



## INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE USE ON WRITING SKILLS IN MOROCCAN EFL CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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### Abstract:

The use of the mother tongue (L1) in English as a Foreign Language classroom has been a controversial topic for several decades. Researchers divide into two perspectives; some argue that L1 can positively impact EFL writing skills, while others contend that it results in language interference. Proponents view L1 as a valuable helping tool for EFL students, in developing their writing skills. Opponents of L1 use, on the other hand, stress L1 leads to linguistic interference, resulting in errors in English writing. This study examines the role of L1 Moroccan EFL classrooms. It examines the effect of L1 on writing skills, analyzes writing errors among Moroccan EFL learners, and explores teachers' perceptions of the use of L1 in the classroom. A mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative data) was used, combining experimental and control groups with teacher questionnaires. Findings reveal varying teacher perspectives on L1 use, with significant numbers observing both positive and negative effects. Besides, the study provides implications for effective pedagogical approaches in Moroccan EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** L1, EFL, Interference, Morocco, teacher perspectives, effect, writing skills

### 1. Introduction

Writing plays a crucial role in language learning insofar as it allows students to develop their language skills in various ways. In the Moroccan context, English is taught both in public and private schools. Despite the increasing importance of English as a global language, many Moroccan EFL students face difficulties with regard to writing, and this is partly ascribed to several factors, namely (i) the limited number of study hours, (ii)

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insufficient vocabulary and grammar and (iii) limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In other words, the little amount of time dedicated to English in schools (i.e., only two hours per week for middle school students and three to four hours for high school students) is not enough to help students develop their writing skills. Moroccan EFL students have very little knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and this very fact weakens their ability to express themselves and voice their thoughts effectively in writing. The limited exposure to English outside the classroom, moreover, limits opportunities for practice and reinforcement of writing skills.

The present study also addresses another interesting issue in the field of teaching, namely the use of L1 and its impact on English writing skills among Moroccan students. Morocco, it is important to remember, is a multilingual country where Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Amazigh, and French are the dominant languages and coexist in a quadriglossic relationship (Moustaoui Sghir, 2016; Maliki *et al.*, 2017). Arabic and/or Amazigh serve as the primary L1s for almost all Moroccan students, while French is widely used as a foreign language (L2) in education and daily life. This study focuses primarily on Moroccan Arabic. Previous research conducted in different contexts has made it clear that the role of the mother tongue (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction remains a subject of ongoing debate. While some advocate for its strategic use as a scaffolding tool or a temporary framework put up for support and access to writing skills, vocabulary, grammar, content knowledge and meaning, others emphasize the potential for negative transfer and interference, overgeneralization, code-switching, and writing errors (i.e., grammar, syntax, vocabulary, writing conventions, discourse structure, and cultural conventions) and all these are factors which hinder the acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) skills. There exist many research works on the impact of L1 on EFL writing skills in various contexts; however, there is, to the best of our knowledge, very limited research which investigates this very fact in the Moroccan context.

This being the case, the present study, and in a bid to contribute to this discussion, investigates the impact of L1 (Moroccan Arabic) on EFL writing skills among Moroccan students, by exploring teacher perceptions of the use of L1 and by analyzing students' writing errors in order to identify patterns associated with L1 interference. The context of the study, marked by limited English exposure outside the classroom and the multilingual nature of Morocco, will provide more significant information, insights and perspective on this investigation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Studies on the Role of L1 in EFL Writing**

The role of the first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has been a subject of extensive research and ongoing debate. Scholars hold diverse viewpoints regarding the impact of L1, ranging from those who advocate for its positive influence (Cummins, 2000) to those who voice their concerns about its

potentially detrimental effects on L2 writing development (Johnson, 2018). Proponents of the incorporation of L1 argue that it (L1) serves as a crucial foundation, which makes it possible to build upon and transfer existing linguistic knowledge and skills to the target language (L2). For example, learners with strong L1 grammatical and syntactic understanding may benefit from this transfer, facilitating smoother L2 acquisition (Smith, 2015). This perspective aligns with the Interactionist Model (IM), which emphasizes the crucial interplay between prior L1 knowledge and new L2 input in successful language acquisition (Long, 1996). The strategic use of L1 can help in the negotiation of meaning, provide cognitive support, and reduce the cognitive load during L2 writing (Gass, 1997).

Socioeconomic factors also significantly affect EFL writing skills in Morocco. Many students come from low-income backgrounds and lack access to resources such as computers and internet connectivity, limiting opportunities to practice and develop writing skills outside the classroom (Bahous *et al.*, 2017; Moustououi *et al.*, 2019). Addressing these socio-economic disparities is crucial for improving EFL writing proficiency.

Despite these known challenges, research exploring the specific impact of L1 (Moroccan Arabic) on EFL writing skills in Morocco remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating Moroccan English teachers' perceptions towards L1 use in EFL classrooms, analyzing the errors that EFL students make in writing, and identifying patterns associated with L1 interference. The findings will provide insights into the role of L1 and the specific challenges faced by Moroccan EFL students.

## **2.2 Studies on Errors in EFL Writing Resulting from L1 Interference**

L1 interference refers to the influence of a learner's mother tongue on their acquisition and use of a foreign language. When discussing L1 interference, it is important to consider the resulting errors in FL. Ellis (1994) delves into this very topic by examining various types of errors that arise due to L1 influence, including morphological, syntactic and pragmatic errors. Through understanding these errors, educators gain valuable insights into the specific challenges that learners face when acquiring a new language. Wang's (2019) study, which complements Ellis's work, stresses the impact of the Chinese language (L1) on the writing abilities of Chinese EFL learners. Through error analysis, Wang identifies specific types of errors that Chinese students make in their written production, such as lexical, syntactic and discourse-level errors. Such errors are attributed to L1 interference, where linguistic features and conventions from the Chinese language affect the production of English.

Both Ellis (1994) and Wang (2019) highlight the implications of L1 interference for language teaching. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing these errors to facilitate effective language instruction. Educators can use the insights provided by these studies to develop strategies that minimize L1 interference and help learners overcome specific challenges in areas such as writing. By targeting the areas of L1 interference that contribute to errors, language teachers can design tailored interventions and provide appropriate guidance to enhance language learning outcomes.

However, concerns exist regarding the potential for L1 overreliance to lead to negative consequences. Excessive dependence on L1 can result in negative transfer, where L1 structures, vocabulary, and writing conventions are inappropriately applied to L2, leading to errors and impeding the development of accurate writing skills (Chen, 2019). This aligns with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of full immersion in the L2 environment for internalizing target language norms (Vygotsky, 1978). Over-reliance on L1 might disrupt the scaffolding process within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), hindering progress toward L2 independence. The potential for L1 interference, therefore, requires a cautious approach to L1 integration in EFL writing instruction.

### **2.3 Studies on EFL Writing Skills in Morocco**

Recent research, which shows that the study of English writing skills in Morocco has gained significant attention, highlights the challenges that Moroccan EFL students face. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom and a lack of access to authentic writing materials negatively impact writing skill development (Bouzidi, 2019). This implies that increased exposure to authentic English materials and real-life contexts could potentially enhance proficiency. Moreover, cultural factors also influence writing performance. Moroccan students often struggle to transition from the more formal style of Arabic writing to the more informal and cohesive style of English, resulting in non-cohesive and non-coherent writing (Bouziane, 2018). This suggests that teachers must be aware of these cultural differences and provide explicit instruction on English writing conventions.

Research indicates that traditional teacher-centered approaches, characterized by a heavy emphasis on grammar drills and rote learning, remain prevalent in many Moroccan EFL classrooms (El Khatib, 2020). However, a clear and imminent shift towards more communicative and process-oriented pedagogical approaches is taking place. These newer methods give priority to more authentic writing tasks, peer feedback, and revision opportunities, a fact that is in keeping with learner-centered and task-based instruction. The adoption of such approaches holds significant potential for enhancing the effectiveness of EFL writing instruction in Morocco. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors exert a considerable influence on EFL writing skills. Studies reveal that a substantial proportion of Moroccan EFL students originate from low-income backgrounds and lack access to essential resources like computers and internet connectivity (Bahous *et al.*, 2017; Moustououi *et al.*, 2019). This limited access restricts opportunities for independent practice and skill development outside the classroom setting. Consequently, addressing socioeconomic disparities and ensuring equitable access to resources are crucial steps toward improving EFL writing proficiency among Moroccan students.

## 2.4 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Despite the known challenges faced by Moroccan students in English writing, there is a surprising gap in research regarding the impact of the first language (L1) on English writing skills in Morocco. To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate the attitudes of Moroccan English teachers towards L1 use in the EFL classroom and explore the potential influence of L1 on English writing skills. Additionally, the study aims to analyze the errors that EFL students make in writing, specifically those resulting from L1 interference. By examining these factors, the study seeks to provide insights into the role of the use of L1 in EFL writing in the Moroccan context and to shed light on the specific challenges faced by students thereto.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection to provide a comprehensive analysis. This design was informed by theoretical frameworks such as the Interactionist Model and Socio-Cultural Theory, which emphasize the importance of interaction and social context in language acquisition. By combining target language (TL) instruction in English and L1 instruction in Arabic, the study sought to explore how learners' existing L1 knowledge interacts with new FL input, a key concept in Interactionist perspectives (Long, 1996). Additionally, the Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) informed the investigation into how the use of L1 as a mediational tool might scaffold learners' writing development in FL, especially in the collaborative classroom context.

The research design divided participants into two groups: a control group receiving only TL instruction in English, and an experimental group receiving both TL and L1 instruction. The primary aim was to assess how L1 use influenced EFL students' writing skills by analyzing teacher input before, during, and after the writing lessons. This aligns with the interactionist notion of learners negotiating meaning through interaction with both languages (Gass, 1997).

To collect qualitative data, an online questionnaire was distributed to English teachers in Moroccan public schools. The questionnaire was designed to elicit teachers' perceptions of the role of L1 in EFL classrooms and its impact on students' writing skills. The Socio-Cultural Theory informed the analysis of these perceptions, particularly how L1 serves as a scaffolding tool in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) to help learners progress in their writing skills.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between L1 use and EFL writing skills. The combination of experimental data from both groups and qualitative insights from teachers provided valuable perspectives on the role of L1 in developing English writing proficiency, framed within these key language acquisition theories. The study addressed the following research questions:

- 1) What are Moroccan English teacher's perceptions towards the use of L1 in the EFL classroom?
- 2) How does the use of L1 as language instruction impact Moroccan EFL students' writing skills?
- 3) What are the types of errors observed in Moroccan EFL students' writing that can be attributed to L1 interference?

### **3.2 Participants and Sampling**

The participants of this study were 74 students split into a control group (38 students) and an experimental group (36 students). Students belonged to the ninth grade at Attacharok middle school in Harbil (an outskirt of Marrakech). The participants were selected based on the fact that they had never studied English before and were native speakers of Arabic. Their age ranged between 15 and 16. They had studied English for 5 months before the treatment took place, and all of them were beginners. Students studied English twice a week, and each session lasted for one hour. Students used English only in class with Arabic being their language of everyday life. The study also addressed English teachers in middle and high schools across nine regions in Morocco. About 165 Moroccan English teachers teaching students at different levels ranging from 9th grade to 2nd-year baccalaureate responded to the questionnaire, Teachers worked in different areas (urban, suburban, and rural).

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

This study employed three instruments. Before conducting the treatment, the students were given a pre-test to determine their language proficiency (low, moderate, or high achiever). The students were asked to write a short paragraph about themselves, including personal information. The second instrument was the post-test administered right after the treatment. The post-test was designed to evaluate the students' performance in both groups and analyze their errors. The third instrument was a questionnaire consisting of two sets of questions: the first set was designed to elicit general information about the participant teachers, while the second set was designed to elicit Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions vis-à-vis the use of L1 and its effect on English writing skills.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Techniques**

This study employed two analysis techniques: error analysis to identify and categorize errors made by students in their English writing productions and then decide on the impact of L1 on English writing skills, and descriptive statistics to have a clear idea about Moroccan teachers' perspectives of the use of L1.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Demographic Information of the Participants**

Among the respondents, 54.5% worked in urban areas, 23% in suburban areas, and 22.4% in rural areas. Indicating that students in urban areas have more chance to English exposure outside the classroom compared to students in suburban and rural areas, which may influence the use of L1 in the English classroom. The majority of the respondents were male teachers (62.4%), while 37.6% were female. In terms of educational qualifications, 72.7% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, 26.7% held a master's degree, and only one respondent had a Ph.D. The respondents also had varied teaching experience, with 22.4% having taught English for 16 to 20 years, 21.8% with 6 to 10 years of experience, and 18.8% with both 11 to 15 and 1 to 5 years of experience. Additionally, 18.2% of the respondents had more than 21 years of teaching experience. Overall, the respondents represented a diverse group of EFL teachers in terms of gender, qualifications, school location, and teaching experience, which could provide valuable insights into the use of L1 in English classes. The study identified educational achievement, area of work, levels assigned, and teaching experience as significant factors in the use of L1 in EFL writing lessons in Morocco, with experienced teachers potentially having a deeper understanding of instructional strategies and content knowledge for effective L1 implementation.

### **4.2 Teachers' Beliefs about the Use of L1 in English Writing**

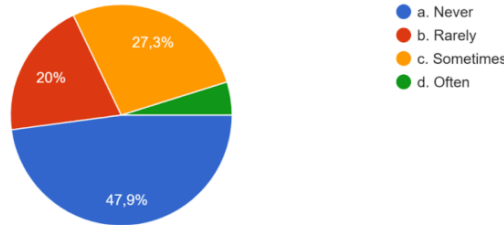
To draw on Moroccan English teachers' perceptions, the following areas were addressed:

#### **4.2.1 Frequency of the Use of L1**

The findings reveal that a significant portion of the respondents (47.9%) did not permit the use of the students' first language in their classroom, indicating a strict policy against L1 use. About a quarter of the respondents (27.3%) occasionally allowed L1 use, while a smaller percentage (20%) rarely permitted it. Interestingly, only a small proportion of the teachers (4.8%) frequently let students use their L1 in class, suggesting that this practice was not commonly adopted in the surveyed population. Overall, the findings suggest a diversity of perceptions towards L1 use in the classroom, with a significant portion of teachers opting for limited or no L1 use in their instructional approach.

**Figure 1:** Frequency of the use of L1

1. How often do you allow students to use their L1 (Moroccan Arabic, Berber, or French) in writing assignments?  
165 réponses

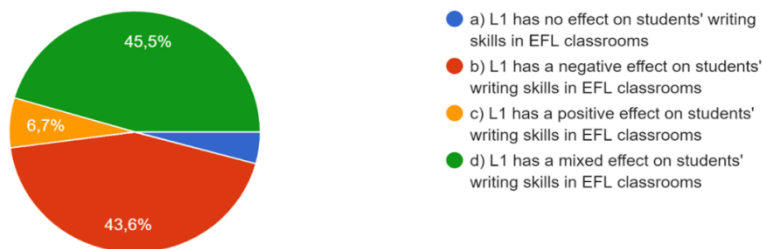


#### 4.2.2 The Effect of L1

According to the of L1 on the effect of English writing skills, a significant number of the surveyed teachers (45.5%) expressed the belief that students' first language had a mixed impact on their writing skills. Additionally, 43.6% of respondents stated that L1 had a negative effect on students' writing skills, while only 6.7% believed that L1 had a positive effect. Furthermore, a mere 4.2% of teachers admitted that L1 has no effect on students' writing skills. These findings highlight the varying perspectives among teachers on the influence of L1 on students' English writing skills.

**Figure 2:** The effect of L1

2. Which of the following best describes the effect of L1 on students' writing skills in EFL classrooms in Morocco?  
165 réponses



#### 4.2.3 Correlation between L1 Proficiency and English Writing

The findings suggest that there is a lack of consensus among teachers on the relationship between students' proficiency in their first language (L1) and their English writing skills. A significant percentage (49.1%) of respondents did not believe that L1 proficiency translates to better performance in English writing. However, a considerable proportion (35.2%) of the responding teachers acknowledged some degree of relationship between L1 proficiency and improved performance in English writing. A smaller percentage (9.7%) of teachers expressed a belief in such a relationship, and an even smaller percentage (6%) of respondents perceived a strong correlation between L1 proficiency

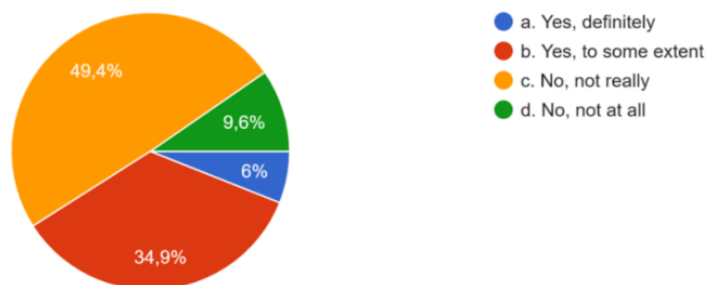


and better performance in English writing. These findings highlight the complexity and variability in teachers' perspectives on the role of L1 proficiency in English writing skills.

**Figure 3:** Correlation between L1 proficiency and English writing (raw percentage)

3. In your experience, do you think students who are more proficient in their L1 tend to have better English writing skills?

166 réponses



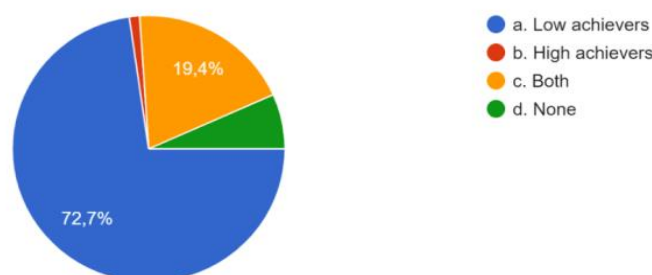
#### 4.2.4 Correlation between English Proficiency and L1 Use

Regarding the use of the L1 in English writing assignments, the findings reveal varying perceptions among teachers. A significant majority (72.7%) of respondents believe that low achievers tend to use L1 in English writing tasks. However, a notable percentage (19.4%) of teachers think that both low and high achievers utilize L1 to tackle writing. Surprisingly, only a small proportion (6.6%) of respondents admit that none of their students use L1 in English writing assignments, which may imply potential reluctance or hesitation in acknowledging or addressing L1 use in the classroom. Interestingly, a very small percentage (1.2%) of responding teachers confirmed that high achievers use L1 to respond to English writing tasks. The findings suggest that teachers' perspectives on L1 use in English writing assignments are nuanced and influenced by various factors, including individual beliefs, classroom dynamics, and student characteristics.

**Figure 4:** Correlation between English proficiency and L1 use

4. In your class, who is the most likely to use L1 in English writing tasks?

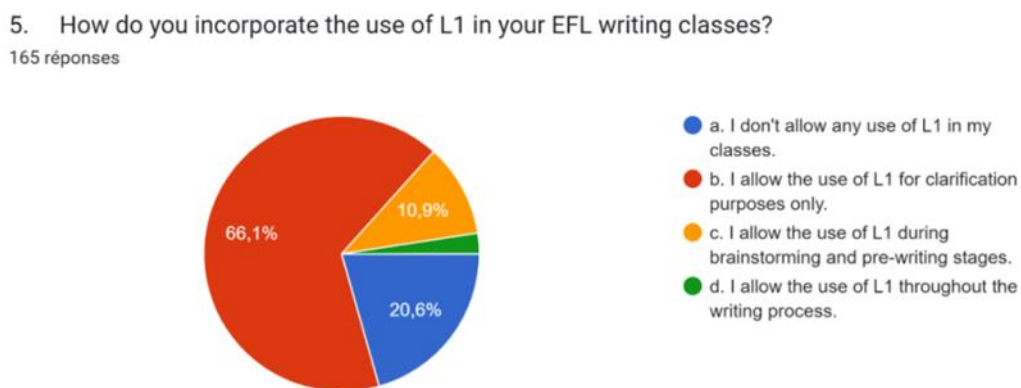
165 réponses



#### 4.2.5 Reasons contributing to the use of L1

Concerning the incorporation of L1 in the English writing lesson, a big majority 66.1% of respondents used L1 for clarification and to avoid misunderstanding, 20.6% of teachers did not allow L1 at all, which entails that they discouraged the use of L1, 10.9% made use of L1 when brainstorming, potentially leveraging students' L1 proficiency or background knowledge for generating ideas, and 2.4% of respondents used L1 throughout the writing process.

**Figure 5:** Reasons contributing to the use of L1

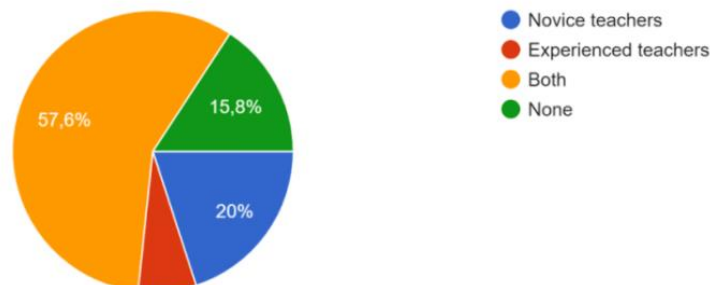


#### 4.2.6 Correlation between Teaching Experience and the Use of L1

The majority of the participants (57.6%) perceived that both experienced and novice teachers tend to use L1 in English writing tasks. This suggests that the use of L1 in English writing is a common practice among them. Furthermore, a significant portion of the respondents (20%) believe that only novice teachers rely on L1 when dealing with writing in English class. Interestingly, a smaller percentage of respondents (15.8%) admitted that experienced teachers also use L1 in English writing, albeit to a lesser extent. This suggests that some respondents recognize that experienced teachers may also resort to L1 in certain situations, but not as frequently as novice teachers. Lastly, a small proportion of respondents (6.6%) believe that even experienced teachers make use of L1 in English writing lessons. This indicates that a minority of respondents held the belief that the use of L1 in English writing was not limited to novice teachers but was also observed among experienced teachers.

**Figure 6:** Correlation between teaching experience and the use of L1

6. In your opinion, who tends to use L1 more in the EFL writing lesson in Morocco?  
 165 réponses

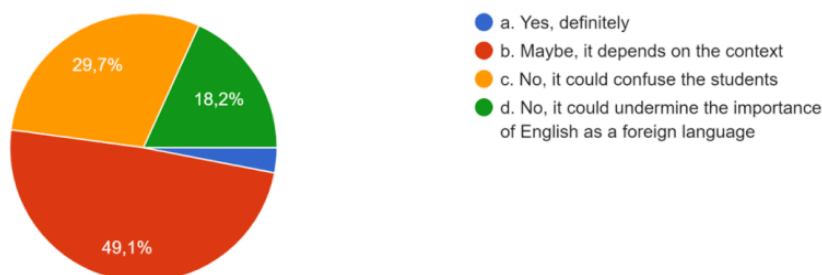


#### 4.2.7 Correlation between the Use of L1 and the Enhancement of EFL Writing Skills

Nearly half of the respondents (49.1%) expressed the belief that the positive impact of using the first language (L1) in writing tasks depends on the context. On the other hand, 29.7% of the participants revealed that the use of L1 confuses students and leads to their loss of direction when facing English writing tasks. This indicates a perception that L1 interference may hinder the development of English writing skills. Furthermore, 18.2% of the respondents believed that L1 weakens the importance of English in writing tasks. Interestingly, only a small percentage (3%) of the participants acknowledged the positive impact of L1 on enhancing English writing skills, suggesting that they perceived some benefits in utilizing L1 during the writing process.

**Figure 7:** Correlation between the use of L1 and the enhancement of EFL writing skills

7. Do you believe that incorporating the students' L1 in writing lessons could enhance their English writing skills?  
 165 réponses



#### 4.2.8 The use of Translation Platforms

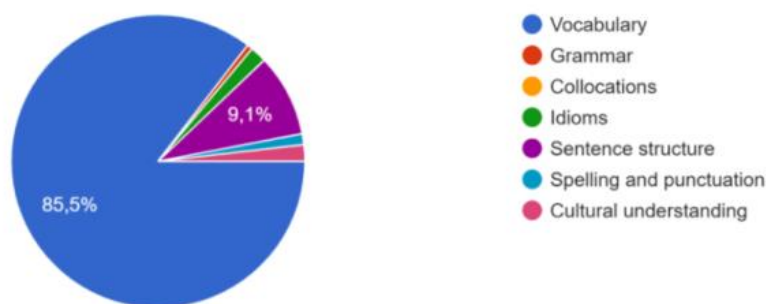
The vast majority of teachers who participated in the survey (85.5%) indicated that their students rely on translation platforms such as Google Translate to translate vocabulary. Additionally, a smaller percentage (9.1%) reported that their students use translation

tools specifically for sentence structure, which may indicate that they are not learning how to construct proper sentences on their own.

**Figure 8:** The use of translation platforms

8. What do your English students use translation platforms in a writing task for?

165 réponses



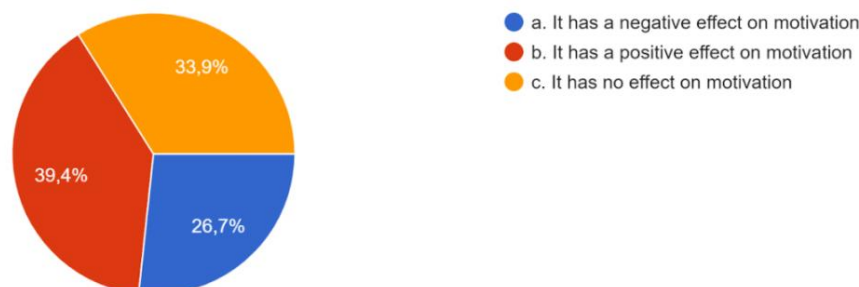
#### 4.2.9 Correlation between the Use of L1 and Students' Motivation

About 39.4% of teachers believed that using L1 had a positive impact on students' motivation, meaning that they think using L1 can motivate students to improve their English writing skills. Approximately 33.9% of the respondents thought there was no effect, which implies that using L1 does not have any significant impact on students' motivation in learning English writing skills. On the other hand, 26.7% of the respondents admitted that using L1 had a negative impact on motivation, suggesting that using L1 in English writing classes may demotivate students and hinder their progress.

**Figure 9:** Correlation between the use of L1 and students' motivation

9. How do you think the use of L1 in EFL writing classes affects students' motivation?

165 réponses



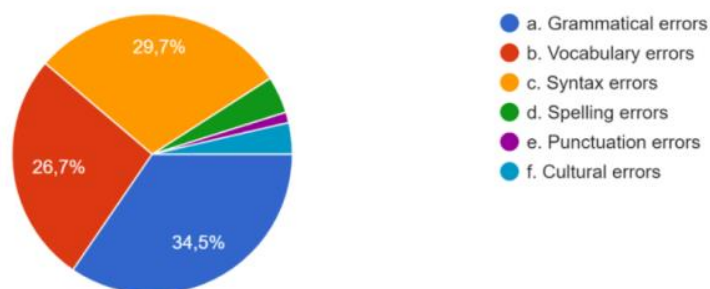
#### 4.2.10 L1 Interference

The data indicates that L1 interference significantly affects students' English writing. The majority of teachers (34.5%) observed grammatical errors resulting from the use of L1.

This suggests that students struggle with applying English grammar rules accurately. Additionally, 29.7% of the teachers identified syntax errors, indicating challenges in constructing sentences according to English syntax patterns. Vocabulary errors were also prevalent, with 26.7% of teachers noticing such issues, which suggest difficulties in selecting appropriate English words. Less frequently, teachers reported cultural errors (4.8%), spelling errors (4.2%), and punctuation errors (1.2%) resulting from L1 interference. Cultural errors may arise due to differences in cultural conventions between the students' L1 and English. Spelling errors may be attributed to variations in spelling rules, and punctuation errors could stem from the transfer of punctuation rules from the students' first language. These percentages highlight the significant impact of L1 interference on different aspects of English writing. The higher percentages for grammatical, syntax, and vocabulary errors underscore the need for targeted instruction to address these areas. The lower percentages for cultural, spelling, and punctuation errors suggest the importance of addressing these issues as well, albeit to a lesser extent.

**Figure 10:** L1 interference

10. What kind of L1 interference have you noticed in your English students' writing?  
165 réponses

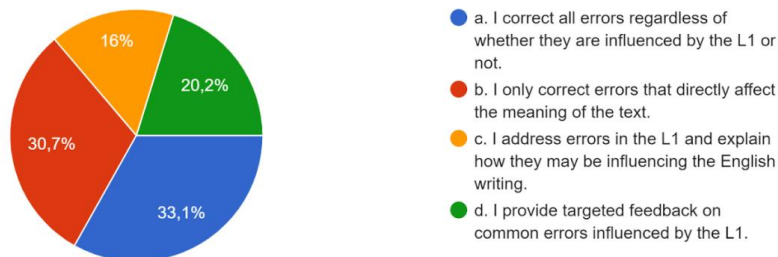


#### 4.2.11 Approaching Students' Errors

A significant proportion of teachers did not take into account the influence of L1 when correcting their students' errors, with 33.1% of teachers indicating that they corrected errors without considering L1 interference. This could potentially be problematic as L1 interference can lead to incorrect usage of English structures and vocabulary. On the other hand, a substantial number of teachers (30.7%) focus on correcting errors that impact the meaning of the message, which is a positive approach to error correction. However, only a small proportion of teachers (16%) discuss errors with their students using L1, which could be a missed opportunity to address L1 interference and help students develop their writing skills in English.

**Figure 11: Approaching students' errors**

11. How do you address errors in students writing that may be influenced by their L1?  
 163 réponses

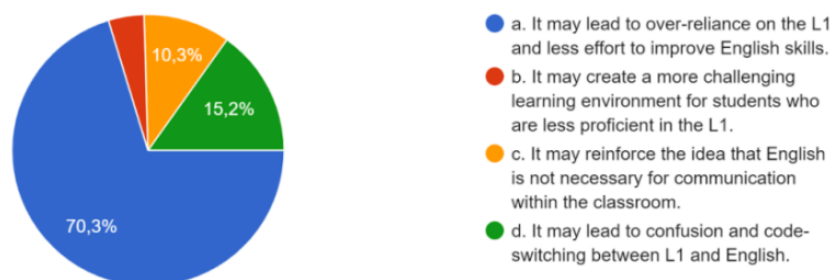


#### 4.2.12 The Effect of L1 on English Writing

A large majority of teachers (70.3%) saw the over-reliance on L1 as the main barrier to English improvement among their students. This finding highlights the importance of addressing the use of L1 in English language classrooms. It is interesting to note that some teachers (15.2%) viewed the use of L1 as a form of code-switching, which suggests that they may perceive the use of L1 as a potential resource for facilitating learning. However, a minority of teachers (10.3%) believed that the use of L1 discouraged students from interacting in English in the classroom, which could potentially hinder their language development.

**Figure 12: The effect of L1 on English writing**

14. In your opinion, what are some potential drawbacks of allowing the use of L1 in the EFL writing classroom?  
 165 réponses



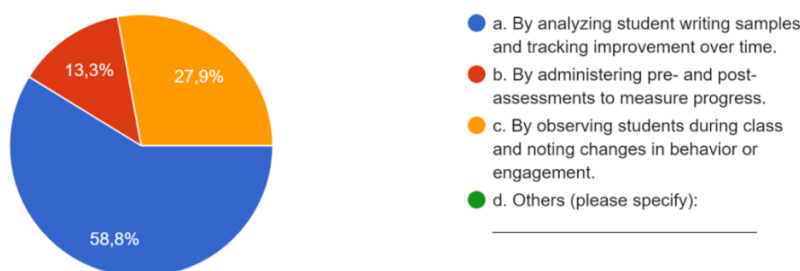
#### 4.2.13 L1 Influence Strategies

The majority of teachers (58.8%) chose to analyze their students' writing in order to address the impact of their L1 on their English writing. This indicates that teachers recognize the importance of identifying and addressing the influence of the L1 on students' writing. However, it is notable that only a small percentage of teachers (13.3%) used pre-assessment and post-assessment to measure their students' progress, which could indicate a lack of focus on tracking student learning outcomes. Additionally, the

fact that a significant proportion of teachers (27.9%) chose to watch their students in class to track engagement and motivation highlights the importance of addressing not just the technical aspects of writing, but also the affective and motivational factors that can impact students' writing development.

**Figure 13:** L1 influence strategies

16. How do you measure the effectiveness of your teaching strategies to address the influence of L1 on writing skills?  
165 réponses



### 4.3 Treatment Results

The students in both the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) were asked to write a short paragraph describing the appearance of their best friend. Analysis of the data collected from both groups revealed that the students in the CG (28 students) performed better compared to their counterparts in the EG. The writings of the CG students were considered satisfactory, demonstrating fluency and accuracy with only minor errors (of 10 students) in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and conjunction usage. However, among the EG students, a total of 26 students (18 low achievers and 8 moderate achievers) produced writings that fell below the expected standard and were deemed unsatisfactory, negatively impacting both accuracy and meaning. Interestingly, only 10 EG students were able to produce accurate writing with minor errors, similar to the CG students. It was observed that the EG students made more errors, which can be attributed to the interference of their native language (L1). The following is a compilation of the 10 most common errors found among the EG students, accompanied by examples extracted from their productions.

#### 4.3.1 Word Order Errors

Arabic and English have different word order patterns. Arabic follows a noun-adjective (N+Adj) word order, while English follows an adjective-noun (Adj+N) word order. EGS transferred the Arabic word order to their English writing, resulting in errors. For example, "She has got a jacket pink" instead of "She has got a pink jacket"; "She has got a mouth small." instead of "She has got a small mouth", "Her hair is brown light" instead of "Her hair is light brown", etc.

#### 4.3.2 Article Errors

Moroccan Arabic does not have definite (the) and indefinite (a/an) articles like English does. Moroccan students struggled with using articles correctly in English writing. Moroccan Arabic may use other strategies to convey similar meanings, such as using the plural form of a noun without an article to refer to non-specific or generic objects. This can lead to confusion when trying to use 'a' or 'an' with singular nouns in English, as Moroccan students may inadvertently transfer the usage patterns of Moroccan Arabic and use 'a' or 'an' with plural nouns in English. For Example, "Mina has got a blue jeans" instead of "Mina has got blue jeans"; and "Hajar has got a white shoes" instead of "Hajar has got white shoes"; "white shirt" instead of "a white shirt".

#### 4.3.3 Vocabulary Errors

Moroccan Arabic and English have different vocabulary, and Moroccan students may sometimes use direct translations from Arabic to English, resulting in errors in word choice and usage. Example: "She is of tall height" instead of "She is tall"; and "Her hair is tall" instead of "Her hair is long".

#### 4.3.4 Transliteration Errors

Some CGS used Arabic script or phonetic transliteration when they wrote the English paragraph, which resulted in errors in spelling. For Example, "samall mouth" /fam saghir/ "فم صغير" instead of "small mouth". Some of the students in the EG misspell the English pronoun 'she' as 'sche'. In Arabic, the feminine pronoun is written as "هـ" or 'هي' (pronounced as 'hiya' or 'hiyā', which ends with the letter 'ي' (yā'). The letter 'ي' (yā') is a common feminine marker in Arabic, and when Moroccan students transfer this language feature to English, they mistakenly write 'sche' as a direct transliteration of the Arabic pronoun. And due to the influence of the French language on Moroccan Arabic, some CGS inadvertently used the French spelling when writing in English, which can result in misspelling the English words. For Example, 'bleu' [blø] (Instead of 'blue' [blu:]); 'greey' (gris) [gri:] instead of 'grey/gray' [grei].

#### 4.3.5 Pluralization Errors

Moroccan Arabic has its own system of pluralization, which differs from English. CG students transferred the Arabic pluralization rules to English, resulting in errors in plural forms. For example, "He has got black shoe" to mean "He has got black shoes", 'tooth' instead of 'teeth' and 'jean' instead of 'jeans'.

#### 4.3.6 Use of Arabic Loanwords

Moroccan Arabic contains loanwords from French, Spanish, and Berber languages, among others. EG students used these loanwords in their English writing, resulting in errors or unfamiliar terms in English. For example, "Hind has got blanc trousers" instead of "Hind has got white trousers".



#### **4.3.7 Possessive Adjectives Errors**

Another type of common error spotted among students in EG was possessive adjectives. They confused “his” with “he’s”. In Moroccan Arabic, possessive adjectives are often formed by adding a possessive suffix to the noun, rather than using a separate possessive adjective as in English. This could potentially lead to confusion when trying to use possessive adjectives in English, where “his” is used to indicate possession, rather than a possessive suffix attached to the noun. Additionally, in Moroccan Arabic, contractions similar to “he’s” do not exist, as Arabic verbs are often conjugated by adding prefixes and suffixes to the root verb. So, they are not familiar with the concept of contractions, and they mistakenly assume that “he’s” is the possessive form of “he” due to similarities in the written form. For example, “He nose is straight.” Instead of, “His nose is straight.” and “She hair is black.” instead of, “Her hair is black”.

#### **4.3.8 Conjunction Errors**

EG students often overused the conjunction ‘and’. Moroccan Arabic has different conjunctions that are commonly used in specific situations, and students transferred this tendency to their English writing. This resulted in the overuse of the conjunction ‘and’, leading to repetitive and monotonous writing. For example, “Asma has got long hair and small mouth and white teeth” instead of “Asma has got long hair, small mouth, and white teeth”.

#### **4.3.9 Capitalization Errors**

In Moroccan Arabic, proper nouns, such as names of people, subject pronoun ‘I’ and the first letter in a paragraph are not capitalized in the same way as in English. This led to errors where students failed to capitalize proper nouns, and resulted in incorrect capitalization, which affected the accuracy of the text. For example, “my friend maryam is fifteen years old” instead of “My friend Maryam is fifteen years old.”

#### **4.3.10 Use of Cultural-specific Expressions or Idioms**

A few EGSs involved specific expressions and idioms related to describing people that are not commonly used or understood in their English writing without providing adequate context or explanation, resulting in a cultural error. For example, “He is tall like a palm tree” to describe height, which is not idiomatic or commonly used in English. Another translated expression is “Her hair is like silk”. In Moroccan Arabic it is common to have expressions that use comparisons to materials or fabrics to describe someone's hair, which may not be the case in English. The use of ‘silk’ to describe hair is not a typical English expression.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study explored the effect of L1 (specifically Moroccan Arabic) on English writing skills in Morocco, employing both a questionnaire teacher and an experimental design.

The questionnaire gathered data from 165 English teachers, while the experimental group (36 students) and control group (38 students) allowed for a detailed examination of L1 influence on student writing. The findings revealed that the use of L1 positively affected the motivation, self-confidence, and engagement of the experimental group students during English writing lessons. Despite this, many teachers expressed concerns, reflecting a broader awareness of L1 interference in language learning.

In line with Socio-Cultural Theory, L1 functioned as a scaffolding tool, particularly benefiting lower-achieving students and beginners. By leveraging their L1, students were able to engage in meaningful interaction, facilitating classroom instructions and enhancing their ability to process and organize new information. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) view of L1 as a mediational tool, where learners rely on familiar linguistic structures to negotiate meaning and gradually internalize L2 concepts. The metacognitive engagement observed among students further supports this perspective, as they were able to consciously reflect on their language learning processes and use L1 strategically to support their writing in English.

The Interactionist Model (Long, 1996) also underpins these findings, emphasizing the role of interaction between existing L1 knowledge and new L2 input in language acquisition. While L1 served as a support mechanism in ensuring comprehension and fostering engagement, the emergence of specific errors in the experimental group highlights the potential for negative transfer, as students sometimes applied L1 structures inappropriately to their EFL writing. These errors, however, provide valuable feedback for refining instructional approaches, suggesting that careful regulation of L1 use can help minimize its adverse effects.

While the use of L1 in EFL writing instruction should not be dismissed outright, its frequency and extent should be carefully controlled, taking into account students' proficiency levels and specific learning needs. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how L1 can both support and hinder the acquisition of English writing skills. Grounded in both the Interactionist Model and Socio-Cultural Theory, this study offers valuable insights for educators in developing balanced, effective teaching approaches that maximize the benefits of L1 while minimizing its potential for interference. These theories provide a framework for integrating L1 in a way that fosters meaningful language interaction and cognitive development, supporting more informed language teaching strategies.

## **6. Suggestions for Further Research**

Given the gaps and limitations identified in the current literature, there is a need for further research in various areas related to: investigating the effect of L1 on different writing tasks (e.g., argumentative writing, narrative writing, etc.); examining the effects of the use of L1 on different proficiency levels (e.g., intermediate, advanced); exploring the role of L1 proficiency; exploring the impact of the use of L1 on specific aspects of

writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, or coherence; and exploring the role of L1 proficiency on EFL writing.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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