



## EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN MOROCCAN SECONDARY EDUCATION: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract:**

This study investigates Moroccan high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions and definitions of school violence, utilizing semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of twelve participants representing various regions in Morocco (75% male, 25% female). All participants provided informed consent, and each had direct or indirect experience with school violence. The research builds upon an emerging but still limited literature on teacher-targeted violence, which is recognized globally as a pressing issue with implications for educational outcomes, teacher well-being, and school climate. While studies in Western and Asian contexts have identified family structure, administrative support, student behavior, and societal influences—including media and substance abuse—as key determinants of in-school violence, research in North Africa, and particularly Morocco, remains scarce. This study seeks to address this gap by focusing specifically on EFL teachers in Moroccan secondary education, whose perspectives are underrepresented in current scholarship. The primary objectives are to: (1) explore how EFL teachers perceive, define, and recognize student-initiated violence; (2) identify and analyze the underlying factors contributing to violent behaviors directed at teachers, such as family neglect, administrative shortcomings, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and the influence of social media; and (3) propose actionable measures to mitigate both the physical and psychological consequences of such violence, including strengthening disciplinary policies, enhancing parental engagement, improving teacher training, and increasing awareness through media and school initiatives. The research is guided by the following questions: How do EFL teachers conceptualize and interpret student violence? What are the main causes behind student violence toward teachers in Moroccan secondary schools? How do teachers make sense of and respond to these incidents? By situating this inquiry within the wider literature and emphasizing the local context, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher-targeted violence in Moroccan schools—an area that remains

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underexplored. By employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study provides nuanced insights into teachers' lived experiences and sense-making processes. Findings will inform educational stakeholders and policymakers about the realities faced by EFL teachers and support the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies to foster safer school environments (Baghit, 2026b).

**Keywords:** EFL teachers' perceptions, student violence, sense-making, contributing factors, preventive solutions

## 1. Introduction

School violence is a significant issue in both education and psychology. Reports document a rise in violent incidents within Moroccan schools over the past decade (Morocco World News, 2023). In this study, 'school violence' specifically refers to intentional, disruptive acts—verbal or physical—that interfere with educational activities. Such acts include bullying (including cyberbullying), intimidation, threats, weapon possession, and gang activity (Waseem & Nickerson, 2017). Webster's Dictionary defines 'violence' as the use of physical force with the intent to injure or damage. For this research, 'school violence' is further narrowed to mean aggressive behaviors by students directly targeting teachers. These behaviors, which may be witnessed or personally experienced, can occur both on school grounds and during commutes.

School violence receives extensive media coverage, both nationally and internationally. However, 'teacher-targeted violence'—deliberate, harmful student acts against teachers (Espelage et al., 2013)—remains underexplored. In Morocco, research on violence directed at English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers is sparse. This study investigates Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions and firsthand encounters with teacher-targeted violence, a distinct subtype of school violence. Teachers may be direct recipients or principal observers of such acts. They experience violence during multiple incident phases. Despite this frequent exposure, reports remain limited. Examining teachers' perspectives yields actionable insights for education stakeholders. These insights enable policymakers and psychologists to design targeted interventions.

The purpose of this study is to examine how EFL teachers distinguish and define student-initiated violent behaviors in school settings. Here, 'identify' refers to recognizing actions that meet established criteria for violence; 'perceive' means consciously noticing such incidents; 'interpret' refers to analyzing motives, causes, and contexts of these behaviors; 'address' means implementing management or preventive actions; and 'manage' involves executing specific strategies to confront or reduce violence. This study also investigates how teachers specifically define and recognize violence initiated by students. Findings are intended to inform EFL teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers. The research questions guiding this work are:

- 1) What are high school teachers' perceptions of student violence?
- 2) What are the causes of student violence directed toward teachers?

3) How do teachers interpret and make sense of school violence?

For this study, 'verbal aggression' is defined as spoken insults or threats directed at teachers; 'physical assault' includes actions such as hitting or pushing teachers; and 'psychological intimidation' refers to ongoing harassment or coercion aimed at educators. These categories specify the concrete challenges teachers face.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore and interpret participants' lived experiences. This approach aligns with the aim of understanding how individuals make sense of their realities and create meaning from their interactions and perceptions.

### **2.2 Participants**

Twelve English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from several Moroccan regions participated in this study. Of these participants, 75% were male, and 25% were female. All provided informed consent.

### **2.3 Instrument**

A qualitative approach was employed to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of school violence. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of high school EFL teachers representing various regions in Morocco (Baghit, 2026a). All participants had direct or indirect experience with school violence (see Appendix 1). Employing semi-structured interviews facilitated rapport and allowed for flexibility when addressing sensitive issues (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This approach provided a thorough examination of participants' perspectives relevant to the research questions.

### **2.4 Procedures**

This study used an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework to examine how Moroccan EFL teachers make sense of their experiences. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six teachers, who were purposefully selected based on their direct or indirect experience with school violence and their representation of diverse Moroccan regions. Informed consent was obtained before interviews to ensure compliance with ethical standards. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission. They were then transcribed verbatim and coded for emergent patterns using IPA methodology (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

## **3. Results**

This section presents teachers' perceptions of student violence as revealed through the qualitative interview data. Each theme and sub-theme is substantiated with direct evidence from participant responses, highlighting specific examples and patterns that

emerged during analysis. These data-based findings provide a robust framework for the in-depth discussion of convergent results in the following section (see Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 1: Semi-structured interview themes and sub-themes**

<b>Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Sub-themes</b>
<b>Clarity in identifying students 'violence</b> Verbal act Physical act Electronic bullying
<b>Modest Knowledge in Dealing with Students' Violent acts</b> Lack of experience Minimal media role
<b>Parents' Involvement in Students' Violence against Teachers</b> Lack of guidance Lack of care Domestic violence
<b>School Administration's Involvement in Students' Violence against Teachers</b> Scarcity of administrative staff Lack of a serious school system. No contact with the parents.
<b>Juvenile Delinquency's Involvement in Students' Violence against Teachers</b> Drug addiction Smoking
<b>Social Media Involvement in Students' Violence against Teachers.</b> Libeling and attacking teachers. Victimizing students. A means for bullying;
<b>Preventive Solutions to Students' Violence against Teachers</b> Sensitizing campaigns Controlled Media. Teachers must enhance their misbehavior-management skills. Discipline and rules must be operated. The family should be educated with regard to violence. Family-school cooperation should be enhanced.

**Table 2: Themes Convergence**

<b>Clarity in Identifying Students 'Violence</b>
<b>Modest Knowledge in Dealing with Students' Violent Acts</b>
<b>Factors involved in students' violence against teachers</b> Family School administration Juvenile delinquency Social media
<b>Preventive Solutions to Students' Violence</b>

### 3. Discussion

The convergent themes derived from the semi-structured interview (see Table 2) are displayed in the following way:

### **Theme 1: Clarity in Identifying Student Violence**

All participants clearly articulated their understanding of student violence when asked to define it. Their responses reflected a nuanced awareness of its various forms.

T1: *"After experiencing it, it has become plain to me. Students' violence includes insulting, mocking, and playing physically harmful tricks on teachers."*

T3: *"I think students' violence is when students attack their teachers violently in different ways. Violence against teachers can be exercised through threatening or humiliating behavior, especially against high school teachers."*

T6: *"Violence today becomes electronic."*

Participants consistently identified student violence as encompassing verbal, physical, psychological, and electronic forms. Their clear and detailed definitions suggest a strong conceptual understanding grounded in personal experience, demonstrating their ability to make sense of violence both as a behavior and as a broader social issue.

### **Theme 2: Knowledge in Dealing with Student Violence**

Five out of six participants demonstrated awareness of strategies for managing student violence. Their knowledge stemmed from personal experience, peer guidance, or observation. One participant, newly appointed, admitted to a limited understanding due to a lack of experience.

T1: *"Before going through violence, I had no prior knowledge about the ways I should deal with students' violence. Now, I do know."*

T2: *"Thanks to my veteran colleagues' advice, I learned to build a strong rapport with my students, which helped me a great deal to avoid their expected violence."*

T3: *"I've learned to get prepared before any violent act."*

T4: *"Repeated students' violent acts occupy the newspapers' headlines, which pushed me to think twice and draw back whenever there is a problem with a student (Morocco World News, 2023)."*

T6: *"This is the worst generation ever. We used to respect our teachers, but this generation doesn't respect their parents, let alone their teachers. So, we have to look out and teach ourselves how to avoid their violence and learn from our colleagues and others' experience, or else we will be humiliated."*

These responses highlight how teachers develop coping strategies through lived experiences, peer mentorship, and exposure to others' encounters with violence. Participants' reflections also suggest an evolving understanding of violence management, grounded in both individual and collective learning.

### **Theme 3:** Factors Contributing to Student Violence Against Teachers

Participants identified multiple factors contributing to student violence, including family neglect, administrative shortcomings, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and the influence of social media.

*T3: "I'm really questioning—where are the parents? They want their sons and daughters to go to school only to get rid of their troubles. If they cared for them, they wouldn't behave violently against us."*

*T4: "We always call for more administrative staff, but who cares? They underestimate the students' misbehaviors and violent acts that are progressively increasing."*

*T5: "Social media is the source of all problems. Some platforms are the first enemies of teachers. They attack teachers harshly, overlook their concerns, and side with students (Lehfid & Bakkali, 2025, pp. 41-54). What a shame."*

*T6: "Some students often come to class drunk (Global School-based Student Health Survey [GSHS], n.d.). How can you talk with them? They're delinquents."*

According to participants, a lack of parental involvement in guiding and disciplining children fosters behavioral problems that spill over into the classroom. Domestic violence was also seen as a contributing factor, with students replicating abusive behaviors at school. Inadequate school administration, particularly a lack of staff and disciplinary support, was cited as enabling such behavior. Juvenile delinquency, including substance abuse, was viewed as directly linked to violent incidents, sometimes with severe consequences. Additionally, participants viewed social media as a powerful and dangerous force that undermines teacher authority, glorifies student misconduct, and distorts public perception of educators (Caridade et al., 2020).

### **Theme 4:** Preventive Solutions to Student Violence

Participants expressed awareness of the roles various stakeholders—schools, parents, media, and teachers—should play in preventing or minimizing violence against teachers.

*T1: "I guess that the typical solution to ban violence against teachers would be to enforce discipline and rules inside the school."*

T2: *"Schools and parents should fight for a violence-free educational setting."*

T3: *"I think freedom has limits, so media news or leaks should be censored if we want to fight against students' violence."*

T4: *"Before educating students, their parents must be educated beforehand."*

T5: *"As a newly appointed teacher, I've never been fully trained to deal with students' violence."*

T6: *"Schools and media should sensitize parents, students, and everybody concerned to the growing danger of violence directed toward teachers."*

The participants offered a range of practical and systemic recommendations that closely align with international findings on effective responses to school violence. They emphasized the need for schools to enforce clear disciplinary policies, mirroring global calls for firm institutional guidelines to deter aggressive behavior (Espelage et al., 2013). Parental involvement in students' moral education was also highlighted, which is supported by literature identifying parental engagement as a key factor in reducing school-based violence (Caridade et al., 2020). Several teachers addressed the media's role in shaping student attitudes, advocating for tighter regulation to prevent portrayals that might normalize violence, a concern similarly expressed in studies from other educational contexts (Waseem & Nickerson, 2017). Additionally, the necessity of comprehensive teacher training—particularly for newly appointed educators—was identified as crucial for equipping staff with strategies to manage and de-escalate violent situations, consistent with international recommendations for professional development in violence prevention (Espelage et al., 2013). Finally, participants called for awareness campaigns led by schools and media to raise societal consciousness about the gravity of violence against teachers, echoing best practices internationally for community-wide prevention efforts.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although this study focused on a selected group of high school English teachers who have experienced student violence, their experiences may reflect broader patterns applicable across different educational levels. Being subjected to or witnessing colleagues endure physical and verbal abuse—including being beaten, cursed, or humiliated—places considerable psychological stress on teachers (Lehfid & Bakkali, 2023, pp. 1-15). However, such experiences also raise their awareness of the need to adopt effective strategies for managing student violence. Over time, they develop the ability to recognize early signs of aggression and respond with appropriate, informed interventions. These findings suggest that teacher-targeted violence represents not only a localized issue but

a systemic challenge that may undermine educational quality and teacher retention more broadly. There are important implications for professional development, policy-making, and resource allocation: educational administrators and policymakers should prioritize ongoing teacher training, implement robust support systems, and promote a positive school climate across all educational sectors. Furthermore, investing in interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, psychologists, and community stakeholders is essential for developing comprehensive prevention programs. As Walker and Sylwester (1991) emphasize, school psychologists should take a leading role in addressing school violence as a broader social issue and in supporting efforts to create safe, respectful school environments for students and educators. Considering these broader implications, future research should extend beyond English teachers and secondary education to examine the prevalence, causes, and prevention of teacher-targeted violence across various subjects and school contexts in Morocco and comparable settings.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Baghit Redouan is a professor of English at CPGE in Rabat, Morocco, with international experience, including service as a Moroccan delegate to the United Kingdom. He holds a PhD with distinction in Applied Linguistics and focuses his research on English language teaching (TEFL, TESOL), language assessment, psychometrics, curriculum design, pedagogy, andragogy, syntax, oral communication skills, and research methodology. Dr. Redouan actively contributes to the scholarly community as an Editorial Review Board member for the International Journal of English Language and Literature (AEISS Publications, Q1 Scopus-indexed) and the Asian Online Journal Publishing Group.

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