concept of "projects" has long been present in curricular documents, particularly within the English curriculum at the middle-school level. However, research consistently reveals a gap between the curricular vision of PBL and its classroom implementation according to Bouqetyb (2021). Teachers often implement simplified "project work" rather than genuine PBL due to misconceptions, resource constraints, or limited pedagogical preparation (Moussaoui & Erguig, 2024). Moreover, studies across Moroccan secondary and tertiary settings indicate that although PBL contributes to developing critical thinking,

collaboration, and soft skills ((Astaifi, 2024; Belmekki, 2024; Hamdanat et al., 2025; Jalil, 2025), its integration remains uneven and context-dependent.

Given these realities, understanding teachers' perceptions and lived experiences becomes essential. As Krajcik et al. (1994) argue, teachers' beliefs, contextual constraints, and professional learning shape the extent to which PBL can be meaningfully adopted. Despite its prominence in official discourse, there is still limited qualitative research exploring how Moroccan middle-school English teachers interpret and navigate PBL. This study contributes to filling this gap by examining teachers' perceptions of the opportunities, practices, and challenges associated with PBL in the public-school context of Salé.

2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how English teachers in Moroccan public middle schools perceive Project-Based Learning, how they describe their approaches to implementing it, and what challenges they encounter. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. What opportunities do middle-school English teachers perceive in implementing PBL?
2. How do these teachers describe their classroom practices when integrating PBL?
3. What challenges do they identify in employing PBL within Moroccan public schools?

These questions allow the study to illuminate the interplay between pedagogical intent and structural constraints.

3. Literature Review

3.1 What Is Project-Based Learning (PBL)?

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is widely recognized as an instructional approach grounded in constructivist and experiential learning theories. Yet, "it is important to understand that there is no universally agreed upon definition of what constitutes PBL. Almost all teachers use some PBL, and the projects they use vary widely in form and content" (Moursund, 1999, p.11). Rather than transmitting knowledge through direct instruction, PBL positions learners as active agents who investigate meaningful questions, design solutions, and construct understanding through extended inquiry. In this context, Thomas (2000) describes PBL as a systematic teaching method that involves real-world challenges, student autonomy, and sustained investigation. In language education, Beckett (2006) highlights that PBL enables second and foreign language learners to engage in purposeful, authentic communication, thereby integrating linguistic, cognitive, and social skills. Stoller (2006) similarly notes that PBL aligns with twenty-first-century learning goals by encouraging problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and learner autonomy.

Central to PBL is the idea that learning is driven by a guiding question or real-world problem that requires sustained exploration. Students work collaboratively to research, plan, design, and present their findings, while teachers shift from knowledge transmitters to facilitators (Kokotsaki et al. 2016). Krajcik et al. (1994) argue that effective PBL requires careful scaffolding, explicit goal-setting, and structured opportunities for reflection. Assessment is likewise multidimensional, encompassing both the process and the final product. Taken together, these principles distinguish PBL from more superficial forms of "project work," which often involve short, creative tasks without sustained inquiry or authentic application.

3.2. Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations of Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning is deeply rooted in constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning, which emphasize knowledge construction through active engagement and social interaction. From a constructivist perspective, learning is not transmitted directly from teacher to learner but is constructed through meaningful experiences that require learners to explore, question, and reflect (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). PBL operationalizes this view by situating learning within extended tasks that demand inquiry, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Sociocultural theory further informs PBL by highlighting the role of collaboration, dialogue, and mediation in learning. Through group work and shared inquiry, learners co-construct knowledge while negotiating meaning, roles, and responsibilities. This interaction is particularly valuable in language learning contexts, where communication is both the means and the outcome of learning (Beckett, 2006; Stoller, 2006). PBL thus provides a socially situated environment in which language use becomes purposeful rather than artificial.

Experiential learning theory also underpins PBL by emphasizing learning through doing and reflection. According to this perspective, knowledge emerges from concrete experiences that are subsequently analyzed and evaluated. Projects that involve planning, research, creation, and presentation allow learners to cycle through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Kolb, 1984). Such cycles promote deeper understanding and transfer of learning beyond the classroom, the skill that bridges classroom practice with the demands of the outside world including the job market.

Effective PBL is characterized by several pedagogical principles that distinguish it from traditional project work. Authenticity is central, as projects are anchored in real-world problems or questions that are meaningful to learners (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). Inquiry and sustained investigation guide the learning process, requiring learners to gather information, evaluate sources, and construct solutions over time. In other words, collaboration is equally substantial, as learners work interdependently to plan, negotiate, and produce shared outcomes. Teacher scaffolding plays a critical role in supporting learners through structured

guidance, feedback, and reflection, particularly in contexts where students are unfamiliar with autonomous learning practices (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

In essence, assessment in PBL extends beyond final products to include process-oriented evaluation, peer assessment, and self-reflection. According to Bender (2012), such multidimensional assessment aligns with competency-based educational goals and allows teachers to capture linguistic, cognitive, and social learning outcomes. These theoretical and pedagogical foundations provide an important lens for understanding how PBL is conceptualized and why its implementation requires careful alignment between instructional design, teacher expertise, and institutional support.

3.3 PBL in the International Context

International research has extensively documented the educational value of PBL across subject areas and levels of schooling. In science and general education, PBL has been shown to enhance conceptual understanding, motivate learners, and foster collaborative problem-solving (Krajcik et al., 1994). In language education specifically, PBL promotes authentic communicative practice, meaningful vocabulary acquisition, and increased fluency by situating language use within socially situated tasks (Beckett, 2006).

Globally, PBL has also been linked to improvements in critical thinking, learner autonomy, and interdisciplinary learning. Studies demonstrate that when students engage in projects that require planning, decision-making, and evaluation, they develop transferable skills that extend beyond classroom contexts. Furthermore, PBL enhances twenty-first-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and self-regulation (Bell, 2010). Bender (2012) notes that these outcomes are particularly relevant for preparing learners to navigate rapidly evolving knowledge economies.

However, international scholarship also highlights the challenges of implementing PBL effectively. Teachers often struggle with balancing curriculum pacing, managing group dynamics, designing rigorous assessment, and shifting their instructional identity toward facilitation. These challenges suggest that successful PBL implementation depends on institutional support, teacher training, and contextual adaptation.

3.4 PBL in the Moroccan Context

In Morocco, curricular reforms, especially the competency-based framework introduced at various educational levels, explicitly encourage project work as a means of fostering communication, autonomy, and higher-order thinking. Nevertheless, research consistently indicates that the implementation of PBL remains uneven and frequently misunderstood.

Bouqetyb (2021) found that Moroccan EFL teachers often confuse PBL with short, decorative classroom tasks such as posters or presentations, which lack the sustained inquiry characteristic of authentic PBL. This distinction is echoed in the work of Moussaoui and Erguig (2024), who argue that misconceptions about PBL, coupled with contextual constraints, result in superficial or fragmented practices. Their findings show that many teachers equate PBL with end-of-unit projects rather than integrating it as an inquiry-based learning cycle.

Emerging empirical studies from Moroccan higher education provide evidence of PBL's potential benefits. Belmekki and Koumachi (2024), Astaifi (2024), and Hamdanat et al. (2025) demonstrate that PBL enhances critical thinking, collaboration, and soft-skill development among university students. Similarly, Jalil (2025) reports positive student attitudes toward PBL, especially in terms of teamwork and communication. In the same vein, Hassim, Bendouqi, and Fahmi (2006) argue that the integration of Project-Based Learning encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning, which in turn facilitates the development of skills associated with producing high-quality work. According to the authors, this learner autonomy enables students to translate their learning processes into well-developed project outcomes that reflect key attributes such as creativity, relevance, and coherence.

These studies highlight the pedagogical promise of PBL in Morocco while underscoring the importance of teacher preparation and supportive learning environments.

Despite these positive outcomes, several contextual barriers persist across the Moroccan educational landscape. Teachers frequently cite heavy syllabi, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient materials, and a lack of clear assessment guidelines as major obstacles to implementing PBL (Bouqetyb, 2021; Moussaoui & Erguig, 2024). Amghar (2020) further argues that school culture and institutional conditions play a decisive role in shaping whether innovative pedagogies can take root.

3.5 The Research Gap

Although PBL is increasingly referenced in Moroccan policy and research, significant gaps remain in the literature. Most existing studies focus on higher education or general EFL contexts, leaving the middle-school level—where project work is explicitly mandated in the curriculum—relatively underexplored. Furthermore, much of the Moroccan literature highlights implementation challenges or theoretical perspectives but offers limited qualitative insight into the lived experiences of teachers navigating PBL in resource-constrained public-school environments namely public schools.

There is a critical need to understand how middle-school English teachers conceptualize PBL, how they adapt it to their classroom realities, and what systemic factors shape their pedagogical decisions. Such insights are essential for addressing the persistent disconnect between curriculum-level expectations and practical classroom implementation.

This study responds to that gap by examining the perceptions and experiences of fifteen teachers in Moroccan public middle schools in Salé, offering an in-depth account of how PBL is understood, practiced, and constrained in this context.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in a phenomenological orientation to explore English language teachers' lived experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL) in public middle school contexts. Phenomenology is particularly appropriate for this inquiry as it prioritizes participants' subjective meanings and interpretations of educational practices as they are experienced in real classroom settings. Rather than measuring outcomes or testing predetermined variables, this approach seeks to uncover how teachers understand, enact, and make sense of PBL within the constraints and affordances of their everyday professional environments.

4.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in public middle schools in Salé, Morocco, where PBL is formally referenced in the national English language curriculum. A total of fifteen English language teachers participated in the study. Participant selection followed a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that teachers had prior exposure to, or familiarity with, project-based tasks, either through direct classroom implementation or curricular engagement. This criterion was essential for eliciting informed and reflective accounts of PBL practices.

To complement purposive sampling, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional participants who were actively engaged in, or knowledgeable about, PBL-related practices. This combined sampling strategy enabled access to a diverse group of teachers with varying levels of experience, institutional support, and pedagogical confidence, thereby enriching the depth and variability of the data.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured, individual interviews, which allowed for both consistency across participants and flexibility to pursue emerging ideas. Each interview lasted between 35 and 60 minutes and was conducted in a conversational manner to encourage open reflection and detailed narration. The interview protocol included prompts that invited participants to define PBL in their own terms, describe their experiences with implementing project-based tasks, reflect on perceived pedagogical benefits, and discuss challenges encountered during planning, execution, and assessment.

The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to probe participants' responses, clarify meanings, and explore contextual factors shaping PBL implementation. This approach supported the generation of rich, nuanced accounts of teachers' professional experiences and perceptions.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Interview data were analyzed thematically following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). An inductive coding approach was adopted, allowing patterns and themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Initial coding involved close, repeated readings of the transcripts to identify meaningful units related to teachers' understandings, practices, and challenges concerning PBL.

Codes were then systematically reviewed, compared, and clustered into broader themes that captured shared experiences and recurring issues across participants. The analysis was conducted manually using basic organizational tools, which facilitated deep engagement with the data and allowed for iterative reflection throughout the analytic process. This hands-on approach was particularly suited to exploring the complexity and contextual specificity of PBL implementation in EFL classrooms.

4.5 Trustworthiness and Credibility

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed in line with qualitative research standards. Member checking was used by sharing summaries of key interpretations with selected participants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to document the researcher's assumptions, analytical decisions, and evolving interpretations, thereby promoting transparency and reflexivity.

In addition, detailed documentation of coding procedures and theme development was maintained to support dependability and confirmability. These measures collectively strengthened the rigor of the study and increased confidence in the credibility of the findings.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were rigorously observed throughout all stages of the research. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was ensured using pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts and reports.

All audio recordings, transcripts, and analytic documents were securely stored and accessible only to the researchers. These ethical protocols were implemented to protect participants' privacy and to uphold professional standards of ethical research conduct.

5. Findings

The analysis of the fifteen interviews yielded a set of themes that closely align with the study's three research questions. Teachers' narratives revealed a clear understanding of PBL, describing both its pedagogical promise and the contextual forces that shape its enactment. Their accounts offer rich insights into the opportunities they perceive, the ways they attempt to implement PBL within the constraints of public middle schools, and the recurring challenges that limit its fuller application in the EFL classrooms.

5.1. Perceived Opportunities of PBL

Most teachers portrayed PBL as a pedagogical approach capable of revitalizing classroom learning, particularly by fostering student engagement and agency. Many spoke of a marked difference in classroom atmosphere during project periods. As one participant explained, "When we do projects, the class feels different; students who never speak suddenly want to contribute. It's like they finally see English as something alive, not a list of rules." This view was echoed across interviews and mirrors findings in Moroccan studies highlighting PBL's ability to democratize classroom participation (Jalil, 2025).

Participants also associated PBL with authentic language development. Teachers repeatedly observed that students' vocabulary, oral fluency, and confidence improved during project work. As one teacher noted, "They learn new words without me telling them to memorize. They pick them up naturally because the project needs those words." Such observations resonate with Beckett's (2006) argument that PBL situates language learning within purposeful communicative contexts and which resonates with the promises of communicative language teaching (CLT).

Teachers also emphasized PBL's ability to cultivate learner autonomy and a sense of responsibility. Several teachers recounted experiences in which students took initiative or managed tasks independently. One participant shared: "I was surprised when a group organized their roles without my help—one typed, one searched for pictures, one practiced speaking. They took ownership of everything." These reflections correspond with higher-education findings in Morocco showing that PBL nurtures soft skills such as leadership, collaboration, and self-directed learning (Belmekki & Koumachi, 2024; Hamdanat et al., 2025).

Considering the potential many aspects of PBL shared by Middle School teachers, it is worth noting that they perceived PBL not merely as a method for delivering content but as a transformative learning experience with potential long-term benefits for students.

5.2. Classroom Practices: How PBL is implemented

While teachers expressed clear appreciation for PBL's pedagogical value, their descriptions of implementation unraveled a pattern of adaptation shaped by contextual constraints. Many acknowledged that they did not conduct "full-scale" PBL as described in training manuals or curricula. Instead, teachers relied on what several termed "mini-projects." As one explained, "In theory, a project takes weeks. In reality, we have maybe two sessions. So, we do something small—a poster, a short video, a group presentation." This observation aligns with Moussaoui and Erguig's (2024) finding that Moroccan teachers tend to reduce PBL to short creative tasks rather than extended inquiry or big projects.

More importantly, teachers frequently contrasted their actual practices with their ideal visions of PBL. One teacher reflected, "Real PBL needs time. Therefore, students should research, explore, design... but we cannot afford that. So, we improvise and keep it simple." These adapted practices reveal how teachers negotiate between institutional demands and pedagogical aspirations.

In describing their role during project work, teachers emphasized a shift toward facilitation and adaptation. Many expressed that PBL required them to relinquish traditional control and allow students to lead. One participant described: "I walk around, listen to their ideas, help when they get stuck. I am not explaining—just guiding." Yet, some teachers acknowledged feeling uncertain about this shift, with one admitting, "Sometimes I want to intervene too much. It's difficult to let them make mistakes and learn by themselves."

Additionally, assessment practices emerged as another area of ambiguity. Most teachers reported using informal and subjective evaluation methods, relying on judgment rather than structured tools and checklists. As one participant put it, "I just evaluate the final product and their participation. We don't have rubrics, so it's difficult to be fair." This concern reflects widespread national observations about the absence of formal assessment guidance for PBL in the Moroccan curriculum (Bouqetyb, 2021).

5.3. Challenges to Implementing PBL

As far as Challenges are concerned, teachers identified several persistent difficulties that hindered the effective integration of PBL in their classrooms. The most prominent was limited instructional time and curriculum density. Many explained that the pressure to complete textbooks and prepare students for exams left little room for project-based activities. One teacher commented, "If I dedicate three lessons to a project, I fall behind. Then I must rush through the units. It becomes stressful for me and the

students." This sentiment reflects serious concerns raised across Moroccan studies recognizing the rigidity of curricular pacing guides.

Overcrowded classrooms emerged as a second major challenge. Teachers described significant difficulties organizing and monitoring group work in classes that often exceeded forty students. One participant described the experience vividly: "Forty students in one room doing projects? Imagine the noise, the movement. You cannot manage all groups. Some work; others don't." Such realities illustrate the gap between policy aspirations for interactive learning and the structural constraints of Moroccan public schools.

On top of that, resource scarcity further limited implementation as teachers recounted lacking printers, audio-visual tools, project spaces, or even basic materials such as paper and markers. One teacher stated, "We want to do creative things, but we don't have enough resources. Sometimes students bring from home, but not all can afford that." This reinforces Moussaoui and Erguig's (2024) argument that PBL requires infrastructural support that many Moroccan schools lack.

Finally, teachers highlighted the need for practical, hands-on training. Many expressed dissatisfaction with workshops that focused on theory rather than classroom application. One teacher observed, "Training tells us PBL is good, but no one shows us how to do it with 40 students and no materials. We need real examples, not just concepts." This aligns with Amghar's (2020) argument that meaningful pedagogical change demands systemic support, not merely technical mandates.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore Moroccan public middle-school English teachers' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL), the ways they implement it, and the challenges they encounter. The findings reveal a complex and often contradictory landscape, one in which teachers hold strong pedagogical convictions about the value of PBL yet struggle to enact it amid the structural, material, and curricular constraints of their schools. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to the research questions and situates them within the broader literature on PBL in Morocco and international contexts.

6.1 PBL as Pedagogically Powerful but Structurally Constrained

Teachers in this study overwhelmingly regarded PBL as a meaningful and transformative pedagogical tool, echoing claims in both Moroccan and global research. Consistent with Beckett (2006) and Bender (2012), participants emphasized that PBL fosters authentic language use, deeper engagement, and the development of transversal skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and communication. Their classroom observations align with empirical findings from Moroccan higher-education studies demonstrating that PBL enhances critical thinking, motivation, and soft-skills acquisition (Belmekki & Koumachi, 2024; Hamdanat et al., 2025; Jalil, 2025).

The teachers' narratives provide compelling examples of these impacts. One teacher remarked that "even the shy ones suddenly want to speak during project work," illustrating how PBL broadens participation and democratizes classroom discourse. Another noted that students "naturally pick up new vocabulary" because project tasks require meaningful language use, reinforcing the idea that PBL cultivates linguistic development through authentic communicative needs.

These findings affirm that teachers recognize PBL as an approach aligned with the goals of Morocco's competency-based curriculum. However, enthusiasm alone is insufficient to ensure successful implementation.

6.2 Adaptive Practices: Navigating Between Vision and Reality

While teachers valued PBL, their actual practices often diverged significantly from the curricular model envisioned by reform documents. Many teachers acknowledged implementing what they themselves called "mini-projects"—abbreviated, simplified tasks designed to fit limited time and constrained classroom conditions. This adaptive pattern mirrors the "truncated PBL" described by Moussaoui and Erguig (2024), who argue that Moroccan teachers frequently replace extended inquiry with superficial forms of project work due to misconceptions or practical barriers.

The shift from teacher-centered instruction to facilitation was present but uneven. Teachers expressed wanting to allow students more autonomy, yet some struggled with relinquishing control. As one teacher admitted, "It's difficult to let them make mistakes and find their own solutions." Such ambivalence reflects the transitional nature of teachers' pedagogical identities and resonates with Krajcik et al.'s (1994) argument that meaningful PBL requires not only procedural knowledge but also shifts in teacher beliefs about their role.

Assessment emerged as another area marked by uncertainty and improvisation. The absence of formal rubrics or guidelines compelled teachers to rely on intuition. The statement, "I just judge the final product and their participation," captures a widespread concern about fairness and clarity, echoing national findings on unclear assessment expectations in PBL implementation (Bouqetyb, 2021).

Overall, teachers' adaptive practices reflect an attempt to reconcile educational ideals with the constraints of the classroom, rather than a rejection of PBL itself.

6.3 Persistent Systemic Barriers to PBL Implementation

The challenges identified by participants align closely with those documented in Moroccan research, reinforcing the argument that PBL implementation is shaped by structural rather than individual factors. The most pervasive constraint was curricular overload. Teachers repeatedly noted that dedicating multiple sessions to project work threatened their ability to complete the syllabus and prepare students for standardized assessments. This tension between reform aspirations and exam-driven realities has been highlighted by several Moroccan scholars and remains a central barrier to pedagogical innovation.

Overcrowded classrooms further strained teachers' efforts to implement PBL effectively. As one participant noted, "Forty students doing group work—it becomes chaos." Large class sizes undermine the kind of individualized facilitation and sustained inquiry that PBL requires. Resource scarcity compounded these difficulties, limiting teachers' ability to support multimodal or technology-enhanced projects. These lived experiences echo Moussaoui and Erguig's (2024) national analysis showing that many Moroccan schools lack the infrastructural foundation needed for PBL.

A final barrier concerned inadequate teacher training. Participants described existing professional development as theoretical and detached from the realities of public schooling. One teacher's comment—"They tell us PBL is good, but they don't show us how to do it with 40 students and no materials"—captures the frustration many expressed. This critique resonates strongly with Amghar's (2020) argument that pedagogical reforms require systemic cultural and institutional support rather than isolated training workshops.

6.4 A Gap Between Pedagogical Vision and School Realities

Taken together, the findings illustrate a clear divide between teachers' conceptual endorsement of PBL and the reality of its implementation. This gap is not attributable to teacher resistance or lack of pedagogical insight. Rather, it reflects systemic issues—curricular rigidity, resource limitations, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient training—that shape what teachers can realistically accomplish. Teachers' efforts to adapt PBL demonstrate agency and creativity but also reveal the limitations of implementing an inquiry-based approach in environments not designed to support it.

These findings suggest reconsidering how PBL is introduced and supported in Moroccan schools. Without structural alignment—through resource allocation, curriculum redesign, and practical training—teachers will continue to adopt partial versions of PBL that fall short of its transformative potential.

7. Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications for teacher education, school leadership, and curriculum development in Morocco. While teachers expressed strong appreciation for the pedagogical value of PBL, their accounts emphasized the idea that meaningful and sustainable implementation requires structural and institutional support. The following implications are presented with consideration for the constraints and opportunities within Moroccan public middle schools.

First, teacher education programs—both pre-service and in-service—should place greater emphasis on practical and context-responsive PBL preparation. Many participants reported that existing training focuses on theoretical principles without demonstrating how PBL can be enacted in overcrowded classrooms or resource-limited contexts. Professional development that includes model lessons, collaborative planning opportunities, classroom demonstrations, and guided practice could help bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and enactment.

Second, school leaders including headmasters play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for PBL. Although teachers demonstrate willingness to use PBL, their efforts are often constrained by the availability of resources, time, and organizational support. Schools could consider modest adjustments, such as providing shared materials for project work, designating classroom spaces for group activities, or coordinating schedules to allow periodic extended sessions for project completion. Encouraging collaborative teacher teams or PBL-focused working groups could also promote consistent implementation and shared problem-solving.

Third, curriculum designers and policymakers may need to revisit the structure of the middle-school English syllabus to better align expectations with classroom realities. Teachers' accounts suggest that the current curriculum's density leaves limited room for extended project work. Integrating PBL more explicitly into curricular units, defining project-based learning outcomes, and offering clearer assessment guidelines could reduce ambiguity and ease teachers' concerns about syllabus completion.

Finally, the broader structural challenges identified, particularly large class sizes and resource disparities, highlight the need for systemic approaches to educational improvement. While these issues extend beyond the scope of classroom-level interventions, they nonetheless shape how pedagogical innovations unfold in practice. Policymakers might consider prioritizing resource allocation for collaborative learning environments and exploring ways to gradually improve class-size ratios, especially in densely populated urban settings.

Taken together, these implications emphasize that sustainable integration of PBL in Moroccan middle schools depends not only on teacher initiative but also on institutional and structural backup. Addressing these interconnected factors can contribute to a more coherent and feasible environment for project-based pedagogies to thrive in the real EFL classroom.

8. Conclusion

This study explored Moroccan public middle-school English teachers' perceptions of Project-Based Learning, providing insight into how PBL is understood, enacted, and constrained within their professional contexts. The findings show that teachers hold strong pedagogical commitments to PBL, viewing it as a meaningful approach that enhances student engagement, linguistic development, autonomy, and collaboration. Their narratives reveal that PBL resonates with the goals of Morocco's competency-based curriculum and aligns with broader international research emphasizing the value of inquiry-driven, student-centered learning.

However, the study also highlights a persistent gap between the promise of PBL and the realities of classroom implementation. Teachers' reliance on abbreviated "mini-projects," their uncertainties around assessment, and their difficulty assuming a fully facilitative role reflect a wider pattern of adaptation shaped by structural constraints. Overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional time, resource scarcity, and insufficient practical training emerged as significant barriers, echoing findings across Moroccan PBL research. These systemic conditions underscore that pedagogical innovation cannot rely solely on teacher initiative; rather, it requires sustained institutional and policy support.

The study's implications point toward a coordinated approach involving teacher education, school leadership, and curriculum development. By aligning expectations, resources, and training with classroom realities, stakeholders can help create conditions in which PBL can be implemented more effectively and sustainably.

Hopefully, future research may build on these findings by examining student perceptions, exploring PBL in rural or under-resourced environments, or investigating long-term shifts in teacher practice. Such work would further illuminate how PBL might evolve within Morocco's diverse educational landscape as PBL is highly mandated in official State documents.

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