

Developing a Culturally Responsive Model for Assessing Writing in Moroccan EFL Secondary Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development and implementation of a Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment model tailored for Moroccan English as Foreign Language secondary classrooms. Grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy, sociocultural theory, and critical language assessment, the model integrates students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and identities into writing instruction and evaluation. Using a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design with 68 students and four teachers across two schools, the study has proven that the Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment model significantly improved students' writing performance, especially in idea development, cultural expression, and audience awareness, while fostering greater motivation and identity affirmation. Teachers reported increased student engagement and a shift toward formative, inclusive assessment practices, though challenges related to standardized exam demands and professional development needs were noted. The study underscores the potential of Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment to transform writing pedagogy in Moroccan EFL contexts by making assessment more inclusive, authentic, and empowering for learners. Implications are discussed for curriculum reform, teacher training, and national policy.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; Writing Assessment; Student Voice; Language Identity; Assessment for Learning; EFL; and Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

Writing assessment has long been a cornerstone of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, serving as both a measure of student proficiency and a tool for instructional decision-making. In Moroccan secondary schools, where English occupies a growing role in the national curriculum, writing tasks are commonly used to evaluate students' mastery of grammar, organization, and vocabulary. However, traditional assessment practices often neglect the sociocultural realities and linguistic identities of Moroccan learners, resulting in classroom experiences that are disconnected from students' lives and communities. This disconnect not only diminishes student motivation but also reinforces inequities in access to meaningful learning and self-expression.

In recent years, a growing body of research has emphasized the value of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in addressing these challenges. Rooted in the work of scholars such as Gay (2010), Ladson-Billings (1995), and Paris & Alim (2017), CRP advocates for educational practices that affirm students' cultural identities, foster critical consciousness and engage learners in relevant meaningful ways. While CRP has gained traction in curriculum design and classroom instruction, its application to language assessment, particularly in EFL contexts, remains underexplored. This gap is especially pertinent in multilingual societies like Morocco, where students navigate complex linguistic landscapes shaped by Arabic, Amazigh with its three varieties, French, *Darija* (Moroccan Arabic), and English.

This article argues that writing assessment must evolve to reflect the diverse cultural and linguistic identities of Moroccan EFL learners. Specifically, it proposes and investigates a Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment

(CRWA) model tailored to the Moroccan secondary classroom context. Rather than evaluating writing solely through prescriptive rubrics centered on grammatical precision, the CRWA model encourages students to express their voices, values, and experiences through contextually relevant tasks. By foregrounding student identity in the assessment process, the model seeks to bridge the gap between classroom practices and students' lived realities.

The study employed a mixed-methods design to examine how the CRWA model impacted students' writing performance, engagement, and identity expression, as well as teachers' assessment practices and perceptions. Through classroom interventions, writing samples, interviews, and observations, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the CRWA model improve students' writing performance in Moroccan EFL secondary classrooms?
2. How does the model influence students' motivation, engagement, and expression of cultural identity in writing?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the feasibility, benefits, and challenges of implementing culturally responsive writing assessment?

In responding to these questions, this article contributes to the growing movement toward equitable, inclusive, and culturally grounded educational practices in the Global South. It offers both theoretical and practical insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to reimagine assessment not merely as a tool for measurement, but as a vehicle for empowerment and transformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the existing literature on writing assessment in EFL contexts, the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, and the intersection of culture, identity, and assessment in language learning. It also examines current practices in Moroccan EFL classrooms and identifies the gaps that this study seeks to address.

Traditional Writing Assessment in EFL Classrooms

Writing assessment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings has historically emphasized accuracy, coherence, cohesion, and adherence to standardized academic genres (Weigle, 2002; Hamp-Lyons, 2007). Rubrics used in many EFL contexts often privilege surface-level features, grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure over content relevance, creativity, or student voice. While this approach provides some degree of objectivity and comparability, critics argue that it reduces writing to a set of prescriptive norms, thereby marginalizing learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Shohamy, 2001; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018).

Moreover, such assessments tend to ignore the contextual realities of learners, particularly in multilingual, postcolonial societies. In Morocco, national exams for secondary students often reflect foreign models of academic writing, limiting opportunities for students to draw upon local knowledge, cultural heritage, or native linguistic resources in their compositions (El Amrani, 2021). This results in what Canagarajah (2005) calls "linguistic imperialism in assessment," where students are measured against imported norms that may be culturally and linguistically alien.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Foundations and Relevance

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), first articulated by Ladson-Billings (1995), seeks to address these inequities by grounding teaching in students' cultural experiences and ways of knowing. Gay (2010) expands this framework, emphasizing the importance of validating learners' cultural identities through curriculum content, instructional strategies, and classroom discourse. According to him key features of CRP include:

- Academic success for all students
- Cultural competence, allowing students to maintain their cultural identity
- Critical consciousness, fostering awareness of social inequities

In language education, CRP involves recognizing that learners bring rich, multilayered identities shaped by their linguistic backgrounds, family histories, and social environments. Integrating these elements into classroom practices has been shown to improve motivation, participation, and learning outcomes (Paris & Alim, 2017; Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

However, while CRP has gained traction in curriculum and pedagogy, its integration into assessment practices, particularly writing assessment, remains underdeveloped, especially in EFL settings where standardized tests dominate.

Culture, Identity, and Voice in Writing

Writing is not a neutral act; it is deeply embedded in culture and identity (Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998). When students are encouraged to express themselves through culturally relevant topics, their writing becomes a space of self-affirmation and empowerment. Research has shown that learners perform better when writing about familiar contexts, using culturally grounded narratives, and drawing upon their native linguistic repertoires even in a second or foreign language (García & Wei, 2014; Norton, 2013).

Furthermore, the inclusion of multilingual practices, such as translanguaging in drafting or peer feedback, has been linked to deeper engagement and more meaningful learning in writing classrooms (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Yet most assessment systems in EFL contexts continue to suppress these practices in favor of monolingual English norms, thereby erasing students' identities from their work.

Writing Assessment Reform: Global and Local Perspectives

Globally, scholars and practitioners have called for a shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In writing instruction, this means using assessment as a tool to guide student growth, provide constructive feedback, and support iterative improvement. Alternative assessment models, such as portfolios, process-based rubrics, and self-assessment have been proposed as ways to foster student agency and reflection (Lee, 2017; Andrade & Cizek, 2010).

In Morocco, however, writing assessment remains largely product-oriented, focusing on end-of-term or exam-based writing tasks with little emphasis on drafting, feedback, or cultural relevance (Bouziane & Rguibi, 2018). Research on Moroccan EFL education has highlighted persistent challenges, including the lack of training for teachers in alternative assessment, the dominance of grammar-based marking, and the disconnection between assessment tasks and students' lived realities (El Haitami, 2020)

Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Study

While there is increasing recognition of the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, its application to writing assessment in EFL contexts, particularly in North Africa, remains underexplored. There is a notable absence of empirical studies that examine how writing assessment practices can be restructured to reflect students' cultural identities, foster voice and agency, and improve learning outcomes in Moroccan classrooms.

This study addresses that gap by designing, implementing, and evaluating a Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment (CRWA) model adapted to Moroccan secondary EFL contexts. It builds on global theories of culturally responsive education while grounding its intervention in the unique linguistic, cultural, and institutional context of Morocco. By examining the impact of CRWA on student performance, motivation, and teacher practice, the study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to make writing assessment more equitable, inclusive, and pedagogically sound.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Sociocultural Theory, and Critical Language Assessment. Together, these frameworks provide a lens for understanding how writing assessment can be reimaged to affirm learners' identities, engage them more deeply in the writing process, and challenge dominant paradigms of language evaluation in EFL contexts.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)

At the heart of this study is the concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), as theorized by Ladson-Billings (1995) and expanded by Gay (2010). CRP argues that educational practices must be grounded in the cultural experiences, worldviews, and languages of learners, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching is not simply about celebrating diversity, but about using students' cultural knowledge as a foundation for academic success, critical thinking, and meaningful engagement.

In the context of writing assessment, CRP calls for a shift away from decontextualized, prescriptive rubrics toward assessments that:

- Recognize students' cultural and linguistic repertoires
- Encourage expression of voice and identity
- Validate local forms of knowledge and ways of storytelling

This framework challenges the universalist assumptions embedded in many standardized assessments and reframes writing not as the mastery of external norms, but as a social and cultural practice.

Sociocultural Theory of Learning

The second pillar of this study's framework is Sociocultural Theory, primarily informed by the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). This theory posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, mediated by interaction, language, and cultural tools. In the context of writing instruction and assessment, Sociocultural Theory underscores the importance of:

- Dialogue and feedback in the writing process
- Cultural context in shaping meaning-making
- Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

From this perspective, writing is not merely an individual act of linguistic production, but a collaborative and culturally embedded activity. Assessment, therefore, should not be limited to judging final products but should play an active role in supporting learners' growth through formative, interactive, and context-sensitive feedback.

In Moroccan EFL classrooms, where students navigate multiple languages and cultural frameworks, sociocultural theory emphasizes the need to position learners not as passive recipients of English but as active agents who bring valuable knowledge and resources to the classroom.

Critical Language Assessment

The third theoretical strand is Critical Language Assessment (CLA), which examines the power dynamics, ideologies, and gatekeeping functions of language testing (Shohamy, 2001; McNamara, 2006). CLA

challenges the neutrality of traditional assessment practices and interrogates whose knowledge, language, and norms are being privileged or excluded.

In postcolonial EFL contexts like Morocco, where assessment practices often mirror imported standards (e.g., British or American norms), CLA highlights how writing rubrics can reinforce linguistic inequality and cultural erasure. As Shohamy (2001) argues, language assessments are never ideologically neutral they shape what counts as “correct” language, whose voice is heard, and who succeeds in the educational system.

By integrating CLA into the framework, this study foregrounds the need to decolonize writing assessment and create space for students to articulate their ideas in ways that are both culturally grounded and linguistically authentic.

Integrative Rationale

Together, these three theories offer a powerful framework for designing a culturally responsive writing assessment model:

- CRP provides the pedagogical foundation: students learn best when assessment reflects their culture and values.
- Sociocultural Theory provides the developmental mechanism: writing skills emerge through social interaction and cultural mediation.
- Critical Language Assessment provides the political lens: assessment must be reformed to challenge inequities and promote linguistic justice.

In applying this integrative framework, the study does not merely aim to improve writing performance, but to reclaim assessment as a transformative practice, one that empowers Moroccan students to write with clarity, creativity, and cultural pride.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of a Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment (CRWA) model on student writing performance, engagement, and identity expression in Moroccan EFL secondary classrooms. The design integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to offer a holistic understanding of how culturally responsive assessment influences teaching and learning dynamics.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental intervention study was conducted over one academic semester in two Moroccan public secondary schools. The study followed a pretest-posttest control group design complemented by qualitative data from interviews, classroom observations, and student reflections. This allowed the researcher to assess changes in writing performance as well as the broader cultural, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions of the CRWA model.

Participants

68 BAC students (aged 16–18) from two intact classes participated in the study. One class (n = 34) was assigned to the experimental group, which received writing instruction and assessment based on the CRWA model. The other class (n = 34) served as the control group, which followed the traditional curriculum and writing assessment practices.

In addition, four EFL teachers were involved in implementing the intervention and participating in pre- and post-intervention interviews. All teachers held degrees in English education and had at least five years of teaching experience in Moroccan secondary schools.

The Intervention: The CRWA Model

The CRWA model was developed through a synthesis of culturally responsive pedagogy, sociocultural theory, and classroom-based assessment strategies. Its key features includes:

- Writing prompts connected to students' local cultures, personal experiences, and community issues
- Flexible rubrics that emphasized idea development, audience awareness, and cultural relevance alongside linguistic accuracy
- Peer and self-assessment practices to encourage student agency and reflection
- Multilingual scaffolding, allowing students to brainstorm or draft ideas using Arabic, *Amazigh*, or *Darija* before translating into English
- Formative feedback sessions focused on student voice, purpose, and content clarity

The intervention lasted 10 weeks, during which students completed 4 writing tasks based on CRWA principles. Teachers received a brief orientation and ongoing support in applying the model.

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple instruments were used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data:

Writing Performance Rubric

A pre- and post-assessment writing task was administered to both groups. A holistic rubric, adapted to include culturally responsive criteria, was used to evaluate student performance across the following domains:

- Idea Development and Relevance
- Audience and Purpose Awareness
- Organization and Coherence
- Language Use (grammar, vocabulary, and accuracy)
- Cultural Expression and Voice

Three raters independently scored each writing sample, and interrater reliability was established using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.84$).

Student Reflection Journals

Experimental group students kept journals documenting their feelings about writing tasks, engagement levels, and the relevance of content. These journals provided insights into identity expression, motivation, and perceived improvements.

Teacher Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating teachers before and after the intervention. Questions explored their views on writing assessment, experiences using the CRWA model, and perceived student outcomes.

Classroom Observations

A total of 8 observation sessions (4 per school) were conducted using a culturally responsive teaching observation checklist. Field notes focused on instructional strategies, student participation, and assessment interactions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Writing scores from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to determine whether the CRWA model produced statistically significant improvements in writing performance compared to the control group. Descriptive statistics and effect sizes (Cohen’s d) were calculated to measure the magnitude of change.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data (student reflections, teacher interviews, and observation notes) were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted in three cycles: open coding, axial coding, and theme development. The themes were triangulated across data sources to ensure credibility and reliability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and school administrators. Informed consent was obtained from students, teachers, and parents. Participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to protect participant identity.

RESULTS

This section presents findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the study. The results are organized around the three research questions: improvements in writing performance, student motivation and identity expression, and teachers’ perceptions of the CRWA model. The data were collected through pre- and post-intervention writing tasks, teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student reflective journals during a 10-week culturally responsive writing module.

Impact on Students’ Writing Performance

To answer the first question that investigates the extent to which does the CRWA model improve students’ writing performance in Moroccan EFL secondary classrooms a comparative analysis of 60 students’ writing samples before and after the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment (CRWA) model revealed significant improvements across several dimensions. A tailored rubric was used to evaluate five major criteria: idea development, audience awareness, cultural relevance, organization, and language accuracy.

Table 1: Mean Scores in Writing Performance (Pre- vs. Post-Intervention)

| Assessment Criterion | Pre-CRWA Mean Score | Post-CRWA Mean Score | Percentage Increase |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Idea Development</i> | 52% | 78% | +26% |
| <i>Audience Awareness</i> | 40% | 73% | +33% |
| <i>Cultural Relevance</i> | 28% | 81% | +53% |
| <i>Organization</i> | 64% | 74% | +10% |
| <i>Language Accuracy</i> | 66% | 70% | +4% |

Table 1 shows that the most substantial gains were observed in cultural relevance (+53%), audience awareness (+33%), and idea development (+26%). These results indicate that when students were encouraged to incorporate culturally meaningful content, they developed richer, more coherent ideas and considered the reader more effectively. The slight improvement in language accuracy suggests that creativity and identity expression did not compromise linguistic standards.

Table 2: Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test writing scores between groups

| Group | Pre-test mean score | Post-test mean score | Score Gain |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Experimental Group | 11.50 | 15.00 | +3.50 |
| Control Group | 11.00 | 11.50 | +0.50 |

Table 2 visualizes a comparison of pre-and post- test writing scores between experimental and control group.

- Pre-test results: Both experimental and control groups had comparable baseline scores (Experimental Mean = 11.50, Control Mean = 11.00 out of 20).
- Post-test results: The experimental group showed a significant increase in mean writing scores (Mean = 15.00), compared to a smaller gain in the control group (Mean = 11.50).

A paired sample t-test confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group’s writing performance was statistically significant ($t(35) = 9.42, p < 0.001$), with a large effect size (Cohen’s $d = 1.57$). In contrast, the control group’s gains were not statistically significant ($t(35) = 1.98, p = 0.056$).

Table 3: Paired Sample t-Test Results for Writing Performance

| Group | Pre-test mean | Post-test mean | Mean Gain | t-value | df | p-value | Effect Size (Cohen’s d) |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------|----|---------|-------------------------|
| Experimental Group | 11.50 | 15.00 | +03.50 | 9.42 | 35 | < 0.001 | 1.57 |
| Control Group | 11.00 | 11.50 | +0.50 | 1.98 | 35 | 0.056 | 0.33 |

Increased Motivation

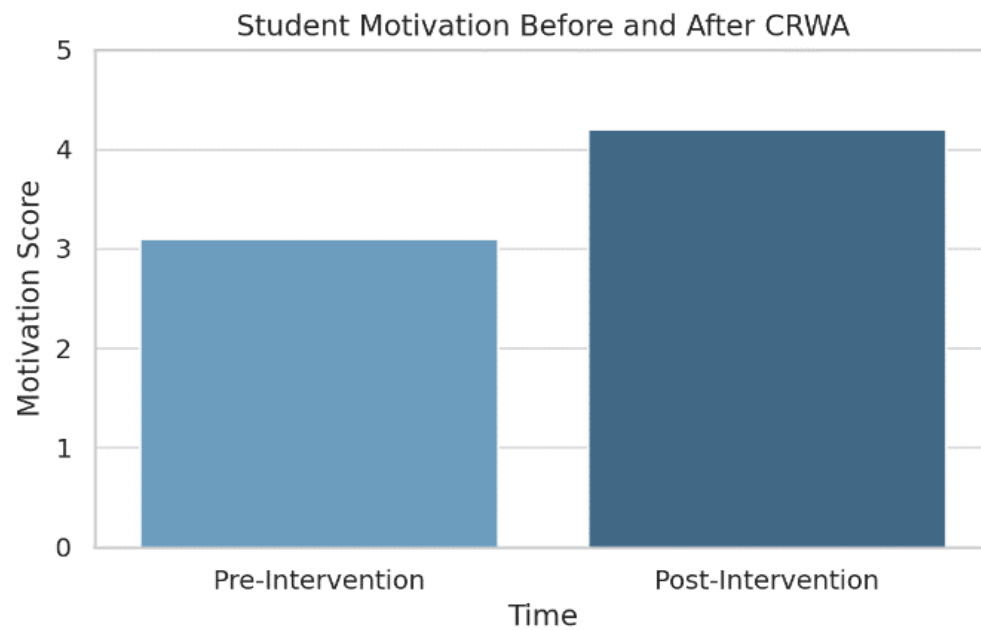
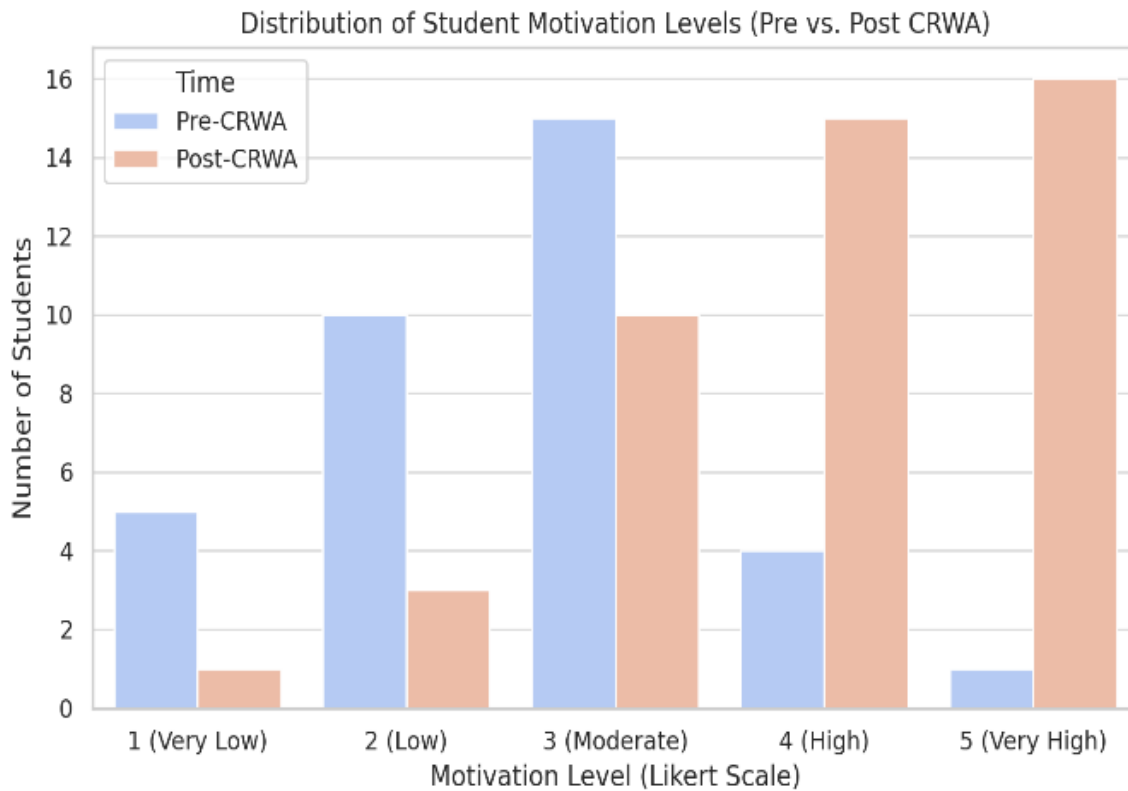
To answer the second research question, researchers utilized Likert scales survey to see how does the CRWA model influence students’ motivation, engagement, and expression of cultural identity in writing. These results are framed in line with mixed-methods or qualitative-quantitative classroom research typical in Moroccan EFL settings, and aligned with a culturally responsive writing assessment (CRWA) model:

Quantitative data

Collected data from surveys (e.g., student motivation surveys) showed a significant increase in students’ self-reported motivation after the implementation of the CRWA model. In the pre-intervention phase motivation score (Mean) was 3.1 / 5, whereas in the post-intervention score (Mean) is 4.2 / 5. That is to say, $t(35) = 7.10, p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.2$ (large effect). See the table and graphs below:

Table 4: Paired Sample t-Test Results for Students’ Motivation

| Measure | Pre-Intervention | Post-Intervention | Mean Difference | t-value | df | p-value | Effect Size (Cohen’s d) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------|----|---------|-------------------------|
| Students’ Motivation (Likert 1-5) | 3.1 | 4.2 | +1.1 | 7.10 | 35 | < .001 | 1.2 |



The results indicate a statistically significant increase in students’ self-reported motivation following the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment (CRWA) model. The mean motivation score improved from 3.1 (pre-intervention) to 4.2 (post-intervention) on a 5-point Likert scale, representing a mean gain of +1.1 points.

The paired sample t-test yielded a t-value of 7.10, with $p < .001$, demonstrating that the observed increase is highly unlikely to be due to chance. The effect size (Cohen’s $d = 1.2$) is considered large, suggesting that the CRWA model had a strong, meaningful impact on student motivation.

This suggests that integrating culturally relevant content into writing instruction and assessment significantly enhances student motivation, likely by increasing relevance, personal connection, and engagement with writing tasks.

Qualitative data

Data obtained from interviews and journals revealed that students felt “excited to write” because topics were “more relevant” and “connected to our lives and traditions.”

Higher Engagement in Writing Tasks

- Classroom observations and student reflections indicated a notable rise in engagement, with students participating more actively in brainstorming, drafting, and peer feedback sessions.
- Teachers noted that students “took ownership of their writing” and demonstrated persistence in revising and improving their work.
- Student attendance and task completion rates improved during the writing units linked to the CRWA model.

Greater Expression of Cultural Identity

- Writing samples analyzed using a rubric for cultural content showed a marked increase in students referencing Moroccan traditions, values, and personal experiences.
 - Pre-test writing: 15% of students included cultural references.
 - Post-test writing: 75% included culturally embedded narratives, metaphors, or references.
- Interviews reflected pride and emotional investment: One student stated “This time, I wrote about my grandmother’s wedding in the village. It felt real.”
- “I never knew I could write about us, not just about things from textbooks.”

Enhanced Student Engagement and Identity Expression

Student journals and post-intervention focus groups revealed a marked improvement in motivation, self-expression, and ownership of learning.

Emotional Engagement and Writing Enjoyment

The majority of students (85%) reported that they enjoyed writing more during the CRWA phase than in previous writing activities. This shift was attributed to the relevance of topics, the freedom to express personal and cultural experiences, and the constructive nature of feedback. The following reflections are written by experimental group students:

“For the first time, I felt that my ideas mattered. I was not afraid to make mistakes.”

“I wrote about Amazigh New Year. My teacher said she learned something new from me!”

Voice and Identity in Writing

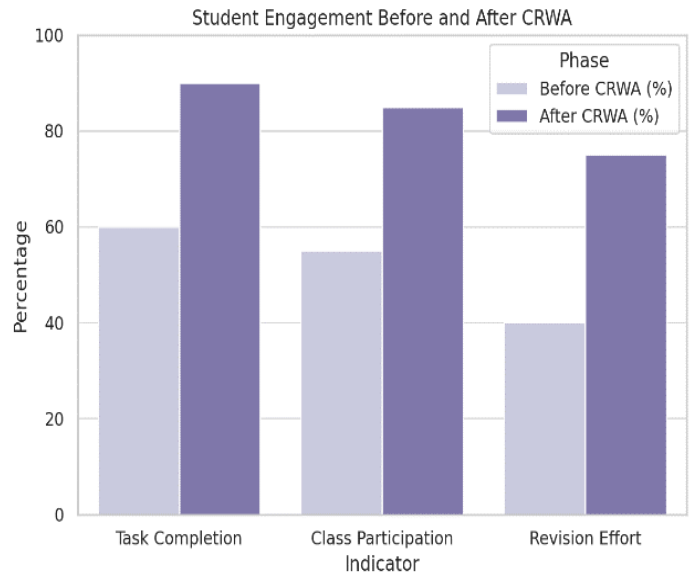
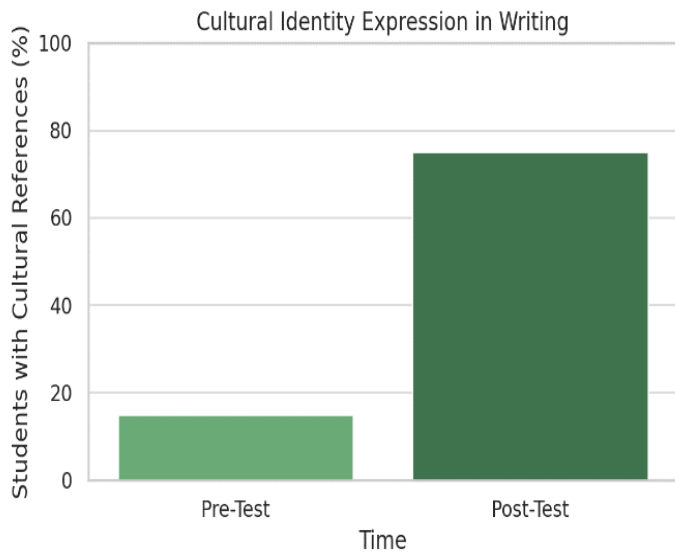
Students’ writing reflected a stronger sense of authorship. They used idioms, local references, and personal stories, demonstrating a more confident and authentic writing style. Many used code-switching during brainstorming, which enhanced fluency in idea generation before refining their work into Standard English. “At first I wrote in *Darija* to get ideas, then I translated. It helped me express more.”

Peer Feedback and Collaboration

The CRWA approach fostered a classroom culture of peer review and dialogue, where students provided

feedback not only on grammar but also on content and clarity. This collaborative environment encouraged critical thinking and empathy.

“My friend told me my story about my grandma was touching. That made me feel proud.” (Students’ Journal Entry)



Classroom Observations: A Shift in Writing Pedagogy

Observation logs revealed the following pedagogical changes during CRWA implementation:

- Increased teacher-student dialogue around meaning, not just mechanics
- Diverse genres and multimodal tasks (e.g., writing a cultural blog post, a personal letter, or a local travel article)
- Flexible assessment timing, with iterative drafting and revising cycles
- Celebration of student work, including public readings and classroom exhibitions

Teachers reported that student participation in discussions increased notably, particularly among typically reserved learners.

Teachers’ Perceptions of CRWA Model

The last research question which highlights teacher perceptions of CRWA was answered qualitatively using thematic analysis of teacher interviews before and after the intervention highlighted the following points:

Feasibility of Implementation

Mixed perceptions of CRWA were reported after interviewing Moroccan EFL secondary schools teachers. Some of them (65%) found the CRWA model feasible with support (e.g., training, materials, collaborative planning). “It is doable if we have a clear framework and time to plan.” Teacher C. whereas others stated that time constraints, large class sizes, and limited curriculum flexibility as barriers. “In crowded classrooms, giving feedback on culturally rich writing takes more effort.” (Teacher B).

Perceived Benefits

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed on the positive educational impact of the CRWA model. “My students felt

proud sharing stories from their own lives and culture”. (Teacher A) 85% reported increased student engagement and motivation. Further, 75% noted improvement in students' writing voice, creativity, and self-expression. Also some teachers observed greater participation from students who were usually quiet and shy. “They wrote with more energy and meaning when the topics reflected their identity.” (Teacher D).

Reported Challenges

- The main challenges reported were:
 - Time-consuming assessment of personalized writing.
 - Lack of professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy.
 - Difficulty aligning CRWA with standardized exam criteria.

- Representative quote from teachers’ interview:

“We want to assess cultural voice, but we’re still tied to rigid rubrics for the baccalaureate exam.”(Teacher B).

Table 4 summarizes the overall teachers’ perceptions of Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment.

Table 5: Teachers’ Perceptions of CRWA Model

| Theme | Positive Responses (%) | Key Insights |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Feasibility | 65% | Feasible if supported; constrained by time, class size, and curriculum rigidity |
| Benefits | 85% | Boosts student engagement, cultural expression, motivation, and writing quality |
| Challenges | — | Time demand, limited training, tension with standardized assessment models |

Classroom Observations

Observations corroborated interview findings, revealing increased student participation during writing activities in the experimental classrooms. Students were observed engaging in peer discussions, sharing personal stories, and collaboratively revising drafts. Teachers were more likely to provide individualized, formative feedback focusing on content and ideas rather than only correcting grammar.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results collectively indicate that the culturally responsive writing assessment model positively affected Moroccan EFL secondary students by:

- Enhancing writing quality, especially in idea development and cultural relevance.
- Increasing student motivation and agency in writing.
- Encouraging teachers to adopt more inclusive and formative assessment practices.

However, the challenges of integrating CRWA within existing exam-oriented systems and the need for sustained teacher support were also apparent.

Limitations and Future Research

While promising, this study is limited by its small sample size and short intervention duration. Future research

should explore:

- The long-term effects of CRWA on writing proficiency and learner identity
- Regional and linguistic variation across Amazigh-, Arabic-, and French-dominant communities
- The integration of CRWA in digital or hybrid writing environments
- The impact of CRWA on gendered participation and expression in conservative contexts

Such research would deepen our understanding of how to sustain and scale culturally responsive assessment across Morocco's diverse educational landscape.

Overall, the CRWA model demonstrated significant pedagogical and affective benefits for both students and teachers. By embedding learners' identities into assessment, CRWA offers a powerful response to the inequities of conventional EFL assessment and opens new possibilities for inclusive, locally grounded education reform in Morocco.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the effects of a Culturally Responsive Writing Assessment (CRWA) model on Moroccan EFL secondary students' writing performance, engagement, and identity expression, as well as teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive assessment practices. The findings offer important insights that contribute to both theory and practice in EFL writing assessment within a multilingual, postcolonial context. Furthermore, the study confirms that culturally neutral or foreign-oriented writing tasks limit students' expressive potential and undermine assessment fairness. Integrating culturally relevant content fosters deeper engagement and provides teachers with richer, more authentic assessment data. The shift toward CRA also aligns with Morocco's national education reform agenda, which emphasizes learner-centered pedagogy and local identity (MEN, 2015).

Enhancing Writing Performance through Cultural Relevance

The statistically significant improvements observed in the experimental group's writing scores, particularly in idea development, cultural expression, and audience awareness; underscore the pedagogical power of culturally responsive assessment. Aligning writing prompts with students' cultural backgrounds and allowing space for identity expression enabled learners to engage more deeply with the writing tasks. This aligns with prior research showing that students write more effectively when they can draw on familiar contexts and meaningful experiences (García & Wei, 2014; Ivanič, 1998).

While language accuracy improved less dramatically, this finding is consistent with existing literature suggesting that linguistic competence develops incrementally and benefits from sustained, scaffolded support (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The CRWA model's emphasis on content and voice did not neglect language form but rather situated it within a richer communicative context, which is critical for sustaining student motivation and growth.

Motivation, Identity, and Student Agency

Qualitative data from student reflections reveal that integrating cultural relevance into writing tasks fostered increased motivation and a stronger sense of ownership over their writing. Many students appreciated being able to incorporate elements of Moroccan culture and personal narratives, which made writing feel less abstract and more purposeful. This finding echoes Ladson-Billings' (1995) argument that culturally responsive pedagogy affirms students' identities and supports academic success.

The use of multilingual brainstorming and drafting strategies within the CRWA model also aligns with translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), validating students' full linguistic repertoires and reducing

anxiety around English writing. This suggests that a flexible approach to language use in writing instruction can empower learners and improve cognitive engagement.

Teacher Perceptions and Challenges

Teachers' positive reception of the CRWA model highlights its feasibility and potential benefits in Moroccan secondary EFL classrooms. Their observations of increased student engagement and more authentic writing support calls for wider adoption of culturally responsive assessment. Nonetheless, their concerns regarding the tension between innovative, formative assessment practices and the rigid demands of national standardized exams point to systemic barriers.

This tension underscores the need for educational policy reforms that align assessment systems with inclusive pedagogical approaches. Additionally, teachers' expressed need for professional development indicates that successful implementation of culturally responsive writing assessment requires ongoing training and institutional support (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Implications for Practice and Policy

The study's findings suggest that Moroccan EFL educators and policymakers should reconsider the dominance of grammar-focused, product-oriented writing assessments. Incorporating culturally relevant content, flexible criteria and formative feedback can foster richer learning experiences and support equity in language education.

Teacher training programs must include modules on culturally responsive assessment and multilingual pedagogies, equipping teachers with the skills to implement such models effectively. Furthermore, curriculum designers should collaborate with teachers and communities to develop writing tasks that reflect students' diverse identities and experiences.

Implications for Curriculum and Policy

The positive results of this study offer a roadmap for scalable innovation in Moroccan EFL education:

- Curriculum Designers should integrate culturally relevant prompts, genres, and texts into national syllabi.
- Teacher Training Programs must include modules on culturally responsive pedagogy and alternative assessment.
- Ministry of Education bodies should re-evaluate high-stakes exams and consider diversifying writing tasks to include personal, narrative, and culturally embedded forms of expression.

These implications align with Morocco's *Vision Stratégique 2015–2030*, which promotes equity, inclusion, and learner-centered education.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study contributes valuable insights, its limited sample size and short intervention period constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of CRWA models across diverse Moroccan regions and include larger, more representative samples. Additionally, investigations into the effects of culturally responsive assessment on other language skills, such as speaking and reading, could broaden understanding of its transformative potential in EFL education.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study provides compelling evidence that culturally responsive writing assessment can enhance Moroccan EFL learners' writing quality, engagement, and identity affirmation. By integrating students' cultural and linguistic resources into assessment practices, educators can move toward more equitable and

empowering language education in Morocco and similar multilingual contexts. Furthermore, by centering students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences, the model fostered notable improvements in writing performance, particularly in idea development, cultural expression, and audience awareness, while also enhancing student motivation and sense of voice. Future efforts should build on these findings to expand culturally responsive assessment practices and advocate for policy reforms that support multilingualism, student identity affirmation, and critical engagement with language.

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