Unveiling the Writing Drives of Tertiary Education Students: A Grounded Theory

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ABSTRACT

Writing has become one of the most essential skills in almost all the fields. This does not only become a tool of communication but also an avenue for human expression. Having the command on the written language will not only make the students proficient but also competent as an individual. However, most of the students are not motivated to write thus affecting their performance. This qualitative study conducted an in-depth exploration of writing drives among the tertiary education students using the grounded theory. The in-depth interviews with the participants revealed four essential themes with a central category on their motivations to engage in a writing endeavor. "Student's writing discernment" emerged as the core category with the four essential themes: (1) Interconnection (writing views as a means of connection); (2) Incentives (perceived rewards from writing); (3) Intrinsic Motivation (personal engagement in writing endeavors); and (4) Interaction (increased likelihood in writing). The grounded theory of perception-motivation-engagement: student's writing discernment unveils an understanding that the way the students view (perception) writing cascades to how they be driven (motivation) to have its practice (engagement). The theory can provide a better lens as to how educators can make necessary changes and adjustments on writing activities considering the perspectives of the students. Tailoring writing activities to student's interest will make them more involved in the process knowing that this skill, at this time, is no longer a want or an advantage but a necessity.

Keywords

writing; perceptions; drives; grounded theory

Introduction

Writing is one of the complex skills to be learned. According to (Erkan & Saban, 2011) this is because writing permanently records information, opinion, beliefs, feelings, arguments, explanations, theories and emotions. It is very important in all academic disciplines at all school levels (Payne, 2012). More is also expected from tertiary students who will be embarking to work soon after their studies. It is something that one cannot just ignore especially that this has become more of a necessity than of an advantage. Most professions too require good writing skills while others even ask higher level of competency (Payne, 2012).

However, most of the tertiary students lack the expected competency of the said skill on their level. Most of them are not moved to write. Their writing motivations are important factors in writing competence because if they lack these, they will not readily engage in any writing activities (Payne, 2012). There are a lot of variables that one has to take control with when writing. These variables make most of the students realize that learning to write fluently and expressively is difficult (Dani, 2014). Considering that writing involves many different processes that need to work simultaneously (Torrance & Galbraith, 2006), this may also be a reason for them to become more demotivated to engage thus their motivations should be accounted.

Studies have revealed that motivation helps determine the students' success in writing (Surastina et al., 2018) and is considered a very wide and well- studied field. Because of its scope, it is sometimes hard to draw connections among motivation and specific activities such as writing (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). Cebu Normal University Balamban Campus has seen the need to equip its education students since they will soon become part of the workforce soon and become

teachers too. Considering their level, their writing skills really need to be worked out because even simple ways of organizing thoughts still becomes a problem. Writing is an integral part of human existence and drives in engaging into such skill are important to be made known as this will cascade to the output.

This study believes that the different motivations of the students in writing should be identified as this will have effect on their writing engagement and eventually cascade on their performance. Examining these factors will aid the teachers in improving writing instruction and in designing writing programs or activities that are anchored on these drives.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to generate a theory on student's drives in writing which can shed light on: (1) how the students perceive writing; (2) what are the student's external and internal motivations in writing; and (3) what will engage (activities) the students to indulge in writing.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing has become one of the most essential skills in almost all the fields. Communicating ideas clearly is the basic purpose of writing (Nazarenko & Schwarz-Peaker, 2013). It is not as simply using paper and pen to connect letters to form words but it is using words to form larger thoughts that demonstrate understanding. This eventually allows a person to see on paper what their brain is processing or thinking (Waring, 2007). It is to transfer the visualized ideas on the paper (Kirbaş, 2017).

Further, this does not only become a tool of communication but also an avenue for human expression. This allows and provides the permanency of information conveying emotions and thoughts (Kirbaş, 2017). Their feelings are highlighted because it is personal to them. Students are said to be prone to experience a wide range of emotions during this complex process of writing due to either internal or external factors (Mendez López, 2011). Additionally, during the process, students are also given the opportunity to evaluate themselves. Doing so will also enable them to make their emotions work for them and not against them. Students are not restricted in exploring ideas and without worrying in making or correcting any mistakes (Waring, 2007). And even if they do, it is still fine since these mistakes are considered part and parcel of learning. Moreover, being more involved in writing provides a room for developing confidence in oneself. Active engagement gives them the feeling of success in writing assignments and enhance their self-confidence (Cheung, 2018).

According to (Hillocks, 2006) students who do not write well will have difficulty in developing thinking skills. This will also have a domino effect at the later stage such as not doing well in the tertiary education and the workplace (Matsumura et al., 2015). (McKinsey and Company, 2013) study shows that only 13 percent of the graduates from emerging countries are suitable for employment in global companies and that the primary reason is lack of English skills. Having the command on the written language will not only make the students proficient but also competent as an individual.

However, most of the students are not motivated to write thus affecting their performance. Motivation, as part of attitude, is an essential affective factor and a driving force that directly influences students' writing performance in the foreign language (Jahin & Idrees, 2012). According to (Surastina et al., 2018)motivation determines students' success in academic writing. It is an important factor in writing competence because students who lack this will not readily engage in academic writing activities(Payne, 2012). It is also regarded as a main factor that influences the success of students' foreign language learning (Mali, 2015). It plays a prominent role in writing development and performance and is acknowledged in most contemporary models of writing (Troia et al., 2013). Educational psychologists have found out that influence of rewards on motivation and performance is complex (Black & Allen, 2018). This is also because there is a big dependency on the individual's values and goals.

Motivation has three main influences and this includes expectancy, incentive and motive(Surastina et al., 2018). Expectancy refers to how the students believe that they will perform the given task. Incentive is more of the how attractive the task is and motive is seen to be related to the type of reward the student will gain if the engagement is successful. It is also categorized into two: intrinsic and extrinsic. The former is more of internal factors that do not directly get affected by whatever factor outside of the individual. It comes from within. While the latter is more of the external factors that are dependent on variables or things around and outside the person.

It is a given fact that writing is really a complex skill to be learned. It requires a lot of effort from an individual. It also demands a lot of variables to be controlled thus most of the language learners realize that learning to write fluently and expressively is indeed difficult (Dani, 2014). But despite these, motivation is presumably a necessary ingredient for attaining writing success. On a study of (Troia et al., 2013)the results showed that some aspects of writing motivation have direct influence to students' writing activities. This is also supported by(Sabti et al., 2019) in their research showing that the higher the writing self-efficacy and writing achievement motivation level, the better the writing performance.

However, motivation is taken too as not a unitary construct but something that is made up of several related components (self-efficacy beliefs, interest, perceived task value, attitudes, goal orientations and attributions for success and failure).(Troia et al., 2013)) recognized too that there are potentially important mediators and moderators of the relationship between these motivation components and writing together with measurement issues that can confuse relevant and salient findings. This is also agreed by (Lo & Hyland, 2007)that motivation is not entirely fixed. This unfixed stand therefore become an avenue for teachers to do some intervention for students' improved motivation. Even with some disagreeable impact of motivation to writing and the skill in itself is taken as aversive to students(Hidi & Boscolo, 2007), drives are still essential consideration for teachers.

Preparing students to communicate in the real world of work is a challenge for educators in higher education. Holtzman et al. (2005) also noted that the ability to communicate effectively has been recognized as a hallmark for membership in the learned professions as he made an assessment of the writing skills of dental students in an article. Thus, if teachers are into adequately preparing the students for jobs that involve more than minimal levels of responsibility, they must address their writing skills (Defazio et al., 2010)There is a significant need for students at all levels not only to be good written communicators, but also to understand the importance of good writing skills (Defazio et al., 2010)

Identifying the different writing motivational factors is indeed essential as this will not only improve the skills to students but will also provide a wider exploration on making the necessary adjustments or alterations on schools' writing activities and instruction.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper employed the grounded theory that is applied broadly in educational research. Grounded theory is uncovering a theory generated and taken from the data that are collected and systemically analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). It offers a different set of systematic methods that uphold the analysis and abstraction of the information to build up and establish a theory based on the empirical data (Presmeg & Kaiser, 2019). Different coding procedures are also incorporated such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding which depend on the constant comparison technique (Alicamen & Abadiano, 2020).

Participants: Students taking up Education will be the target participants of the study using a purposive sampling technique. Reaching the data saturation determined the number of participants involved. Cebu Normal University Balamban Campus was the locale of the study.

Instrument: The main instrument for this study was interview conducted on English and Cebuano languages and on the availability of the participants. It was done via Messenger application developed by Facebook and phone call since face-to-face interview was not allowed.

Data Gathering Procedure: Application for waiver to exemption from the ethical review was secured from the CNU Ethics Review Committee and the certification for it was granted. After, permission to conduct the study was asked from the Campus Director of CNU Balamban Campus. Thereafter, an informed consent was given to the participant with an ample time to review on their participation on the study. They were further oriented about the nature of the study together with their rights and benefits. They were also informed on how the gathered data be taken with utmost confidentiality. After the consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher, the interview commenced. Proper phone etiquette and netiquettes were observed during the conduct of online and distance interview, respectively, subjected to the availability of the participants.

Data Analysis: Constant comparative method and coding are taken to be crucial and significant in the development of a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). This method requires analysis and comparison of gathered data. Data are analyzed into indicators or minute units (Strauss, 1987) and then were compared systematically as these are used in the next gathering phase or stage. Further, the method is constant for it requires the researcher to (a) constantly return to the starting point of analysis and continues the process in each phase; (b) find similarities and commonalities together with the differences among the data; (c) engage in analysis, comparison and abstraction of data (Feeler, 2012).

After the data collection, the three types of coding process came after namely: open, axial and selective. Utilizing this triadic coding process makes the grounded theory more substantial (LaRossa, 2005). The first type which is **open coding** allowed the fragmentation and reduction of data into parts which are then methodically analyzed. This process intends to find the core concepts of each part and eventually come up with a code that would best describe or define it (Presmeg & Kaiser, 2019).

Table 1. Open Coding

Tuble 1: Open Coung			
form of expression	feelings	impart knowledg e	scores
freedom	challenge oneself	feedback	encouragemen t for others to express
listening to songs	influence to people	reading relatable stories	emotions
desire to share	accomplishmen t	interactive activities	confidence
learn from experience	watching inspiring movies or videos	self- evaluation	meditational activities
personal exploratio n on one's			

ability

The next step then commenced and this is **axial coding**. In this phase, an analysis around the axis of "one category at a time" took place (Strauss, 1987). The relationships found on the different categories lead to the identification of the central or core category (Feeler, 2012). This core category serves as the primary and principal point for the generation of the theory (Strauss, 1987). With this, the researcher examined on the relationships and concepts that were observed in order to come up a comprehensible explanation.

Table 2. Axial Coding

influence to people

desire to share Writing views as a means impart knowledge

encouragement for others to of connection

express

learn from experience

feedback

personal exploration on one's

ability

Perceived rewards from writing

challenge oneself accomplishment

scores

self- evaluation

emotions

feelings Personal engagement in

freedom writing endeavors

confidence

form of expression reading relatable stories interactive activities

watching inspiring movies or writing

videos

listening to songs

Finally, **selective coding** takes place where there is a refinement of the final categories as their associations among the others are studied. It should be reflective, coherent and ideally compelling (LaRossa, 2005). The primary phenomenon of the study will then be distinguished after the identification of the core category. This will then further shed light on the research queries

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the coding and analysis of the data gathered, the core category that emerged was the student's writing discernment. It is their ability to obtain sharp perceptions and make an informed judgement or understanding on something (writing). There are four themes extracted and these are:

Theme 1: Interconnection (Writing views as a means of connection)

Theme 2: Incentives (Perceived rewards from writing)

Theme 3: Intrinsic Motivation (Personal engagement in writing endeavors)

Theme 4: Interaction (Increased likelihood in writing)

Different propositions are made out of the themes. Then hypotheses were made based on the created propositions supported by comprehensive discussions and studies.

THEME 1: Interconnection (Writing views as a means of connection)

Writing is a very powerful tool for human communication. Communicating ideas clearly is the basic purpose of writing (Nazarenko & Schwarz-Peaker, 2013). It is not as simply using paper and pen to connect letters to form words but it is using words to form larger thoughts that demonstrate understanding. This eventually allows a person to see on paper what their brain is processing or thinking (Waring, 2007). It is to transfer the visualized ideas on the paper (Kirbaş, 2017). This makes an individual see a purpose in writing especially if someone has to read whatever is written down. One important purpose of which is a simple communication and connection. Not all individuals are capable and confident of speaking whatever they have in mind and tell it to people. But with writing, they are able to make it happen.

Below are some of the statements of the participants who see writing as a tool or instrument of making connection to people:

"It is also an opportunity to express oneself especially those who are not given the opportunity to speak and those who are not given the opportunity of being heard, and those who were not given an opportunity to become who they really are." P8

"It is also my way to share my thoughts and opinions that I am not that confident to share through speaking." P7

"Writing is a powerful tool that can speak what mouth can't." P9

"Writing is something nga makapagawas sa imung unspeakable thoughts or mga dili nimu kaya istyorya na thoughts kay ipaagi nalang nimu siya ug suwat." P4 [Translation: Writing is something that can make you express your unspeakable thoughts.]

"Writing is to deliver information, to influence other people especially sa katong mga tawo na walay knowledge bitaw ana nga butang." P5 [Translation: Writing is to deliver information, to influence other people especially those who do not have knowledge on that particular thing.]

Hypothesis 1: Seeing purpose in writing makes it more possible for its engagement.

Proposition 1: Students took writing to establish a connection to people outside of themselves.

THEME 2: Incentives (Perceived rewards from writing)

The way students view something and what they will get after will have an effect on how they are going to react on it though others sometimes do the opposite. Incentive, being one of the main motivational influences, determine the extent of how attractive the task is (Surastina et al., 2018). Educational psychologists have found out that influence of rewards on motivation and performance is complex (Black & Allen, 2018). This is also because there is a big dependency on the individual's values and goals. Some will take it for personal benefit and growth. Others are more driven if they take it from outside of themselves. This is more of the internal and external gains that they get from whatever undertaking they are into. The type of reward that the student will gain if the engagement is successful is described as 'motive' being one of the main influences of motivation (Surastina et al., 2018). It is also categorized into two: intrinsic and extrinsic. The former is more of internal

factors that do not directly get affected by whatever factor outside of the individual. It comes from within. While the latter is more of the external factors that are dependent on variables or things around and outside the person. The same goes to writing because motivation was also known as an important factor that affects student performance in such skill (Troia et al., 2013).

The following are some of the statements of the participants that show the internal reward that they get from writing:

"Kanang akoa kay gichallenge nako ako self na makahimu ko ug something, na makahimu ko anang I thought dili nako kaya." P5 [Translation: I challenge myself to make something I thought I can't.]

"When I write something or a write-up in class, it feels like it would be another challenge for me to craft so as a student, I would better do my best produce good piece." P9

"Makafeel ko ug accomplishment if our teachers asked us to write something." -P6 [Translation: I can feel accomplishment...]

"I got to learn from this experience as well as the experiences of other people that I observe throughout my life so far." -P2

On the other hand, some of the participants shared the external gains that they also derived from writing:

"What moved me is the score that I get when I have completed my writing."- P8

"And also, I quite love the idea gaining something as a score or a remark, even if it is a small thing. Every time I write, if the teacher gives me a remark, whether it is a good remark or a bad remark, it actually fuels me to improve more on my writing." P3

"What drives me extrinsically are the comments from my teachers and the people who read my work, may it be positive or negative. I find it really amusing to listen to people's comments about my work." -P2

Hypothesis 2: Students' recognition on the different gains that they get from writing will indulge them to perform more in such skill.

Proposition 2: External and internal rewards engage the students to writing activities.

THEME 3: Intrinsic Motivation (Personal engagement in writing endeavors)

One of the notable things about writing is that it can be something personal since majority of what one has to write comes from within. It may collect or gather information from other sources to wider understanding but the scribbling of words into paper is from the person himself. In the same manner, writing has become a channel or an outlet of people due to the personal touch that it brings to the individual. This allows and provides the permanency of information conveying emotions and thoughts (Kirbaş, 2017). Their feelings are highlighted because it is personal to them. Students are said to be prone to experience a wide range of emotions during this complex process of writing due to either internal or external factors (Mendez López, 2011). Additionally, during the process, students are also given the opportunity to evaluate themselves. Doing so will also enable them to make their emotions work for them and not against them. Further, students are not restricted in exploring ideas and without worrying in making or correcting any mistakes (Waring, 2007). And even if they

do, it is still fine since these mistakes are considered part and parcel of learning. Moreover, being more involved in writing provides a room for developing confidence in oneself. Active engagement gives them the feeling of success in writing assignments and enhance their self-confidence (Cheung, 2018).

"...that leads me to eagerly write what are those strong feelings that touch my souls and express in writing why it hits me so hard." P9

"I am a person who cannot really express into actions so I write it, I write my emotions. Like I can express things if I am in that mood." P14

"If naa koy emotional disturbance, makasuwat jud ko." P10 [If I have emotional turbulence, I can write.]

"Whenever I am at the peak of my emotion, and I couldn't control myself, I tend to write and my frustrations with life in general help me to come up with brilliant ideas which becomes my strength in writing." P6

"...where I can pour my heart out or the freedom I couldn't have orally, and to where no one can judge..." PI

"...naa koy freedom and wala jud wall." P5 [Translation: I have the freedom and there are no barriers or hindrances.]

"...when I review my work and it gives me a little more of my confidence because of the fluency of ideas that I made on my own." P4

"...maapil akong kauigalingun like maassess or maevaluate nako akong kaugalingun..." P14 [Translation: I am personally involved where I can assess and evaluate myself.]

Hypothesis 3: Acknowledgement of personal involvement on writing activities pushes students to be more expressive.

Proposition 3: Students demonstrate emotional attachment to written tasks to make it more personal.

THEME 4: Interaction (Increased likelihood in writing)

Learning to like writing as a skill takes so much time and courage since this is sometimes viewed as complex. Students realize that learning to write fluently and expressively is difficult because it requires control on a lot of variables such as, but not limited to, content, unity and grammar (Dani, 2014). Moreover, Rajanthran et al., 2013 believes this expectation of failure, causes anxiety in writing which can happen due to two scenarios: first, when students are asked to write about a specific topic and let them think of writing as a translating activity.

Most of them are not moved to write. Therefore, providing students the opportunity to think about what they already know before the task begins allow them to include new information into existing structures of knowledge which stimulates long-term memory (Cole & Feng, 2015). Moreover, small group discussion, building real-life connection and peer conferencing are also the techniques used and employed in teaching the area of writing among ESL learners (Cole & Feng, 2015). Additionally, Gagné & Parks, 2013 found that using this method of small group

discussion was, in fact, a successful strategy to produce the language needed to complete a writing task. Abykanova et al., 2016 further added that interaction is advantageous as it helps establish a friendly atmosphere among the users and connect with one another. It further helps learner to boost self- reliance and self- assurance and allows them to overcome the fear of a language barrier (Basbas, 2018). This just goes to show that the more relatable the things discussed either in individual or group activities, the more meaningful it will be for the learners. The more meaningful the matter, the more engaged they are. The more engagement the learner gives, the higher the chances for the acquisition to take place (Basbas, 2018).

"I think most of the times is the touch of movies and dramas I have watched that leads me to eagerly write." P4

"I would try to watch videos or movies to finds inspiration especially fantasy ones, something that is not my personal experience." P3

"Sometimes I get inspired with what I am watching to the point that I am able to make a poem at the end of the movie and also reading because it makes me want to write more."
P2

"Reading stories na makarelate ka, kanang makainspire." P10 [Translation: Reading stories where you get to relate and be inspired].

"Sa classroom kanang pabasahon ug emotional stories and pasuwaton sa akong nafeel or patan-awon kog highly emotional na salida. Then kana sad activity na mainvolve ko, like interactive na activities then after, pasuwaton mi sa experience kay nalingaw man ko. P6 [Translation: In the classroom where we are asked to read emotional stories and then write what we feel and also watching highly emotional movies. An activity also that would involve me like an interactive one where ater, we will be asked about our experience during the activity since I got to enjoy.]

"Next is meditation. It refreshes my mind and helps me think of good times. Lastly, is listening of songs. The words and the meaning of the song will give me an idea on whatever I want to write." P8

Hypothesis 4: Combination of one or more activities increase the chances of more writing engagement.

Proposition 4: Relatable writing materials (stories, movies or activities) allows a more active participation among students.

THEORY GENERATION

When the motivational drives of the education students were explored, **student's writing discernment** emerged as the core category. From the interview responses of the students, the following themes were generated: interconnection (writing views as a means of connection), incentives (perceived rewards from writing), intrinsic motivation (personal engagement in writing endeavor) and interaction (increased likelihood in writing).

Writing, being one of the most essential skills, is undeniably complex and may be difficult to learn. This is used in many various disciplines that is why being good at the skill in this era is no longer a want but a necessity. Writing may come in many various forms as well and that students, learning it in school, also take it differently. Most of the students recognized the use writing as a means of expression and

communication especially for those who cannot express themselves verbally. They have used writing as a channel or as an instrument to connect to the people outside themselves (Theme 1). Being able to use it as a tool also allows them to gain something, may it be external or internal rewards or benefits (Theme 2). Receiving remarks (negative or positive) from people who read their works and being able to go out of their comfort zones are just some of these. They are able to see that the people whom they have made connection with have come to appreciate whatever they have expressed in paper. This also provides them the personal gain since they are also able to explore their ability and challenge themselves that they can leave impact with just written words. This additionally create a sense of personal attachment to the skill as since there is a feeling of fulfillment and that their emotions and feelings as well are taken as part of the core process (Theme 3). This in turn will cascade to their practice of the skill. The more that the students feel the personal attachment to the skill, may they work individually or be in groups, the more that they get to be moved and be engaged (Theme 4).

PERCEPTION-MOTIVATION-ENGAGEMENT Student's Writing Discernment Theory

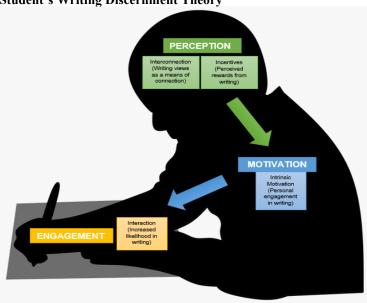


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Basbas' PERCEPTION-MOTIVATION-ENGAGEMENT

Basbas' PME Theory simply states that the student's ability to obtain sharp perceptions and make an informed judgement or understanding (discernment) on writing evolves in the relationship of perception, motivation and engagement. The theory highlights the interconnected roles played by the three important core concepts. It unveils an understanding that the way the students view (perception) writing cascades to how they will be driven (motivation) to have its practice (engagement).

The theory can provide a better lens as to how educators can make necessary changes and adjustments on writing activities considering the perspectives of the students. Tailoring writing activities to student's interest will make them more involved in the process knowing that this skill, at this time, is no longer a want or an advantage but a necessity.

Hypothesis for validation

The main purpose of the study is to explore on the writing drives of students and below are the hypotheses that need to be validated in the next chapters of the study.

- 1. Students took writing to establish a connection to people outside of themselves.
- 2. External and internal rewards engage the students to writing activities.
- 3. Emotional attachment to written tasks make it more personal.
- Relatable writing materials (stories, movies or activities) allows a more active participation among students.

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