

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STUDENTS' SUBJECTIVE TASK VALUE OF WRITING

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Abstract

Research and educational practice which seeks to improve classroom writing instruction and students' skill in writing should take into account students' motivation to write. Research regarding students' motivation to write has largely focused on the impact of self-efficacy (SE) beliefs on writing motivation, however, the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) of motivation provides a framework for this study to examine not just students' expectancies regarding writing, but also the reasons they may find writing valuable. This study focused on the 'value' subcomponent of EVT, using a questionnaire and interviews of high school students to identify factors which impact their perceived value of writing. Student responses indicated that value is found in classroom writing when it mirrors situations which are likely to occur outside of high school, helps students to develop skills that they see as having 'real-world' applications, helps students develop skills which they see as building social capital, or allows students to have autonomy over the content and form of their writing. EVT says that motivation is influenced by both an expectancy of success and how much the outcome of a task is valued, therefore factors that influence students' value of a writing task may be used in a classroom to improve student motivation to write, even if students' expectation of success is not high.

Factors Contributing to Students' Subjective Task Value of Writing

Students in the United States largely demonstrate a lack of writing proficiency (Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (NAEP), 2011). The NAEP has shown that in 2011, 74% of 8th grade students and 73% of 12th grade students were below proficiency, or lack the knowledge and skills needed to communicate clearly in grade-level writing. There are many factors which may contribute to this distressing finding. Results from the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that while US students' reading has remained consistently on par internationally, at least 20% of students could not identify the main idea in a text, find information based on explicit criteria, or reflect on the purpose and form of texts when directed (PISA, 2018). These difficulties in reading may contribute to students' lack of writing proficiency. Other factors include large class sizes (Shin & Chung, 2009) and cultural or policy issues leading to widespread inadequate writing instruction (Graham, 2019), all of which have been shown to impact students' academic achievement. Motivation for academic tasks is also correlated with student achievement, and may be an important mediating variable, without which other interventions to improve writing performance may be less effective (Troia, et al., 2012). While class size and policy issues likely both contribute to low student writing achievement, student motivation should be considered a crucial factor which influences the effectiveness of interventions such as class-size reduction or explicit instruction of writing strategies.

Researchers and educators with the goal of improving student writing must consider student motivation. While motivation is not the sole factor controlling the quality of student writing, students perform more strategic writing behaviors with more sustained attention and self-regulation on tasks they are motivated to do. Motivated students periodically select and review relevant material, create self-reward strategies, seek assistance when needed, and summarize key concepts for themselves (Troia et al., 2012). Therefore, increasing student motivation to write is a priority among educational researchers and educators. However, motivation is not observable and involves many behaviors. Hence, researchers investigating motivation must investigate measurable subcomponents of motivation. Fitzgerald and colleagues (2013) argue that students' motivation to write is composed of specific attitudes or beliefs that

students develop as a result of academic writing experiences. These beliefs may be shaped by the rigidity or personal relevance of the writing task, the feedback a student receives, or other interaction between the student, teacher, and writing process/product. In turn, the student develops their beliefs about their own writing competence, their ability to improve their writing, and other critical attitudes and beliefs.

SE is a notable and well-researched subcomponent of motivation which correlates with student achievement and student satisfaction (Doménech-Betoret, et al., 2017), but it is not the only subcomponent of motivation. Both long and short-term studies have demonstrated that, in secondary and undergraduate students, students' value of an academic task (the students' perception of the usefulness of a given task) impacts their effort directed at the task, their persistence through the task, and their willingness to use more complex strategies on the task (Gasco & Villarroel, 2014; Guo et al. 2015; Nagengast et al., 2011).

To that end, this study aims to use students' own statements on their valuation of writing to discover the conditions under which students might be motivated to write.

Research on motivation has also begun to acknowledge not just the importance of motivation to academic success, but also the fluidity of motivation. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) argue that the motivation of individual students is not constant, even within a domain, and motivational variables will affect students in different ways. The researchers therefore urge that future research should take into account that various interventions designed to increase student SE or task value may not affect all students in similar ways, and that future research should focus on culturally diverse students and nonwhite students, as there is a lack of research into how instructional strategies or classroom interventions intended to affect subcomponents of motivation may affect nonwhite students differently.

As discussed by Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002), motivation is situational and affected by many factors. While many subcomponents which may contribute to students' motivation (such as SE, task value, and mastery goals) are understood, research provides an incomplete picture of how this can translate into classroom strategies which increase these subcomponents in students (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Therefore, research which seeks to better understand students' task value for writing may be improved by asking students. If students are encouraged

to share the factors which they believe affect their motivation, the researcher can gain a student-level understanding of task value and the complex situational factors which affect it.

This study will leverage students' self-reflections on their task value for writing to answer the research question "What do students give as factors which influence their value of writing?" By identifying student-selected factors which impact task value, this study will fortify the body of research on task value as a subcomponent of writing motivation, and may help to form a foundation for evidence-based classroom strategies which ultimately increase students' motivation to write.

Literature Review

Within educational research, student motivation is commonly investigated in relation to writing. This research has uncovered conditions which improve student motivation in writing: large amounts of high-quality feedback from peers and teachers (Ruegg, 2018; Wilson & Czikk, 2016), students using planning and revising as well as metacognitive skills (Graham, 2019; Graham, Harris, Kiuahara, & Fishman, 2017; Karlen & Compagnoni, 2017), students holding incremental theory beliefs about writing (Karlen & Compagnoni, 2017; Waller & Papi, 2017) and students setting specific mastery goals for themselves in writing (Chea & Shumow, 2017; Yilmaz-Soylu et al., 2017).

Classroom strategies which are commonly cited as being effective for generating student motivation to write include writing prompts that are comparable to real-world situations, giving students freedom to choose the writing topic or genre, and creating a warm teacher-student relationship through writing. These strategies appear in teacher handbooks on writing, but also appear in education research, such as Bruning and Horn (2000). This body of literature includes Atwell (2015), who proposes two strategies for improving students' motivation to write: letter-writing and writer's workshops. According to Atwell (2015), student motivation to write comes from curiosity — a desire to refine an idea or discover something, or self-expression — a desire to communicate and connect with others. Similarly to Atwell, Daniels (2013) argues that letter-writing between students and teachers motivates students to write because it's an opportunity for interpersonal communication as much as texting or note-passing are. Expanding

on the use of writing workshops, Marchetti and O'Dell (2015) advocate for the use of mentor texts within a writing workshop. The use of mentor texts motivates students to write by encouraging students to emulate both the goals and techniques of real-world texts which align with student interests. According to the authors, the use of mentor texts ultimately facilitates motivation because it allows students to see the utility of good writing (as well as its attainability and relation to their personal interests).

Unrau's use of the Self-Determination Theory of motivation (2011) can provide a theoretical backing to the notion of student 'ownership' over writing discussed by Marchetti and O'Dell (2015). Unrau argues that students' motivation is increased in a collaborative/constructivist learning environment where they feel an internal locus of control, competence, and autonomy, without external (solely teacher-generated) rewards or requirements. Lastly, Beers et al. (2007) argue that in the present moment, the literacies fostered in writing classes should expand to include social literacy, civic literacy, multimedia literacy, emotional literacy, and technological literacy, as these are skills which students use daily and will continue to use in their future occupations. Student motivation to write is increased when students are encouraged to use and develop their technological skills, or are given the opportunity to work with professionals and develop real-world or occupational skills.

A variety of models of classroom writing instruction exist which aim to increase motivation. However, much of the literature on students' motivation to write has primarily focused on SE as the operationalized measure of student motivation (Banfield & Wilkerson, 2014; Ekholm, Zumbrunn, & Conklin, 2015; Limpo & Alves, 2017; Zumbrunn, Broda, Varier, & Conklin, 2020). This focus on SE means that much less research has been devoted to other components of motivation. EVT posits that a person's expectation of success on a given task is not the sole factor that determines their level of motivation. A person's subjective task value, or how much that person values the task outcome, can contribute to their motivation. The contemporary body of research on student motivation in writing overemphasizes SE, sometimes failing to account for subjective task value or outcome expectations as factors influencing motivation.

Motivation studies which focus on subjective task value or outcome expectations in relation to student writing are rare but offer valuable insights. The Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS) is a survey intended to be a thorough measure of adolescent students' writing motivation, taking into account both SE and students' subjective task values (Wright et al., 2019). Questions targeted at students' subjective task values, such as "I don't mind when my teacher asks me to go back and change some of my writing" and "writing helps me learn" were found to have high reliability.

Wright et al. (2020) later refined SWAS, creating a more comprehensive operationalized definition of motivation as a higher-order construct composed of (1) attitude toward writing, (2) beliefs about self as a writer, and (3) beliefs about writing. The study included both typical SE survey questions and items from the SWAS. This study used a more thorough definition of motivation, but as the researchers who developed the SWAS discuss, students' subjective task values are personal, dynamic, situational, and complex. Researchers can't anticipate every attitude and value a student may hold in relation to writing. Wu et al. (2019) successfully accounted for this, focusing on the writing motivation of students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study was mixed-methods and included student journals and focus groups as data sources, ultimately allowing researchers to build a more complete picture of what students articulated as contributing to their demotivation.

Aiming to contribute to the small body of research on students' subjective task value as a component of motivation, my study is concerned with students' own articulations of their values about writing. Research focusing on subjective task value may provide a rich theoretical counterpoint to the profusion of SE research and improve researchers' depth of understanding of motivation. Additionally, research focusing on students' subjective task value may allow teachers to assign writing projects which are motivating for their students due to the project's perceived value to the student.

Theoretical Framework

Motivation is frequently operationalized in education research by measuring students' SE. According to Bandura's (1991) Social Cognitive Theory, SE influences the subfunctions of motivation, but it is not the only component of motivation. SE influences motivation by affecting

the three-step process of self-regulation, as shown in figure 1. Bandura (1991) describes three subfunctions of self-regulation that compose motivated behavior: Self-observation, judgement process, and self-reaction. SE impacts motivation by affecting each of the three subfunctions. In the self-observation subfunction, SE impacts whether successes or failures are ascribed to internal or external factors. In the judgment process subfunction, SE impacts how much an activity is valued, or whether one cares about one's success or failure within a given activity. Lastly, within the self-regulation subfunction, SE impacts goal setting because people set higher goals for themselves when they believe that they are capable. One's level of perseverance toward set goals is determined by their confidence that they can attain those goals.

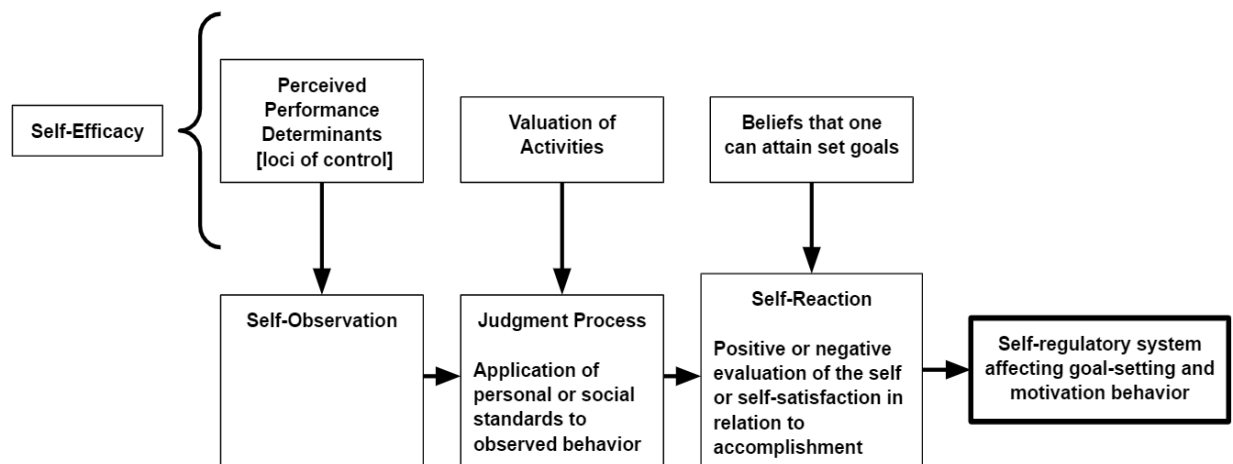


FIG. 1. Factors composing goal-setting and motivation behavior. Modified from Bandura (1991)

EVT holds that there are two components of motivation which ultimately influence a person's sustained effort on a task, or motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The first component of motivation is the expectancy of success, as shown in Figure 2, which is similar to Bandura's theory of SE. According to Eccles, the second component of motivation is subjective task value, which mirrors the valuation of activities component in Bandura (1991), in that they both represent an individual's perception of the value of a given outcome (Schunk & Usher, 2019).

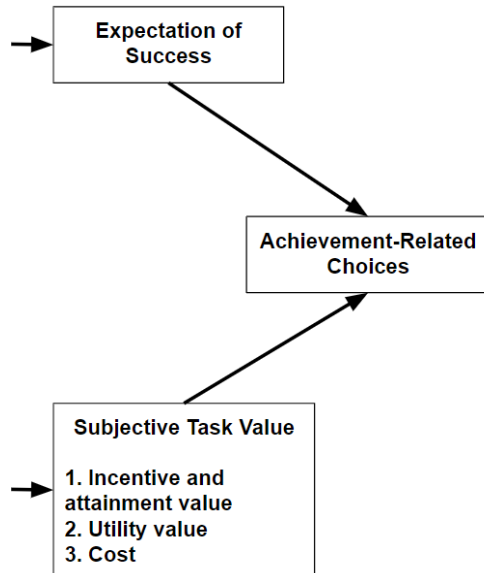


FIG. 2. Excerpted from Eccles and Wigfield's expectancy–value model of achievement motivation (2000)

Both theories of motivation concur that motivation is influenced by both beliefs about the value of a given task and beliefs about one's ability to complete the task. Given the multiple factors present in each model, neither SE nor expectancy of success should be overapplied as the sole measure of motivation.

This study focuses on the subjective task value aspect of EVT because it is a less-researched component of motivation when compared to the more frequently-researched expectancies (in EVT) or SE (in Social Cognitive Theory). Additionally, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) describe how subjective task value may be measured: attainment value or importance, intrinsic value (IV) or enjoyment, utility value (UV) or usefulness of the task, and cost. Therefore, by using EVT to develop questionnaire and interview questions, data collection may more accurately reflect students' subjective task value. By improving our understanding of how students construct their task value of writing, researchers may be able to determine methods to increase student motivation for writing projects, even if a student's SE for the project is low.

To that end, this study asks what factors contribute to students' subjective task value of writing projects.

Method

This qualitative exploratory study sought to identify factors that contribute to students' perceived subjective task value of writing projects. The participants in this study were 36 12th grade high school students in the researcher's student teaching placement. The student participants were engaging in a combination of online classes and in-person classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected for this study both in-person and via Google Forms. The study utilized an open-ended online questionnaire and student interviews.

Procedure

Questions for both the questionnaire and interviews were modeled on Eccles' sub-components of subjective task value: importance, IV, UV, and cost. First, student participants were provided an online questionnaire using Google Forms software. The questionnaire contained four open-ended questions corresponding to the importance, IV, and UV sub-components (see Appendix). 33 students in total responded to the questionnaire from January 26th, 2021 to January 28th, 2021. Student responses were thematically coded. Because student responses to importance and UV questions were similar and involved identical themes, importance and UV responses were merged into one set. Within this set, the major factors that affected students' subjective value of writing were 1) student's belief that writing brings tangible benefits (such as social/professional capital) outside of school, or it will bring benefits in the future and 2) student's belief that writing is not useful because the kinds of writing done in school are not relevant or applicable outside of school settings.

The factor identified from student responses to questions about IV was 1) students find intrinsic value in writing when they have autonomy over form and content, and enjoy writing less when the inverse is true.

After the questionnaire data was thematically coded, interview questions were developed to verify the importance of these themes to students and to expand upon any factors that contribute to IV and UV that had not been included in the questionnaire responses. Three student participants were interviewed, and the transcripts of these interviews were thematically coded. The factors identified from the themes of the in-depth student interviews supported the findings of the questionnaire stage.

Participants

Thirty five twelfth-grade students between the ages of 17 and 19 participated in this study. The student participants were all taking at least one English class with a focus on rhetorical analysis, professional written communication, and oral presentation. All student participants were writing a research paper on a topic of their choice during the study. This study was conducted at a public high school in a residential/commercial neighborhood in the Mountain West region of the United States. The school writing curriculum emphasizes argumentative/persuasive writing, as well as research papers and literary analysis in junior and senior writing classes. The school reports a 2021 enrollment of 1,361, with 43% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. As of 2021, the student body was majority white and Hispanic (Institute of Education Sciences, NAEP, 2019). The SAT Reading and Writing score for Juniors averaged across 2017, 2018, and 2019 was 519 (Francisco Vasquez de Coronado High School, 2020).

Data

All students in the researcher's student-teaching placement were asked to complete both an online consent form and an online 4-part questionnaire via Google Forms (if the student was over 18). Students who were under 18 were asked to complete an online assent form, an online 4-part questionnaire via Google forms, and a parental permission form. The questionnaire responses of students who were under 18 and did not have parental permission to participate in the study were not recorded. In total, 33 students completed all required forms as well as the questionnaire and their responses were included in the study. Following the questionnaire, students' responses were analyzed for common themes. These themes were then used to construct interview questions. The interviews were conducted with 3 students who had not participated in the previous questionnaire research. These interviews were used to triangulate against the questionnaire responses, clarifying whether students found the previously identified themes to accurately represent factors which impact students' perception of the IV or UV of writing.

Data analysis

Although EVT was used to direct this study's data collection, the purpose of this study was to generate a list of factors that contribute to students' perceived subjective task value of

writing, not to support or contradict EVT. Therefore, this study utilized conventional content analysis and sought to code student responses into themes. This analytical approach using thematic coding has been used in other qualitative research on EVT and student motivation, such as Flake et al. (2015) and Fielding-Wells et al. (2017). This study's coding procedure used a framework approach wherein the researcher developed a thematic framework based on the research question, created an index to apply to the data, and then organized the data into themes. The categorization of themes as 'major' or 'significant themes' occurred when 4 or more students expressed a belief consistent with that theme.

Rationale for merging the importance and UV sub-components

The questionnaire contained four open-ended questions corresponding to the importance, IV, and UV sub-components of students' subjective value of writing. However, students' responses to importance-of-writing questions usually involved the utility of writing, and there was significant overlap in the utility reasons that students gave for both importance-of-writing and UV-of-writing responses. Because students saw little to no difference between the importance-of-writing factors and utility-of-writing factors, these categories are analyzed together. 'UV' or 'usefulness' factors in the study results refer to factors students articulated in response to questions about both the utility and importance of writing. However, IV or 'enjoyment' was understood by students to be a separate category, as responses to questions about enjoyment of writing revealed different factors than UV/importance questions.

Results

Twenty-two of the 36 student participants responded that writing is both useful and intrinsically valuable (having both a high UV and IV). There was a high level of agreement between students about what makes writing intrinsically valuable and useful. Even students who did not believe that the writing they did in school was useful anticipated that some forms of writing would be useful after high school. Two of these students expressed frustration that the writing they were being taught in classes was not writing they perceived as having practical applications. Students reported that writing was useful when they were practicing professional skills, learning to communicate in ways that gave them social capital, or becoming better prepared for college. When students were allowed to select their own topics and write for

themselves or their peers, they reported enjoying writing more. Part of the IV of writing for some students involved self-expression as an inherent reward, while others saw utility value in writing as a means to clarify their thoughts, analyze their own thinking, or share information about a topic of interest with their peers. This chart summarizes the three main factors found to influence students' subjective task value of writing:

Factors that contribute to importance/UV of writing	Factors that contribute to IV of writing
Applicability of the writing type or skills gained to daily life (professional communication, college applications, or other social situations in which being a skilled writer yields benefits)	Writing projects that emphasize self-expression, reflection, or writing for peers rather than the correctness of the finished writing Student having autonomy over the form/content of their writing

FIG. 3

Factors influencing importance and UV of writing

The factor which students claimed dictated the UV of writing was the applicability of that kind of writing to daily life, college, or their future profession. Every student participant who said that writing was unimportant or held little UV specified that this was because the kinds of writing done in school were not relevant to “daily life” or their professional life. One student gave the examples of being asked to read “random fiction books the teacher likes” and perform “3-level analysis” as kinds of writing which lacked practical applications. Another student argued that much of school writing is “irrelevant,” and the “topics of the writings will not help most kids in the future.”

Similarly, many students who said that writing had a high utility or importance gave professional reasons. The most common reasons given for a high importance or UV of writing were: job applications/advancement, college applications/preparedness, and social capital. Describing the social functions of writing proficiency, one student wrote, “perfected writing comes off as professional and can become a great skill to sound very collected.” Another student said that good writing skills can make one “sound sophisticated,” and make people more likely to listen or take that student seriously. Eight students cited “professional emails” as a real-world

example of the utility of writing. This focus on the utility of professional writing was reinforced in the interviews, where two of the three students interviewed cited the professional importance of conveying one's ideas clearly through writing. These students cited the explicit teaching of job-related writing skills, such as professional emails or cover letters, to be examples of useful writing which they were motivated to learn.

The perceived incompatibility of writing with UV and writing with IV

Several students articulated that the kinds of writing they see as having a high UV consequently have a low IV. Four students, including one interviewed student, expressed that their own enjoyment of writing was at odds with the utility of writing. These students argued that the kinds of writing done in school were not enjoyable, but "worth it" because writing skills are necessary later in life. One student stated:

Well, if you enjoy writing inherently, then that's great... but I mean, there's a level of not enjoying writing that you just kinda have to get through, and just... survive because you're not gonna make it in the real world [if you don't have writing skills].

This student stressed that he does not find the writing he does in school enjoyable, but believes that is useful and important because writing will yield future rewards. Responding to the questionnaire, another student described the incompatibility between high UV writing and high IV writing, and states that the writing he has done in school is useful, not enjoyable:

writing in school could be very useful, it's just it's never fun learning it because it's more...serious. It's always very professional, not in a fun way professional. Topics are always old topics and just not very interesting to learn about.

Factors influencing IV of writing

Students' beliefs about the IV of writing were strikingly consistent. Students believe that writing is inherently valuable and enjoyable when they have control over what their writing projects look like. Students dislike writing or find it meaningless when they lack autonomy over writing projects. The enjoyment of writing when autonomy is granted is evident in these quotes from students:

The writing project was enjoyable because it had a long deadline and it was something not very structured. So I could make the project what I wanted and I was able to create my own written world.

This student reported enjoying writing because of both the abundance of time given for the project and the ability to control the form and content of their writing. The importance of students having autonomy over the form and content of their writing is reiterated in another student's statement:

I never liked writing because teachers made you do certain things give you prompts and a layout to go off of. If I had to say one of the times I really enjoyed writing was sophomore year I believe teacher didn't give us a prompt or anything I was just able to write. I wrote a fairy tale story cause I mean why not and I was just able to get lost into my own story and imagine it in my mind.

This student also stressed that being told what to write about would cause them not to enjoy a project, contrasting their enjoyment of projects where they were granted autonomy with more typical writing projects. This phenomenon is also not limited to creative writing, as several students stressed that they enjoyed research and argumentative writing when given autonomy to select the subject:

I enjoy doing research papers on subjects I find interesting, mostly because it's nice to be able to write about something I have some amount of invested interest in when I am usually told to write about a subject of the teachers choice.

According to these student responses, autonomy in the form of allowing students to select the genre, topic, content, or timeline of their writing projects all increased students' enjoyment of writing.

Lastly, some students stressed the inherent value of writing as a tool to clarify their thinking and as a tool for self-expression. Two of the students interviewed said that they themselves are the primary audience of their writing, although all three students interviewed described being motivated by writing for their peers more than for their teachers. One student gave essays and research papers as her favored formats to write in, and stressed that she enjoys the process of writing to inform herself and her classmates, as long as she gets to pick the topic.

Another student said he prefers to write in journals, because he prefers writing to reflect, to “elaborate on my thoughts and get them on paper, so I can evaluate it for myself.” This same student stressed that writing in a journal can also reduce the pressure to produce “correct” writing, and that he finds writing that isn’t graded on correctness to be more valuable because he’s focused on writing for self-expression, what he called “thoughts coming straight from your head to the paper.” For this student, the pressure to produce writing that is “neat and proper” can sometimes be a hindrance to his valuing writing.

Discussion

There are four key findings of the present research. First, high school students in this study largely did find both UV and IV in some forms of writing, even if they believed that the writing they did in school did not have a high UV or IV. Second, students believed that writing is useful because it can confer social or professional advantages. Third, some students believed that the kinds of writing that are useful are not enjoyable. Lastly, the student participants, even those who did not usually enjoy classroom writing, reported finding significantly increased IV in writing when they were granted autonomy over the form and content of their writing projects.

This study’s findings align with past research regarding factors which motivate students to write. Providing students autonomy or ‘ownership’ over their writing projects can have an impact on motivation, and writing projects that develop occupational skills can likewise be a motivating factor for students (Atwell, 2015; Unrau, 2011; Yeung, 2016).

This study’s focus on the motivational power of subjective task value alone, without taking into account expectancies or SE, demonstrates the possibility that subjective task value may have an impact on students’ motivation. Student responses indicated that there may be factors that motivate students to write regardless of their expectancies about writing. Therefore, students may be motivated to practice writing in a classroom if these factors which increase the value of writing are present, even among students who do not regard themselves as skilled writers (students with low SE for academic writing). The factors which increase students’ subjective value of writing were consistent among the student participants; every student who completed the questionnaire or was interviewed gave some indication that their valuation of writing in the classroom would be improved by the inclusion of at least one of the following:

- writing projects which emphasize professional skills, skills needed for college, or skills which students perceive as applicable to daily life
- writing projects which allow students to select their own topic or genre
- journaling where students are encouraged to write for self-reflection or expression which will not be evaluated on correctness, or projects where students write to each other

Modifying Eccles and Wigfield's (2000) original EVT model of achievement motivation to include the findings of this study may clarify the ways in which the factors that students identified impact their motivation to write:

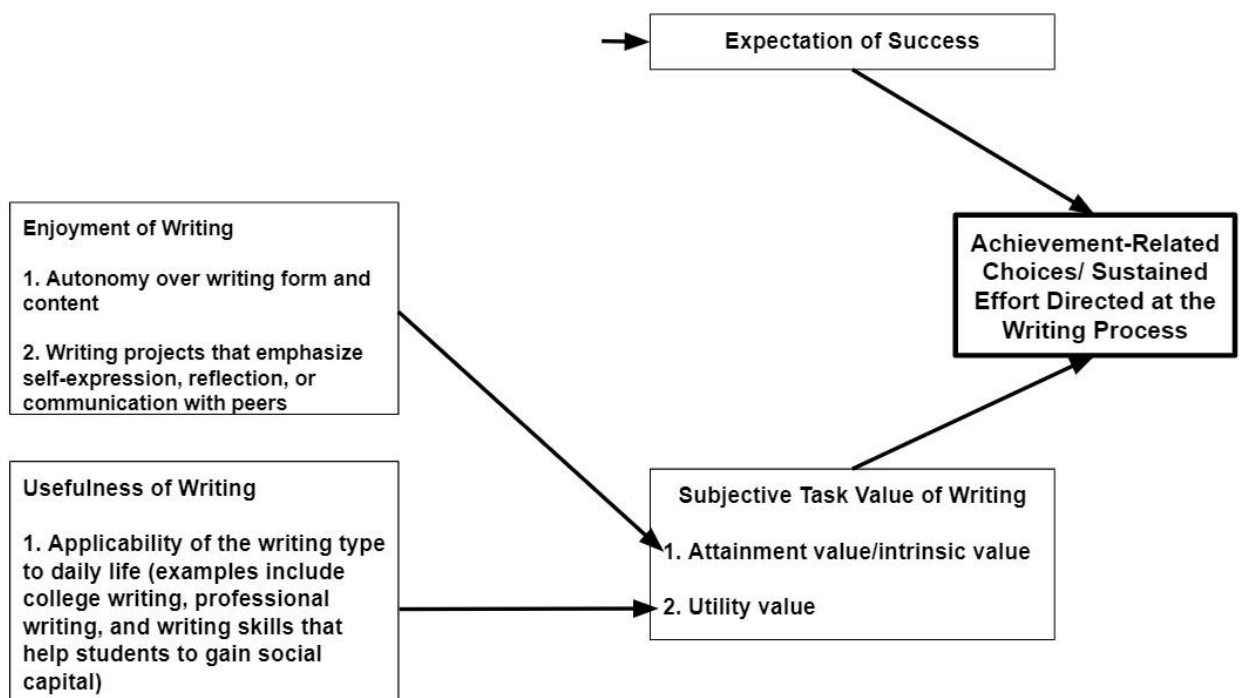


FIG. 4. Modified from Eccles and Wigfield (2000)

This study demonstrated that students' enjoyment of writing increases when they are allowed to personalize the writing process and use writing as a tool in a task that they select and find interest in. Subjective task value is impacted when these factors are present because the writing task becomes more inherently enjoyable. UV is impacted similarly by applicability: students find writing useful when they understand the applicability of the writing to a personally relevant situation. Together, these factors influence the student's perception of a writing task's value, and this in turn influences their motivation. As Troia et al. (2012) discuss, the achievement-related

choices associated with motivation are sustained attention and effort directed toward the writing process, the use of strategic writing behaviors, and increased self-regulation.

EVT is dual: both expectancy and subjective task value contribute to motivation. The student participants in this study appear to recognize this as well, since many students emphasized that writing was valuable, and gave examples of situations in which they would be motivated to write, even if they did not regard themselves as good writers or enjoy most classroom writing. This contradiction demonstrates that a student's task value of writing can be high even as their SE beliefs regarding general academic writing are low. Students with a high task value of writing may still have motivation to write, despite low SE beliefs or expectancies of success in relation to writing. The results of this study suggest that if students are given writing tasks that are valuable to them, more students may be motivated to write, regardless of expectancies or SE beliefs.

Limitations

This study was limited by the number of participants and that the participants were students in the researcher's student-teaching placement. Data was only collected from 36 senior students attending one high school, leading to concerns about whether or not this study's conclusions can be generalized. Of particular concern is the bias that may have occurred because the student participants were second-semester seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. These students, particularly when motivation is being examined, may not be a representative sample of high school students. The themes found in this study may not be found in a similar study conducted on freshmen or students who are not engaging in a writing project during COVID-19.

Additionally, the student participants were writing a research paper during data collection, which may have affected their responses about writing by generating recency bias.

Although questionnaires were anonymized, the teacher-student relationship between participants and the researcher could have led to a desirability bias in student's responses; students may have wanted to avoid giving negative statements about the usefulness of writing to a student-teacher in their English class.

Future research could address these limitations by administering the questionnaire in a larger group of students in different grades at multiple points in the school year. The issue of

desirability bias could potentially be reduced by administering the questionnaire in a class where there is less social pressure to give positive responses about writing, such as a math or science class.

Action Plan

High school students' motivation to write is increased by a combination of relevance (writing that students see as useful practice for work, higher education, or attaining social status), autonomy (ability to select form and topic of writing projects), and low-stakes writing (writing for oneself or for peers in a format that will not be graded based on correctness). As researchers have shown, getting students motivated to write may be a crucial step in improving writing education. Troia, et al. (2012) posited that without engaging in classroom strategies that increase students' motivation to write, other pedagogical or policy interventions, such as class size reductions, may not be effective. Therefore, classroom teachers should seek solutions regarding ways to make classroom writing useful and enjoyable for students.

This study demonstrates that, as a teacher, I can increase my students' motivation to write by including student-choice based writing assignments, writing units that explicitly teach professional writing skills such as email-writing, and low-stakes writing projects (such as journals) in my classroom. While relevance, writing for self-expression, and autonomy were universally desired by the student participants in this study, each student's perception of what constituted autonomy or a practical, relevant job skill varied. Because of this variation, a teacher seeking to provide the three factors must either learn how each class of students defines each factor, or provide open writing projects where students shape the assignment parameters. To provide writing assignments with high relevance, a teacher could poll students about their intended jobs, college aspirations, and the writing skills that they use outside of school, and then develop writing projects that practice those skills. However, the teacher could also ask students to select a writing task from their daily lives and hone their writing skills using that task. Both of these methods would achieve high relevance in the manner defined by student participants in this study.

Additionally, other writing strategies which have been introduced by scholars such as Atwell provide opportunities for students to have autonomy or high-relevance writing projects.

The strategy of letter-writing to teachers and peers provides students an opportunity to practice low-stakes writing. Genre study and writer's workshops provide students with autonomy over their writing topic. The suggestions of Beers et al. (2007), that teachers should strive to incorporate multiple literacies, especially technological literacies into their classes, reflects students' desire to practice professional skills.

Given the results of this study, in future ELA classes, I will begin writing projects by polling students about the particular skills or types of writing which they believe are relevant to their daily lives/professional lives. I will use project-based learning because it closely reflects the professional world in terms of both the autonomy which students are granted, and the skills students are expected to acquire. Student autonomy will be maintained through the use of genre-study and written models; in these formats, students are able to select the topic and genre of their writing after extensive exposure to examples of multiple genres. Students will be asked to keep written reflection journals which will not be shared, in order to provide low-stakes writing and reflection practice, and will be assigned occasional written letters to peers, in order to have the opportunity to write for genuine communication and self-expression.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Questions (modified from Eccles & Wigfield, 2000):

1. Is it important to you to be good at the kind of writing you do in school? Why or why not?
2. Think of a time you enjoyed the writing you did for school. Why was that writing project enjoyable?
3. Some things that you learn in school help you do things better outside of class, that is, they are useful. For example, learning about plants might help you grow a garden. In general, how useful is the kind of writing you learn how to do in school?
4. Compared to other activities you do in school, how useful is the writing you practice in school?

Interview Questions

Attainment value/importance/utility questions:

1. Do you use the writing skills you gain in school to do things outside of school?

If yes -

1. How do you use the writing skills attained at school outside of school?
2. What benefits does writing get you outside of school?

If no-

1. Do you think writing will be useful in your future life, after high school?
2. What kinds of writing would be useful to practice in school?

Intrinsic value/enjoyment questions:

1. If I gave you an assignment where you could write about any topic, what would you most want to write about?
2. What form would you like to write in (such as poetry, essays, articles that will be read by your classmates, a journal that no one else will see, etc)?
3. Who would your ideal audience be?

4. What suggestions do you have for teachers to make writing more enjoyable?