



Teachers' Perspectives on Motivational Challenges and Strategies in L2 Writing Classes at Higher Education Institutions in the UAE

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Despite the wealth of research on writing techniques as well as second language (L2) motivation, research on writing motivation and motivational strategies remain underexplored (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Lee et al., 2018). Even the limited research on writing motivation focuses on exploring students' views, paying little attention to teachers' perspectives. To fill this important gap, this study investigates how teachers perceive their students' writing motivation and the strategies they employ to enhance this motivation. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from four English writing instructors at three private universities in the UAE. Findings show that most students experience low levels of writing motivation. Instructors report encountering several student motivational challenges related to student intrinsic motivation, cost of writing, value of writing, and self-efficacy and expectancy. To address these motivational issues, the instructors ensure providing a pleasant and supportive atmosphere, stimulating and enjoyable writing, effective teaching strategies, autonomous learning and constructive feedback. More L2 motivation research should be done in writing contexts, considering teachers' experiences in dealing with the complexities they encounter in their classrooms. Teachers' perspectives and practices will provide a broader picture of learner motivation, indicate where support is needed, and become the base for new professional development experiences.

Keywords: L2 motivation, writing motivation, motivational challenges, motivational strategies, teachers' perspectives

Introduction

Undoubtedly, writing is considered as the most difficult skill L2 students need to master. Its difficulty lies in the different skills involved in the process starting with the simple ones such as word choice, punctuation and sentence structure to the more complex ones as generating and developing ideas, planning, drafting and revising (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Learners experience mixed feelings of anxiety, fear, lack of power and confidence, and avoidance at the thought of writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000), and this is noticeable in L2 writing classrooms these days. A lot of research in the field of SLA and L2 motivation affirms that individual variability in language learning achievement results from not only cognitive factors such as ability or aptitude but also affective factors, particularly motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation is one of the main factors that influence students' success in learning a second language as "it provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998, p. 203). Research investigating the relationship between motivation and student language learning has found that teachers' behaviour is an influential 'motivational tool' (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), and teachers' strategies are central to students' engagement and success. Through their everyday communication and interactions



with their students, teachers influence their students' perceptions of their abilities, their attributions of their successes and failures, their beliefs of specific subject areas, and their goals to do a certain task (Anderman & Anderman, 2010).

Much research in L2 motivation has been done to identify the main factors that motivate students based on students' perception (Dörnyei, 1998; Lee et al., 2018; Tran, 2007). Unfortunately, only a few studies have investigated student motivation from the perspective of the teachers. Richards (1996) calls for considering teachers' perception when investigating L2 teaching practices and cites Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) who explained that teaching research lacks "the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the way teachers use writing and intentional talk in their work lives, and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices" (p. 281). In his article, Richards reports that teachers develop their principles, or 'maxims', that inform their teaching strategies, and "the understanding of which maxims teachers give priority to and how they influence teachers' practices is an important goal in teacher development" (p. 281). Discussing the importance of studying the psychology of language teachers, Mercer and Kostoulas (2018) highlight the "need to redress the imbalance between studies that have focused on learners and those that have focused on teachers" (p. 2).

Therefore, in this study, I aim to make some connection between student motivation theory and research with the teachers' perceptions of their students' writing motivation and the strategies they use to enhance this motivation. I aim to shed light on L2 writing motivation in specific as "learning to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning" (Hyland, 2003), and academic writing plays an essential role in university education. So far, research has been mostly dedicated to L2 motivation in general (Boo et al., 2015); however, "L2 writing motivation research is still very much in its infancy" (Lee et al., 2018, p. 177). In most UAE's higher education institutions, English is used as the medium of instruction, and students across disciplines are expected to handle a variety of academic tasks requiring proficient writing skills. Students are required to take several writing courses to graduate with a bachelor's degree, yet L2 students face a lot of issues dealing with not only the cognitive challenges involved in writing but also the motivational ones. As in many other contexts, English teachers in the UAE can play a key role in boosting students' writing motivation, which impacts their learning experiences. Therefore, I intend to explore these teachers' perspectives of their students' writing motivation and the motivational strategies teachers employ in UAE higher education L2 contexts.

Literature Review

L2 Motivation Research

L2 motivation theory has gone through different stages, starting with the social-psychological period, cognitive situated period, and the process-oriented period (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). During the social psychological period, Gardner's integrative-instrumental motivation dichotomy was prevailing for quite a while (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). However, during the 1990s, L2 motivation research witnessed the development of more complex theories based on cognitive situated perspectives that called for a more 'practitioner-validated' concept of L2 motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991) and focused on analysing motivation in specific classroom settings (Dörnyei, 1994). Throughout this period, more development took place regarding other theories that focused on the link between L2 motivation and other factors such as self-efficacy (Dörnyei, 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994), attribution (Ushioda, 1996a, 1998; Williams & Burden, 1999), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Brown, 1990), self-determination (Noel et al., 2000), and autonomy (Ushioda, 1996b). Then came the process-oriented period in which scholars called for examining the dynamics of L2 motivation over a period (Ushioda, 1994, 1996a; Williams and Burden, 1997). In Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process motivational model, L2 learner's motivational influences are arranged in relation to a sequence of actional events within three main phases: the pre-actional phase,

actional phase, and post-actional phase. Dörnyei (2005) further developed the L2 Motivational Self System which includes 'L2 learning experience' in which teachers play a pivotal role in creating the L2 learning image, crucial to the ideal self (Dörnyei, 2008).

Writing Motivation

English writing is a vital skill that L2 students need to master to attain a respectable academic performance (Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004), and this is the case at most UAE universities, where English is the means of instruction. However, due to the complexity of the writing process, the motivational balance of many L2 students seems to get affected, which reflects on their academic performance.

Gardner (2018) defines writing as a multifaceted experience that includes "individual cognitive processes situated in a specific literacy event, fused with socio-cultural resonances" (p. 14), and he questions if the complexity of this skill is acknowledged in writing curricula and translated into appropriate teaching practices in the classroom. According to Hidi and Boscolo (2006), students exhibit low levels of interest in writing as they consider it as a hard and daunting activity. As students try to satisfy the many constraints of the topic, audience, purpose, writing conventions, rhetorical modes and critical thinking, motivational challenges become more prominent (Bruning & Horn, 2000; De Smedt et al., 2017). L2 writing motivation is also shaped by social, cultural and contextual factors as well as teaching strategies, all of which influence students' goals (Kormos, 2012).

Cumming, Kim, and Eouanzoui (2007) highlight the importance of understanding ESL's students' goals for their writing development and further incorporating these goals to the universal curriculum requirements or benchmarks that are prevalent in syllabi for language education. They assert the significance of actively involving students themselves in defining their goals and motivations rather than having them preassigned. According to Bruning and Horn (2000), motivation to write develops from the writers' perceptions of the writing task, and these perceptions direct writers to make important decisions and come up with strategies to complete this task. Teachers' motivational factors are very critical in the writers' negotiation of the costs, benefits, expectancy and performance comprised in this writing task. Students who consider themselves as competent writers exert more effort in writing and are more eager to write well (Surastina & Dedi, 2018). Additionally, writing motivation develops in students when writing tasks are not viewed as products but as authentic, purposeful interactions and means to contributing to a discourse community, where the teacher's perceptions of writing play an integral part in shaping students' beliefs (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Students with low levels of motivation tend to exhibit excessive anxiety when required to write; therefore, fostering students' confidence, self-efficacy and self-regulation is pivotal when developing writing motivation (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007; Brown et al., 2011; Cumming et al., 2007). Chae's (2016) study of Korean college students further attributed the decrease of EFL writers' motivation to the EFL writing programs and instructions that might be incongruent to their interest and self-efficacy. She calls for expanded efforts to foster individual and situational interests, thus promoting EFL writing development.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Motivation

Most research investigating the issue of L2 motivation has used various measures of motivation such as Gardner's (1985) Attitude Motivation Test Battery, Clement's (1980) social context model, Noels et al.'s (2000) self-determination model, or Dörnyei and Otto's (1998) process model. These studies have investigated different notions of motivation, but they mostly confirmed the connectedness between motivation and L2 learning and achievement. However, this kind of research overlooked the fundamental role the teacher plays in the learning process. Even the studies that investigated the effectiveness of teacher motivational strategies on student motivation and achievement mostly explored students'

perceptions of their teacher's performance and ignored the teacher's actual behaviour or beliefs (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

Cowie and Sahui (2011) contend the little role teacher perceptions have played in language motivation research. They underscore the extensive knowledge and experience teachers have in their classrooms, which empowers them to conceptualise an intricate phenomenon as motivation. According to Richards (1996), teachers do not only construct their teaching around the curriculum objectives and content, but they are also influenced by their own perspectives, and he refers to Zeichner et al.'s (1987) definition of *perspective* as "the ways in which teachers understand, interpret, and define their environment and use such interpretation to guide their actions" (p. 283).

Only few studies investigate teachers' perspectives of their students' motivation. In Cowie and Sahui's (2011) study in Japanese universities, EFL teachers perceive motivated students as the ones exhibiting enthusiasm and effort, having a positive attitude towards the subject taught, and having strong goals to learn. Dja'far et al. (2016) examined EFL teachers' perceptions of students' motivation and learning achievement in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes in one of the leading universities in Indonesia. The questionnaire revealed that students' motivation was mostly high in relation to effort, engagement, and general interest, but low when it came to peer pressure and course relevance. In their study of teachers' perception of their Korean elementary school students' second language learning demotivation, Kim and Seo's (2012) findings revealed that the fifteen Korean and two native English teachers interviewed attributed the students' demotivation to teachers' inappropriate attitude and teaching methodology, undue social expectation of English competence, and the increased discrepancy in mastering English among the students. Saha (2017) interviewed four EFL university instructors in Bangladesh who believed students were unmotivated due to teacher external factors that cannot be controlled like "flawed education system, influence of community of practice, pathological phenomenon of students' personal lethargy" as well as teacher internal factors that can be regulated such as "defective planning and delivery of lessons, lessons lacking relevance to students, incompatible teaching method, and adverse learning experience" (p. 58).

Teacher Motivational Strategies

Teacher motivational strategies are referred to by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) as the "instructional interventions applied by the teacher to elicit and stimulate student motivation" (p. 57). Motivational strategies were first recognised and developed in the L2 literature in the 1990s when there was a shift in L2 motivation research to the learning environment as an essential factor in shaping situated aspects of the learners' motivation. Following the process motivational model, Dörnyei (2001) designed a practical framework with L2 motivational strategies, including creating motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining motivation, and encouraging self-evaluation. Bruning and Horn (2000) also present four comprehensive 'clusters' of the most crucial conditions in developing writing motivation. The first cluster urges teachers to foster functional beliefs about writing's potential, students' writing competence, and students' self-regulatory skills. In the second cluster, teachers are asked to nurture student engagement through authentic goals and contexts. The third cluster contains motivation-enhancing conditions such as goal setting and feedback that furnish a supportive environment for writing. The last cluster related to the emotional environment provides students with freedom and control to reframe their anxiety and frustrations with writing.

In their study, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) 'ten commandments' for motivating language learning were grounded on teachers' identification of the teaching strategies they found instrumental in promoting L2 student motivation. Out of 51 strategies given, the two hundred Hungarian teachers of English selected ten strategies including creating a pleasant atmosphere, utilizing effectual strategies to achieve realistic objectives, increasing the learner's linguistic self-confidence, making the language classes interesting, and promoting autonomy (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) also replicated the study in a Taiwanese EFL context and recognised that most motivational strategies were transferrable except

‘promoting learner autonomy’ which showed no relevance to the Asian context where teachers are more controlling. Ruesch Cummings et al. (2011) adjusted Dörnyei and Csizér’s instrument and used it to explore teachers’ and students’ evaluation of motivational strategies in North America, and found teacher behaviour, classroom environment, learner’s self-confidence and task presentation to be the most prominent. Later, Guilloteaux (2013) used Cheng and Dörnyei’s (2007) method to investigate the motivational strategies used by EFL teachers in South Korea. Displaying appropriate teacher behaviours, encouraging positive self-evaluation, encouraging students to try harder, and setting achievable goals with instrumental teaching strategies ranked among the highest four strategies endorsed by the Korean teachers. However, these Korean teachers did not consider generating a positive classroom climate and promoting learner autonomy as important to elicit more motivation. It is worth noting that Asian teachers seemed to rank effort higher than autonomy, unlike their Western counterpart. Bernaus and Gardner’s (2008) study demonstrated that EFL teachers in Spain preferred traditional strategies which were teacher-centred and concentrated on teaching the basics and structure of the language rather than innovative strategies which involved more student-centred activities and interaction in completing projects, which rendered the strategies mostly ineffective. In their study, Cowie and Sahui (2011) realised that Japanese EFL university teachers mostly used strategies related to providing high-quality instructions, enhancing students’ emotions, establishing rapport with students, and influencing goals.

Research on teacher motivational strategies in L2 writing in specific is scarce. In Foulger and Jimenez-Silvia’s (2007) yearlong case study, teachers noted that within a safe project-based collaborative environment, the students exhibited more enthusiasm and motivation to write as technology connected them to real life and authentic audience outside the class. In action research done by Lo and Hyland (2007) in Hong Kong, findings showed that even though a new implemented writing programme lowered accuracy and structure scores for high achievers, it boosted students’ writing motivation and engagement. The eagerness participants exhibited with the new programme indicated the significance of providing students with genuine audiences and topics of their interest that have relevance to them, as this “can have a liberating and confidence-building effect on them that more than compensates for any short-term declines in accuracy” (Lo & Hyland, 2007, p. 232). In Dja’far et al.’s (2016) examination of the strategies used to promote high motivation in writing classes, EFL teachers tried arousing students’ interest by providing them with tasks within their ability, continuous feedback, clear instructions and rewards. In Cheung’s (2018) study, writing instructors at a public university in Singapore responded to a survey on their use of Dörnyei’s (2001) motivational strategies. Results revealed that the more the writing instructors recorded utilising strategies in creating, generating, and maintaining students’ motivation, the more the students recorded having enhanced self-confidence and attitude in the writing course.

Despite the considerable amount of research related to teaching writing, there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring the motivational factors crucial in developing this skill (Bruning & Horn, 2000), and the majority of these conducted are in EFL contexts. There is also an evident absence of teacher experience-based insights from L2 motivation research (Ushioda, 2008). Therefore, to fill this gap in the literature and investigate the connection between motivational theories and pedagogical practices, I intend to explore UAE teachers’ perspectives of their students’ writing motivation and the motivational strategies teachers employ in UAE English medium universities where acquiring a high level of writing proficiency is essential for students’ academic achievement.

Research questions:

1. How do English teachers at higher education institutions in the UAE perceive their L2 students’ writing motivation?
2. What are the teachers’ perceptions of the major student motivational challenges teachers face in their writing classes?
3. What strategies do these teachers use to enhance their students’ writing motivation?

Method

Participants

In qualitative research like mine, researchers' main concern is not to include a sample representative of a certain population but to recruit "only those participants with rich experiences in the phenomena of concern" (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004, p. 234), which is known as purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2018). Through email, I contacted English instructors who are known to me and who work at three different universities in the UAE, checked if they were willing to participate, and explained to them the nature of my study. The four instructors replied to my emails, showing a willingness to participate. Investigating teachers' perspectives of students' writing motivation lies within the framework of the constructivist learning approach since the participants will be actively engaged in constructing their social realities and making meaning of their experiences. With these varied subjective meanings, the researcher can understand the intricate perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, as most qualitative research, my small sample helped me dig deep into my participants' experiences and elicit rich data (Ritchie et al., 2014). Higgs et al. (2010) advocate that qualitative research has especially made a difference in "the zone of complex practice" as qualitative researchers "have been prepared to roll up their sleeves and engage with, rather than discount, lived experience, and they have helped practitioners construct theories of, and for, their practice" (p. 11). My participants Amy, Sam, Grace and Dana were four English instructors coming from different countries, the Caribbean, the USA, Syria, and Jordan. Their ages range from 30 to 45. Two of them have a doctoral qualification, one in English linguistics and the other in TESOL, while the others have master's degrees in English language teaching. Amy, Sam, and I are colleagues and teach in the same department at the same institution. Grace is an alumnus from the same university I am pursuing my EdD in, and Dana is a colleague of hers. Their teaching experience in writing ranges from seven to ten years. My sample is especially representative as the participant have significant experience teaching multinational L2 students at three of the most renowned universities in the UAE.

Context

The participants are full-time teachers at private universities in the UAE, in which the student body is made up of mostly international students, most of whom come from the Middle East and East Asia. Their age ranges between 18 and 21, and they are majoring in different fields. English is the medium of instruction at these universities, so students require a minimum score on English proficiency tests like the IELTS and TOEFL to be admitted. English Divisions at these universities offer a range of courses to provide students with the writing skills necessary to thrive in today's competitive academic and professional environment. Some of these courses are developmental English courses designed for L2 students who do not achieve the minimum English requirement on TOEFL or IELTS.

Instrument

In the interpretive paradigm, the researcher employs naturalistic methods like asking participants open-ended questions to gain a profound understanding of the learning experience and not generalise the outcomes (Higgs et al., 2010; Troudi, 2010). Spolsky (2000) confirms that interviews can offer researchers the chance to "explore in conversation and through stories and anecdotes the attitudes, identities, and ideologies of (our) subjects" (p. 162). In my study, I conducted face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with four English teachers at three private universities in the UAE. Even though I had a set of prepared guiding questions, its format was open-ended, and I was always eager to follow up interesting answers and allowed my participants to elaborate in an exploratory way on important points related to their perspectives of motivation and strategies (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In

order to ensure the validity of my instrument, the interview questions were developed carefully to answer the three research questions in my study (Appendix). To achieve greater validity, I consulted one TESOL professional who recommended rephrasing a few questions to avoid any misunderstanding on the respondent part. Even though I planned for the interview to take around 30 minutes, two interviews took around 50 minutes as the teachers were enthusiastic about the topic and elaborated with insightful views. The interviews took place in the participants' offices and were conducted in English, as the participants were highly proficient English instructors.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to doing research, I got approval from the University of Exeter to conduct my study. Participants were contacted and informed about the nature of my study and were assured that participation is voluntary. I obtained their signature on the informed consent and highlighted that they had the freedom to participate, not participate or withdraw from this study at any time. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to conceal my participants' identity, assured them that the recordings and transcripts would not be disclosed to any third party, and kept the university names unrevealed.

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies such as mine, the primary goal of researcher is to identify patterns in their data to generate themes (Shank & Brown, 2007). Prior to the process of coding and analysing, I transcribed the audio-recorded data verbatim from interviews to achieve more accuracy, and I got immersed by reading, re-reading, reflecting on and interpreting the raw data in the transcripts. Afterwards, I started the process of inductive and deductive coding, which entailed coding and categorising data. I mainly embraced an inductive approach because most of the themes, especially the ones related to challenges and strategies, emerged from the data as the related interview questions were open-ended. However, to enhance the understanding of meaning-making, I deductively established some themes related to teachers' understanding of student writing motivation, self-efficacy, and feedback. These themes were based on some more structured interview questions reflecting my knowledge of the SLA motivation literature. Throughout this process of thematic analysis, themes were generated from codes which were generated from subcodes, and this process was facilitated with the help of NVIVO. While reading the data, I generated general themes, which I refined later as related themes were grouped into a combined category. For example, initial themes such as *cognitive effort*, *psychological effort* and *physical effort* were grouped into one and renamed as *cost of writing* because they all describe what writing demands. The data were analysed based on the research questions, which is an instrumental approach since "it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 1206).

Findings

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Students' Writing Motivation

Regarding the first research question, which asked about the teachers' perceptions of their students' writing motivation, the data analysis centred on two themes: teachers' understanding of writing motivation and students' writing motivational levels.

Teachers' understanding of writing motivation

When my participants were asked about their understanding of writing motivation, they all seemed to emphasise the importance of willingness, engagement, and persistence. To Amy, motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. She explained, "If you have motivation, you have an intrinsic self-guided desire to take part in the process and accomplish something ... whatever the reason might be ... even if it's just to get a better grade or go to another class." Grace explained that she could tell students are motivated "from their attitude, from their participation in class. They are eager to write ... They are the first ones to write the topics. The rest is just waiting for you to approach them." Dana confirms the same view, "They are suggesting topics. They want to know more about the task, or they even start suggesting other ways they can present the ideas." Sam sees motivated students "give time for brainstorming, organising ideas, finding main ideas, formulating a correct thesis statement, writing the first drafts or sketching the outline. They simply don't complain. When given a writing task, they take it seriously."

Students' writing motivational levels

When describing their students' motivation, most teachers seem to have only some motivated students in their classes. Amy responded, "At the very beginning of the course, out of 18, three to five are highly motivated, three or four medium, but most of them are not motivated at all." She then added, "By the end of the course, sad but true, I don't think I've seen a drastic change." Grace reported that only five out of her thirty students are motivated to write. Dana echoed her colleague's numbers saying, "20% want to write ... other students would just sit there and stare. I have students who would be writing, but when I ask them, it's not because they're so motivated, it's just because they know they have to." All the teachers agreed that students' first reaction to a writing task is "eye-rolling" as they express their hesitance and unwillingness to write. However, two out of the four teachers declared that there was a noticeable improvement in their students' motivation by the end of the term.

Students' Writing Motivational Challenges

This section answers the second research question regarding the motivational challenges that teachers face in their writing classes. Data Analysis showed four main challenges: student intrinsic motivation, cost of writing, value of writing, and self-efficacy and expectancy.

Student intrinsic motivation

According to three teachers, many students seem to lack academic interests in general, let alone writing. They don't seem to show any appreciation for writing or get any enjoyment from performing this activity. Grace expressed her concern as she feels she is "swimming against the current". She added, "We are doing things that they really do not appreciate. Whatever we do, they do not appreciate writing. No, not just writing ... they don't have a passion for learning." Amy commented that many students plan to finish fast to either get a job or marry and have a family. Dana repeatedly mentioned 'intrinsic motivation' during the interview and stated that "they're not intrinsically motivated ... Even when I ask them to correct the mistakes ... they say it's okay no need, you can grade this draft." This lack of interest and laziness is also exhibited in absenteeism. Teachers report that many students skip classes and, therefore, miss writing tasks or feedback conferences. Amy says, "another sad fact when it's time to write, not all the students show up, so you will have a class of 18 and maybe ten or nine or eight will come on writing days."

Cost of writing

The teachers agree on the complexity of the writing skill and view it as a ‘cognitive’, ‘intellectual’ process, which causes much frustration among students. Dana claims that students find writing difficult as “it is a thinking process because every step requires a certain amount of thinking.” Students need to think of the nature of the topic, organisation, mechanics and audience. Amy believes students feel it is hard because, “On one hand, you tell students ‘write what you think, write what you know’, but then you tell them ‘you need research, you need to have all the ideas, yours are not good enough’.”

Many students shy away from writing tasks not only because of the cognitive effort they require but also the high physical and psychological cost involved. This is corroborated by the teachers’ views of their students’ reaction to writing. Amy’s students view writing as ‘painful’ as “it takes time. It is a process of just crafting a product which never actually is done ... they don’t want to take the time to think.” Amy also noted that “they’re anxious because of the grade because they’re very focused on passing.” To Sam, writing is a laborious challenging activity for L2 learners, and not many students are motivated to write since “they feel writing needs effort. It takes a lot of time. They need to sit, focus ... watch out for L1 translation ... form well-developed sentences ... watch out for run-ons, fragments, grammar, and that’s why it’s very tough.” Dana also commented, “they immediately think of how time-consuming it’s going to be. It’s such a physical effort ... so the first thing they say when they see the papers: Oh, do you want us to write two pages?!”

Value of writing

Teachers complain that their students perceive neither intrinsic nor utility value in a writing task. Many students do not obtain any enjoyment or see any usefulness in engaging in a writing task, and they are not aware of the instrumental value of writing in achieving their goals. Amy’s students “don’t see the benefit of writing because their job as an engineer or a businessperson won’t involve writing an essay. Why am I writing an essay? Who cares!” Students in the STEM fields are not aware of how writing can influence them. Grace confirms that her students ask, “Why should I write if my major is accounting ... I don’t need all of this.” Dana’s observation affirms that students have a complete misunderstanding of the purpose and value of writing. They think that writing is only “college essays” or “research” that is irrelevant in their real life, and they don’t realise that “if you’re blogging, it’s writing. If you’re emailing, it’s writing. If you are ‘whatsapping’, it’s writing.”

Most teachers associate students’ view of writing to their background, mainly schooling. Amy stresses that background “plays a big, a big role ... cause when they come to you, they come with a perception of writing that’s already been formed, and you have to kind of ease that out in your class.” Sam also reiterates the influence of students’ background and past adverse experiences and believes changing their attitudes takes much time. She said, “Some come from a background where the focus on writing was not very successful ... view writing as a very boring process because of previous instructors, previous experiences.”

Self-efficacy and expectancy

The participants indicated that students perceive themselves as incompetent, which renders them reluctant to try hard, persist, and perform well. Dana points out that most of her students “start writing, knowing that they’re not going to do well.” Teachers commonly reported their students’ incompetence to put their thoughts on paper, to begin writing or to organise their ideas. Sam summed up, “They feel that they are not competent enough or they don’t have enough confidence, so they don’t have motivation.” Additionally, Amy mentioned few examples of her students who wanted to write but did not have enough grammar and vocabulary to write in English, so “there’s a fear of getting those words on paper in another language as they are not confident of writing in English”. Besides, Amy noticed “some students have this

perception that the harder they try, the better it's supposed to be, so if they put what they think is enough effort and they don't see a marked great improvement, there's a demotivation."

Teachers' Motivational Strategies

This section presents the various motivational strategies teachers employ to enhance their students' writing motivation, which addresses my third research question. These strategies were grouped into five themes: pleasant and supportive atmosphere, stimulating and enjoyable writing, effective teaching strategies, autonomous learning, and constructive feedback.

Pleasant and supportive atmosphere

To enhance students' writing motivation, the teachers strive to create a safe classroom environment in which students are encouraged to express their ideas in their way. Teachers motivate students to write by building rapport, instilling positive thinking and showing the true value of writing. To build her students' confidence, Amy assures them that they all can write saying, "We do that to varying degrees, but we can all do it. There are many ways of saying the same thing; your way may be different than your classmates' way and my way." She also tries to motivate them in terms of looking at writing "as a stepping-stone to their future academic life". Amy also stresses the importance of modelling and showing sample writings to students to show them real-life examples and reduce their anxiety. Dana always starts her writing course with simple activities like reflective responses on post-it notes, so "they start writing words, but then they end up filling out the two sides of the posts ... I just give them small papers to lessen their anxiety."

Stimulating and enjoyable writing

My participants were concerned with the quality of the writing experience, which they considered as one of the important determinants of students' engagement and persistence. Dana stressed the importance of building interest and said, "I try to give them topics that they wouldn't have expected because I want to build interest", and surprisingly, students get excited writing about challenging new topics. She added, "Students go for the more challenging topics ... students are not only motivated, they're actually engaged."

One especially effective way both Dana and Sam teach writing through is integrated project teaching in which students are asked to explore, research, design, speak and sum all this up with a writing task. Sam described one of the modules students need to work collaboratively on saying "students are asked to create a learning device. They have to describe it in a presentation, and then they have to write a letter to any company in Dubai, proposing their device." Dana also stressed the effectiveness of the collaborative writing tasks saying, "I give them a business pitch, so they have to come up with an idea, write about, and it present it." Her students also create digital stories in which "they have to prepare a storyboard, so they don't actually feel bored as what they are writing about is interesting." Additionally, Amy and Sam acknowledged the motivational effect of using blogs in writing classes. Amy noticed that students "forget that it's still (her) who's reading it now ... they seem much freer when they write on the blog posts." According to Sam, students enjoy the interactive feature of blogging, so "they like it because when they blog, they can also comment on each other's posts."

When involving students in projects, blogging or any writing activities, teachers showed great concern at making the writing task an authentic task in which they see the utility of writing for real reasons such as description, argumentation, or comparison. When teaching comparison, for instance, Amy starts with a practical, real-life example, and Sam relentlessly ensures that the themes she uses in modules and blogging are relevant to her students' lives. In Sam's modules as well as Dana's projects, students write to real audiences whether to persuade them to buy a product or invest in new business. Sam explained, "The

investor (another colleague) attended our presentations, and then after the presentation came the writing task and students had to write a letter to that investor.” Dana also had “faculty members from the media school who come in to evaluate the digital stories.”

Effective teaching strategies

My participants are all advocates of process writing, in which students receive a lot of assistance from their peers, teachers, and resources. For Dana, writing, which should always be linked to reading, is a process that involves a lot of thinking, engagement, planning, and drafting. Reflecting on her experience as a nonnative English writer, Grace also emphasises the significance of using research in writing as nonnative learners cannot write in a vacuum. After voting for the topics they like, her students download three articles related to their topics, read them, plan, outline, draft and then write. She comments, “It’s very preliminary research that they do, but they start seeing writing in a different light.”

Furthermore, Amy states that students go through different steps throughout the writing process, starting with selecting topics, brainstorming and discussing their ideas to conducting workshops in groups and writing several drafts, which takes a while. Amy hails the effectiveness of the process approach saying some students realise the progress they make from their first drafts to their second and third, and this transfers their motivation, and “at the end, the motivation is not too much about the grade, but the growth.” Amy continues, “I feel as though if you teach students how to think, how to read, and how to write, and when they see themselves making tiny steps, incremental steps, the ability and the growth affects the motivation.”

Sam and Amy acknowledged the importance of collaborative work in developing motivation. Students work together on picking topics, brainstorming, collecting information, supporting their ideas and outlining their work. However, they both contested students at this proficiency level do the writing individually at the end. Amy said, “It’s so easy for those who are not performing where they are ... to go in the background and allow the ones who are more competent to take over the project, and at this stage what they need to do is to gain that individual confidence, individual ability to grow.”

Autonomous learning

There is a consensus among the teachers about the importance of autonomous learning as a major motivator to writing. Talking about a hotel project, Sam said, “The theme is our choice, but they come up with the name of the hotel, they come up with the location, they come up with the facilities.” She adds, “When they work on a project that becomes their personal project, they care about writing about that topic.” Dana is a keen believer in autonomous learning, and she said, “I really value students feedback no matter what. I try to give choices when giving the topic, so I don’t try to limit the topics.” Grace noticed that her students were motivated to write the movie critique only when she gave them the freedom to choose a movie of their own.

Constructive feedback

It is evident in the teachers’ responses that feedback is one of the essential strategies that inspire students’ motivation in learning writing. Amy talked about the “too much” oral, written and immediate feedback she gives to motivate her students indicating that “when they get feedback in a timely way, even if it’s just one additional sentence on a word they’ve used differently, anything which makes them feel as though their writing is progressing in a certain direction, it helps them.” Three of the teachers highlighted that their first feedback is mostly concerned with content and organisation, not mechanics unless mechanics obstruct understanding. In addition to feedback given in class, three of the teachers have individual conferences with their students and claim that these conferences motivate students to improve their writing to get the desired outcome. Grace indicated that “some really improved and what I liked,

some of them used to come to me more than three times to get there, to that level of B.” During the conferences, the teachers provided their students with formative and constructive feedback that revealed their strengths and weaknesses, and as Amy said, “This is just a way for them now to look at it with new eyes and to see what else could be done.”

Discussion

According to this study, the participants believe many students experience low levels of writing motivation in UAE, L2 writing classes, and teachers face several student motivational challenges related to student intrinsic motivation, cost of writing, value of writing, and self-efficacy and expectancy. To address these motivational issues, the teachers ensured providing a pleasant and supportive atmosphere, stimulating and enjoyable writing, effective teaching strategies, autonomous learning and constructive feedback. Two out of four teachers reported noticeable enhancement in their students’ writing motivation after employing the abovementioned strategies while the other two witnessed a slight change.

When explaining their understanding of writing motivation, my participants’ answers revealed the great value students’ motivational behaviours have in their definitions of writing motivation. This is in line with Cowie and Sahui’s (2011) teacher participants’ practical definition of motivation that included students showing a positive attitude, having clear goals and acting out behaviours to achieve those goals. My participants view motivated writers as “willing to devote the personal time and effort necessary to revise text drafts until they communicate effectively” (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997, p. 76).

The findings highlight several student motivational challenges that teachers face in writing classes. Students lack the intrinsic motivation and passion for learning in general, let alone academic writing. Such students are categorised as “generic” in Saha’s (2017) findings, as formal education is generally troubling to them. Another motivational challenge is related to the high cost of writing as it entails a great deal of cognitive, physical, and psychological effort. This goes in line with the view that writing is not a mere simple transcription of language into written symbols but a complex process that involves social and affective factors and requires conscious mental effort which needs to be sustained for a period (Qian, 2007; White & Arndt, 1991). Hulleman and Barron (2013) also confirm that “the sacrifices that one has to make in order to engage in the activity, and the negative aspects of the experience (such as anxiety and fatigue) can prevent a student from wanting to continue to engage in the activity” (p. 11). Additionally, the study shows that students, especially the ones majoring in the STEM and business fields, are not aware of the instrumental value of writing in achieving their goals as “any mismatch between classroom task and their immediate necessity raises doubts in students’ mind and make them less attached to the writing class” (Saha, 2017, p. 54). Evidently, the usual instructional approach to writing and its disconnectedness from other disciplines have makes it difficult for students to view writing as an indispensable communicative tool or an interesting activity rather than an academic task standing by itself (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). Thus, the values students attach to L2 writing tasks are rooted in their goals and attitudes (Mancho’n, 2011, as cited in Kormos, 2012). Findings also lend support to Saha’s (2017) observation that students’ adverse learning experience, including teachers’ attitude, criticism and teaching style can erode students’ writing motivation. A final challenge the teachers in this study also emphasised is the great impact the students’ low self-efficacy has on their writing motivation. These learners’ motivation lessens as they are convinced that they cannot succeed in L2 writing no matter how hard they try (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). According to Harmer (2001), “Learners engaged in a productive task can become very frustrated when they just do not have the words or the grammar they need to express themselves” (p. 252). Students’ disappointment mounts when they fail a writing task despite the great effort they exert. As Bandura (1991) explained, students sometimes perceive a high level of effort as low ability, and when failure is attributed to low ability, students exhibit low self-efficacy and consequently reduced motivation (as cited in Tremblay & Gardner, 1995).

In order to enhance students' writing motivation, the teachers in my study implement several strategies in their classrooms. These teachers try to create a pleasant, supportive atmosphere by building rapport with their students, encouraging positive attitudes, demonstrating the true value of writing (Saha, 2017), as well as encouraging risk-taking and accepting mistakes as a natural part of learning (Sucuoglu, 2017). They point out that some features in writing educational contexts that spark students' interest "usually involve novelty, surprise, and uncertainty" (Lam & Law, 2007, p. 148). Teachers who reported a significant boost in their students' motivation are the ones who implemented more collaborative project-based teaching which gave students not only autonomy but also opportunities for interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. This substantiates Kathpalia and Heah's (2011) findings regarding students enjoying working on projects as "the social dimension shows that writing is not a lonely individualistic activity but involves other participants" (p. 21). My findings also confirm the effectiveness of using blog discussions in writing classes as they spark students' interest (Koçoglu, 2009), foster their communication skills, and develop their feeling of community (Miceli et al., 2010).

The significance of including authenticity in task design is highlighted because students are more motivated and engaged in writing activities when writing a text for a real audience other than the teacher (Foulger & Jimenez-Silvia, 2007; Henry et al., 2017). As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) argue, "relevance has to be the red thread permeating activities" if teachers intend to motivate learners, and as Elbow (1994) expressed, words put down on a page to a real audience for an authentic reason are "their own, not borrowed" (as cited in Bruning & Horn, 2000). Furthermore, engaging students in process writing skills results in developing self-regulatory abilities (Brown, 2001), which Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) view as a motivational construct that impacts writers' activities as well as productivity (as cited in Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). This process approach to writing was likewise one of the effective strategies teachers used to alleviate writing anxiety among English language learners in Emirati universities (Qashoa, 2014). Similarly, students' autonomy is highly regarded in my participants' classes as in Dja'afar et al.'s (2016) study where students were encouraged to work in groups to create products such as business reports and plans. The satisfaction of the vital psychological need for autonomy helps nurture motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and as Bruning and Horn (2000) pointed out, "gaining and maintaining control of a writing task almost certainly are critical motivationally" (p. 31). Utilizing effective teaching methods that address students' needs and learning styles help combat L2 students' demotivation (Baldauf Jr., 2007). This study provides further evidence that feedback promotes learner motivation and ensures linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009), and as in previous studies (Hamidun et al., 2012), incorporating constructive feedback on the content more than the mechanics of students' writing better motivates students to accomplish their goals. Cho (2015) concurs the significance of the teachers' motivating their students by focusing on the writer rather than the writing in their feedback.

The significance of this study stems from the little research that takes account of teachers' perspectives when investigating a complex construct as L2 writing motivation, especially in the UAE. Research has shown that neither the most incredible skills nor proper curricula and instructional strategies can ensure students' achievement if students do not possess enough motivation (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). This study shows that it is significant to delve into teachers' experiences when exploring L2 writing motivation since as Cowie and Sahui (2011) previously argued, "these experienced and educated teachers had a wealth of insightful views on learner motivation embedded in years of practice" (p. 226). As Borg (2006) also asserts, "Teacher cognition research has affirmed the active role which teachers play in shaping classroom events and highlighted the complex nature of classroom decision making" (p. 40). Therefore, in order to gain a wider picture of learner writing motivation, teachers' voices should be heard and their experiences explored as they have practical definitions of motivation and the substantial responsibility of crafting their students' learning experiences. Teachers' perspectives and practices will indicate where support is needed and will be the base for new professional development experiences.

Conclusion

Literacy researchers have been cognizant of the need to assist students in learning not only how to write but also how to want to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000), and research has also shown that motivation is both contextually situated (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and domain-specific (Zhang & Guo, 2012). This study has made a modest contribution to understanding teachers' perspectives of their students' writing motivation at universities in the UAE; however, more L2 motivation research is still necessary in writing contexts, considering teachers' experiences in dealing with the complexities they encounter in their classrooms. Further research is needed to establish a strong practical foundation that teachers can rely on when developing their students' motivation to write. Presenting novice writing teachers with various motivational strategies may help lessen the pressing problem of student demotivation in a class, and support students with significant talents to realise long-term objectives (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

This study has several limitations associated with its scope and time. Using multiple methods, or 'triangulation', would have helped me construct a bricolage that embodies richer interpretations of a complex activity like learners' writing motivation "as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Classroom observations would have added more understanding of the strategies actually employed and their effects on the learners' motivation. Finally, my participants are ESL teachers holding either an MA or PhD which might be unusual in most countries. These "elite" teachers' reflections may be substantially different from those of "average" teachers.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Teaching level: _____

Teacher's Qualifications: _____

Teaching experience in Writing: _____

Age: _____

Students' age range and origin: _____

1. How long have you been teaching writing to EFL students at this level?
2. How do you feel about teaching writing as a skill? Do you face any difficulties? If yes. Why?
3. What kinds of writing do your students do in your class?
4. Can you describe how a writing task is presented in class?
5. What are students required to do with a writing task?
6. What's the first reaction of students when they are assigned a writing task or writing quiz? Why do you think they react this way?
7. How do you describe your students' motivation while working on a writing task?
8. What does the expression "motivated to write" mean to you?
9. Are your students confident of their writing pieces? Do they attribute their success or failure to ability or effort?
10. What have been the major motivational challenges that you have faced with students throughout the past few years?
11. What are the strategies that you use to enhance your students' motivation throughout the writing process? Which strategies do you think have been the most effective?
12. What kind of freedom do students have in the writing task?
13. Who is the audience in your students' writing task?
14. How are students' writings evaluated in class? What kind of feedback do they receive? Does this feedback affect students' motivation?
15. Do students get any assistance before/while/after writing? What kind of assistance?
16. Have you received any sort of professional development related to writing motivation that was beneficial? In what way did it help you?