

SELF-REGULATION, MOTIVATION AND ESSAY WRITING PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

The relationship between self-regulation, motivation, and academic essay writing proficiency was explored in this study essentially to extend information about these constructs, and to provide insights from tertiary level using Botswana as an example. A hybrid research approach or design was adopted by this study because it is neither a true quantitative nor a pure qualitative study. This is so because, among other reasons, the convenience sampling technique was used having been found by the author to be suitable or “applicable to both qualitative and quantitative studies” (Suen, et al. (2014). Specifically, motivation and self-regulation profiles in the current study were respectively measured using the Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire (AWMQ) adapted from Payne (2012), and the Wilby (2022) questionnaire. The students self-rated their academic essay writing proficiency. The above questionnaires were completed by a total of 174 students who participated in this study who had enrolled in different Social Sciences courses. Majority of these students were at first year level. The findings of this study, which were guided by the Self-regulation as well as the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation theories, buttressed previous findings that there is a relationship between writing motivation, self-regulation, and proficiency. However, the self-regulation and motivation levels in the current study were moderate but positive, and thus suggesting that the students needed more assistance to improve their essay writing.

Keywords: *self-regulation, motivation, academic essay writing, proficiency, university students, ESL*

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Introduction

The relationship between self-regulation, motivation, and academic essay writing proficiency was explored in this study essentially to extend information about these constructs, and to provide insights using university students in Botswana as an example. Self-regulation in particular is still not fully explored according to Bai, Shen and Mei (2020), despite its importance in students' academic learning, achievement and writing quality and competence (Bai, Hu, & Gu, 2014; Cohen & Pinilla-Herrera, 2009; Oxford, 2017; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007). Moreover, self-regulation in second-language (L2) learning, according to Yu, Lo, and Lincoln (2017), is still a fairly new concept, not to mention in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. This study will therefore increase existing knowledge on the self-regulation construct, particularly in the ESL context of Botswana and similar contexts elsewhere. Bai and Guo (2021) advise that there is need to understand the impact of self-regulation and motivation on English writing for researchers and teachers to effectively design and conduct classroom instructions. Specifically, this study measured the relationship between academic essay writing proficiency, self-regulation, and motivation at tertiary level of education in order to share findings that would contribute to the improved teaching and learning of this skill at this level of education, especially in the ESL and EFL contexts. Researching on essay writing at tertiary level is essential because it equips students with knowledge, and to a large extent assesses their writing competence in their various disciplines (Hyland, 2017). Despite its importance, essay writing unfortunately continues to be problematic at tertiary level, leaving lecturers wondering about steps that can be taken to improve it. Research shows that lecturers in different parts of the world, including Botswana, have expressed their dissatisfaction with their students' lack of writing competence (Achen, 2018; Holland, 2013; Magogwe et al, 2023; Quible, 2008). Their concern emanates from the fact that, according to Hidi and Boscolo (2007), students' failure to write [essays] clearly and effectively affects their academic performance. Notably, writing is a multifaceted and complex skill that predominantly challenges ESL and EFL students (Bai, Shen, & Mei, 2020). The findings of this study will therefore contribute to extent knowledge and highlight the importance of using teaching approaches that will increase the university students' motivation of learning and regulating of their academic essay writing in Botswana and other similar contexts. *Self-regulation*

In this study self-regulation is operationalised as directing own learning (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005) or "changing oneself, or some aspect of oneself so as to conform to some idea or concept" (Forgas, Baumeister, & Tice, 2009, p.4). Zimmerman (2002) further defines self-regulation as an active and constructive process through which learners control their cognitive, metacognitive and emotional behaviour to attain certain learning goals and deal with challenging tasks. Furthermore, self-regulated learning (SRL) is defined by Pintrich (2000) as an academic process or skill used by students to set goals, use relevant strategies and monitor the effectiveness of their learning. Furthermore, Zimmerman (1998) indicates that self-regulated students organize and rehearse information to be learned, are confident about their learning and understand factors that influence their learning. Soureshjani (2013) further clarifies that individual characteristics and the learning environment guide the learner's employment of self-regulation strategies.

Motivation

Motivation, on the other hand, has been defined in different, but related ways by different scholars. For example, Piaget (cited in Oxford & Shearin, 1994, p.23) specifically defines motivation as “a built-in, unconscious striving toward more complex and differentiated development of the individuals’ mental structures”. Crookes and Schmidt (1991, p.481) define motivation as the degree of effort exerted by people to make choices, achieve goals, and avoid certain experiences; while Alexander and Murphy (1998) define motivation as a process through which an individual’s needs and desires are set in motion. On the other hand, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) define motivation as the sum of the need for achievement, the probability of success, the incentive values of task fulfillment, and the incentives to avoid failure. Therefore, it should be noted that there is no standard definition of motivation according to Gopalan, et al., (2017). The current study adopts the above definitions which in summary define motivation as a conscious or an unconscious complex effort exerted by either individuals or by others to make choices and goals and to avoid certain behaviours in order to succeed in the task they would like to achieve. Alexander (2006) posits that motivation is a contributor to success while Oxford and Shearin (1994) consider it as one of the main elements that determine success and active personal involvement in second language learning.

Theoretical framework

A two-pronged theoretical framework that shapes this study comprises the self-regulation and motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) theories.

The self-regulation theory

The self-regulation theory dates back to the mid-1980s when Zimmerman (1986) postulated that self-regulated learners metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally participate in their own learning process. Thus, this theory integrates four separate bodies of research on cognition/metacognition, motivation, behavioural control and developmental processes according to Zimmerman (1986). Notably, the Self-regulation theory corroborates Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive theory which, as validated empirically in different academic learning contexts, posits that beliefs and thoughts influence a person’s behaviour and so does intrinsic motivation (Ito, 2009). Intrinsic motivation is defined below. It should be noted, however, that, according to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulation learning may depend on context and individual differences as indicated by the Social Cognitive theory. Hence, the essence of the current study was to investigate the Botswana university context vis-a-vis other contexts across the globe. Furthermore, according to Zimmerman and Moylan (2009), the Self-regulation theory specifically comprises the following three cyclical phases: forethought, performance and self-reflection. During the forethought stage learners analyse the task by setting goals and planning strategically and at the same time possess self-motivational beliefs such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, task value and goal orientation. The final stage includes the use of task and general self-control strategies, self-monitoring and self-recording which take place during the learning process. It could therefore be concluded that students whose academic essay writing proficiency is higher are more likely to be

motivated and regulate their learning of academic essay writing more than those who are not.

The motivation theory

Second language (L2) motivation has been widely researched since the 80's and in the 90's, and according to Dornyei (1998), the motivation research was dominated by a social psychological approach under the influential work of Gardner, Lambert, Clement and their Canadian associates. During this period, a number of researchers in different parts of the world renewed interest and published various theories in this subject. Dornyei (1998) defines motivation as generally a complex, multifaceted construct with different approaches that complement one another and generally agree that motivation is responsible for determining human behaviour. According to Gopalan, et al. (2017), motivation provides the motive for the human beings to react and fulfil their needs.

The current study invokes the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories belonging to the education domain. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsically motivated activities are performed voluntarily without any external drive. Intrinsic motivation is triggered by challenges, curiosity, control and fantasy. In education, lots of will power and positive attitude is very much required to sustain the motivation. Moreover, Pérez-López and Contero (2013) claim that intrinsic motivation promotes academic achievement and also directs an individual to participate in academic activities only to experience fun, and uniqueness.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2016; Legault, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000), coercion (Riaz, Rambli, Salleh, & Mushtaq, 2010; Tohidi & Jabbari 2012) and penalization (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012). For example, a student completing a writing assignment just because his or her parents threatened to ground him is vastly different from the student who does the writing assignment because he believes it will help him to get into his chosen profession. However, it is interesting to note that, according to Tohidi and Jabbari (2012), extrinsic motivation can gradually transform into intrinsic motivation as the learning process continues or as the student gradually develops a high level of will power and engagement in the activity they are undertaking. It is also important to note, however, that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are needed in a learning process (Li, & Lynch, 2016; Liu, Cheng & Huang, 2011; Ozelik, Cagiltay & Ozelik, 2013).

Literature review

Numerous studies have explored the role of motivation in learning or in education. In terms of academic writing, Payne (2012) administered a 37-item Likert-type Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire (AWMQ) instrument to 69 students enrolled in undergraduate English courses at The University of Georgia. The findings showed that students who read more were found to have significantly higher scores on the AWMQ than students who read less. Humanities majors had higher scores than majors in other areas. Males and females did not differ significantly in their AWMQ scores.

Motivation to write and perform better was further found to be enhanced by self-regulated learning. First, the writing process consists of the self-regulatory mechanisms, such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, and revision, which are essential for effectively accomplishing the writing task (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1985). Second, Santagelo, and Harris (2008) demonstrated that the self-regulation model effectively assisted low performing students to improve in writing because they learnt strategies that helped them to independently manage the writing process (See also Graham & Harris, 2003; Soureshjani, 2013). Furthermore, Teng and Zhang (2017) in China found that metacognitive and cognitive strategies were directly correlated with scores on argumentative essays; while Csizér and Tankó (2015) investigated the self-regulatory strategy use of English language undergraduates at a Hungarian university and reported moderate levels of self-regulatory strategy use. Moreover, Ching (2002) reported on a study in which 29 undergraduate students who took part in a 7-week course on writing strategy use developed in their use of self-regulatory strategy skills, with the most prominent increase being found in academic essay planning. During this course, the learners' self-efficacy in writing also improved and helped the learners to positively respond to negative criticism. The relationship between self-regulation, motivation and writing was also confirmed in a study by Soureshjani (2013) in which two questionnaires on self-regulation and motivation were distributed among 80 Persian EFL language learners. The findings of this study revealed a strong, positive relationship between self-regulation, motivation and writing performance. The study also showed that motivation was a better predictor, compared to self-regulation, of the students' writing performance.

The present study

The above studies have revealed the impact of self-regulation and motivation on writing as well as the relationship between these constructs. Similarly, the present study examined the university students' self-regulation and motivation albeit in the context of academic essay writing. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between these constructs and proficiency. The current study therefore specifically addressed the following research questions:

Research questions

1. What are the students' levels of academic essay writing self-regulation, motivation, and proficiency?
2. How is the relationship between the students' self-regulation, motivation and academic essay writing proficiency?

Methodology

Motivation and self-regulation profiles in the current study were respectively measured using the Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire (AWMQ) adapted from Payne (2012), and the Wilby (2022) questionnaire as detailed below. Also described below is the research background of this study as well as the participants' demographic information.

Research context

The current study was conducted at the beginning of Semester 2 prior to the discussion of the academic essay writing topic in the compulsory first year Academic and Professional Communication course coded COM 152. At the time of the current study the course provided an opportunity for the students to write academic essays and professional texts such as reports and letters. The essay topics covered different academic genres such as expository, narrative, argumentative, and descriptive essays with emphasis on key features of academic writing such as paragraphing, structure, formality and grammar. Notably, this study investigated academic essay writing motivation and self-regulation in general and did not pay attention to any specific academic essay genre. It is arguably important to mention that this study took place in Botswana where English is a second language because of its official use in education and offices. Botswana is a Southern African country neighbouring South Africa to the south and east, Zambia and Zimbabwe to the north, and Namibia to the west.

Participants

A total of 174 students who participated in this study had enrolled in different Social Sciences subjects such as: Economics (6.4%, n=11), Law (32.4%, n=56), Political Science and Administration Studies (2.3%, n=4), Population Studies (1.2%, n=2), Psychology (12.1%, n=21), Social Work (16.2%, n=28), Sociology (5.8%, n=10), Statistics (0.6%, n=1), and others (5.8%, n=10). Majority of these students (97%, n=163) were first year students while minority were respectively in year 2 (1.8%, n=3) and year 3 and above (1.2%, n=2). It should be noted that the post year one students referred to above were repeating the first year COM 152 course, also referred to above, for various reasons such as fail and repeat or disqualification from exemption. The demographic questionnaire showed that 31% of the students were male (n=53) and 69% (n=118) were female. 98.8% (n=167) fell within the 16-29 age bracket while (1.2%, n=2) were between 30 and 40. Notably, 92.4% (n=158) of these students indicated that English was their second language while 7.6% (n=13) claimed that it was their mother tongue. The students who participated in this study were selected using convenience sampling technique capitalizing on their accessibility or proximity to the researcher. However, the patterns emerging from the results of this study are important for information purposes only. It should also be noted that the convenience sampling technique was found by the author to be suitable for this study because, according to Suen, et al. (2014), it is applicable to both qualitative and quantitative studies.

Instruments

The participants volunteered to complete the two questionnaires referred to below.

The self-regulation questionnaire

The self-regulation questionnaire adapted from Wilby (2022) consisted of 13 items, which according to Wilby (2022) measured the participants' metacognitive strategies during, while, and after the writing task. Metacognitive strategies are defined by Anderson (2002:2) as "thinking about thinking" and according to Anderson (2005:760) these strategies "relate to a learner's reflections and awareness of the self-regulatory strategies that they employ during a task" (Also cited in Wilby, 2020). Anderson

(2005:760) further indicates that “Reflections on one’s cognitive processes during a writing task allows the students to control their use of strategies, which leads to a greater utilization of self-regulatory strategies that can assist them in successfully completing a task” (Also cited in Wilby, 2020). The reliability cronbach of .82 (T1) and .89 (T2) in this questionnaire was computed in for example the question ‘While writing an academic essay, I reread my text and make changes if necessary’ (Wilby, 2020). The self-regulation scale used in this study included questions about planning, monitoring, self-control, and self-reflection. These questions according to Wilby (2022) were based on items in the metacognitive strategy use in writing scale from Boekaerts and Rozendaal (2007). The questionnaire was adapted by adding the term ‘essay’ or making the questions specifically talk about academic essay writing instead of academic writing in general. In the current study the students were required to tick or place a cross on a 4-point Likert Scale in which 4 quantifiably measured the student’s strong agreement with a statement on the questionnaire and 3 measured agreement; 2 disagreement; and 1 strong disagreement.

Motivation questionnaire

The students’ motivation to write academic essays was measured using the Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire (AWMQ) adapted from Payne (2012). As was the case with the questionnaire above, the AWMQ questionnaire was adapted by adding the term ‘academic essay’ or making the questions specifically talk about academic essay writing instead of academic writing in general. The AWMQ is a 37-item 4-point Likert-type questionnaire that according to Payne (2012) considers various aspects of writing motivation and was influenced by existing instruments such as the writing apprehension questionnaire developed by Daly and Miller (1975). The students were requested to similarly tick or put a cross to indicate their strong agreement (measuring 4), agreement (3), disagreement (2), and strong disagreement (1) to any statement in the questionnaire. According to Payne (2012), the content validity of the AWMQ was ensured by consulting academic writing experts as well as by consulting literature and other existing academic writing instruments.

Data collection procedures

The Self-regulation questionnaire and the Academic Writing Motivation Questionnaire (AWMQ) were together administered to the students in the researcher’s two different classes. As previously indicated the students were chosen for convenient purposes owing to the fact that this is not an experimental study and its findings are not going to be generalised across all university students in Botswana. The questionnaires were completed respectively in one sitting that lasted for about 45 minutes. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires voluntarily and to ask questions where they did not understand. They were also informed that the information they provided in the questionnaires was going to be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. This was said before they could complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were then collected by the researcher for processing.

Data analysis

Both the Self-regulation questionnaire and the AWMQ were analysed using SPSS by calculating descriptive statistics' means, standard deviations and correlations. First, the means of the different variables were calculated and compared. Second, the relationship between the motivation, self-regulation, and proficiency was calculated using the Pearson Product Moment.

Results and discussion

The findings of this study are presented according to the research questions of this study which sought to measure the students' levels of academic essay writing motivation, self-regulation, and proficiency; as well as to compute the relationship between the students' academic essay writing motivation, self-regulation and their writing proficiency.

Academic essay writing proficiency

Academic essay writing proficiency was measured using descriptive statistics as already indicated. Table 1 shows that 153 of the participants self-rated their academic essay writing proficiency as follows: Excellent (4.6%, n=7); good (58.2%, n=89); moderate (33.3%, n=51); and poor (3.9%, n=6). As the results show, majority of the students rated their writing proficiency as Good. However, cumulatively 96.1% (n=147) they regarded their academic essay writing proficiency as above average, leaving only 3.9% (n=6) who thought their writing was poor. This is a good sign that, all things being equal, the students were capable of improving their academic essay writing. However, it should be noted that proficiency self-rating of the students reflected here does not necessarily suggest their motivation to write academic essays. It is also worth noting that the participants' proficiency level did not reflect their overall academic learning potential but, as indicated by Oxford and Green (1995), reflected their self-perceived success in academic essay writing at the time of this study.

Table 1: Writing proficiency levels of the participants

	Proficiency			
	Excellent	Good	Moderate	Poor
N	7	89	51	6
%	4.6	58.2	33.3	3.9

Overall motivation for academic essay writing

Using a scale of 1 equals 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'agree' and 4 'strongly agree', the participants of this study recorded an overall motivation mean level of 2.93 (n=173, SD=0.405). This finding suggests that the students were not keenly motivated to write academic essays because they slightly fell short of agreeing, or their responses recorded what could arguably be regarded as an average mean below the 3 for 'agree' in the Likert scale. This is not surprising because academic essay writing is a challenging skill, especially for beginning university students. This lack of strong motivation is further evident in the Table 2 AWMQ Items 1: 'I enjoy writing academic essays

($M=2.71$, $N=173$, $SD=0.745$); Item 9 ‘I like to participate in written online discussions about academic essays’ ($M=2.26$, $N=171$, $SD=0.878$); Item 17 ‘I like classes that require a lot of academic essay writing’ ($M=2.16$, $N=171$, $SD=0.850$). To a certain extent, the findings of this study corroborate those of Lee et al. (2018) that in Hong Kong secondary school students generally showed lack of motivation to write in English. The similarity is in that in Lee’s study, as is the case with the current study, the students need to be increasingly motivated to achieve better performance in writing. It should be noted though that the current study was focusing on academic essay writing.

Interestingly, despite their moderate motivation, the students valued academic essay writing as shown in the following above average responses: Item 5 ‘Being a good essay writer will help me do well academically’ ($M=3.62$, $N=172$, $SD=0.677$); Item 8 ‘I put a lot of effort into my academic essay writing’ ($M=3.34$, $N=172$, $SD=0.615$); Item 14 ‘I am more likely to succeed if I can write essays well’ ($M=3.54$, $N=173$, $SD=0.651$). As already indicated, it could be argued that the academic essay writing motivation of the students who participated in this study could increase if they were given the right attention and training.

The above results also suggest that the students’ motivation for academic essay writing was more extrinsic than intrinsic as shown by the following extrinsic motivation items: Items 10: ‘I like to get feedback from my lecturers on my essay writing’ ($M=3.40$, $n=173$, $SD=0.798$); Item 21: ‘It is important to me that I make high marks on essay writing assignment’ ($M=3.62$, $n=170$, $SD=0.605$); Item 30: ‘Being a good essay writer is important in getting a good job’ ($M=3.21$, $n=170$, $SD=0.844$); Item 20: ‘Being a better essay writer will help me in my career’ ($M=3.49$, $n=170$, $SD=0.690$); Item 32: ‘I want the highest grade in the class on an essay writing assignment’ ($M=3.44$, $n=169$, $SD=0.754$) and Item 34: ‘I want others to recognize me as a good academic essay writer’ ($M=3.11$, $n=171$, $SD=0.767$). Whether the students’ essay writing motivation would be decreased if the above motivating factors were reduced is worthy of further research.

Table 2: Motivation for essay writing questionnaire

ITEM	M	N	SD
1. I enjoy writing essays.	2.71	173	0.745
2. I like to write down my thoughts.	2.95	172	0.867
3. I use correct grammar in my writing.	2.90	171	0.708
4. I complete an essay writing assignment even when it is difficult.	3.33	173	0.691
5. Being a good essay writer will help me do well academically.	3.62	172	0.677
6. I write essays as well as other students.	3.02	171	0.731
7. I write more than the minimum on essay writing assignments.	2.80	168	0.850
8. I put a lot of effort into my essay writing.	3.34	172	0.615
9. I like to participate in written online discussions about essays.	2.26	171	0.878
10. I like to get feedback from my lecturers on my essay writing.	3.40	173	0.798
11. I am able to clearly express my ideas when writing essays.	3.12	171	0.713
12. I easily focus on what I am writing in the essay.	3.01	172	0.757
13. I like my essay writing to be graded.	3.37	171	0.758
14. I am more likely to succeed if I can write essays well.	3.54	173	0.651
15. It is easy for me to write good essays.	2.60	172	0.722
16. I enjoy essay writing assignments.	2.62	173	0.824
17. I like classes that require a lot of essay writing.	2.16	171	0.850
18. I plan how I am going to write the essay before I write it.	3.25	171	0.658
19. Becoming a better essay writer is important to me.	3.37	171	0.743
20. Being a better essay writer will help me in my career.	3.49	170	0.690
21. It is important to me that I make high marks on essay writing assignment.	3.62	170	0.605
22. I enjoy writing essay assignments that challenge me.	2.62	170	0.948
23. I revise my essay before submitting it.	3.23	172	0.718
24. Punctuation is easy for me.	3.03	171	0.808
25. I enjoy essay writing argumentative essays.	2.58	170	0.889
26. I like to write essays even if my writing will not be graded.	1.94	172	0.856
27. I like others to read the essays I have written.	2.43	173	1.030
28. I enjoy writing research essays.	2.57	171	0.907
29. I would like to have more opportunities to write essays in classes.	2.43	170	0.947
30. Being a good essay writer is important in getting a good job.	3.21	170	0.844
31. I practice writing in order to improve my essay writing skills.	2.92	171	0.822
32. I want the highest grade in the class on an essay writing assignment.	3.44	169	0.754
33. I would rather write an essay than answer multiple-choice questions.	2.09	172	1.036
34. I want others to recognize me as a good essay writer.	3.11	171	0.767
35. Spelling is easy for me.	2.93	171	0.771
36. Choosing the right word is easy for me.	2.77	171	0.797
37. I am motivated to write essays in my classes.	2.53	172	0.847

Adapted from: Payne, A. R. (2012). *Development of the academic writing motivation questionnaire* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia).

Relationship between motivation and proficiency

The results in Table 3 show that, using the 4-point Likert scale, the mean scores for the relationship between motivation and proficiency levels is respectively around 3 representing 'agree'. The 'poor' category is an exception with the 'disagree' mean of 2.30. In other words, comparatively students who self-rated their academic essay writing proficiency as higher generally agreed that they were more motivated to write essays. The Pearson Product Moment results showed a significant but strong negative correlation between motivation and essay writing proficiency, $r ([153]) = [-0.30] = [<0.001]$. Even though the students' motivation to write essays was not that high the findings showed that this construct was related to proficiency. These findings are therefore arguably similar to those of Lee et al. (2018) who found a relationship between motivation and English writing competence among Chinese university students, although in his case the relationship was positive.

Table 3: Writing motivation by proficiency

Writings Proficiency	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Excellent	3.260	7	0.467
Good	3.026	89	0.370
Moderate	2.821	51	0.374
Poor	2.304	5	0.153

Overall self-regulation in essay writing proficiency

Again using a scale of 1 equals 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'agree' and 4 'strongly agree', the participants of this study recorded an overall self-regulation mean level of 3.20 (n=169, SD=0.497). This finding suggests that the students who participated in this study regulated their essay writing although they needed to do it more. As shown in Table 4, a closer look at the individual items shows that the highest scores have to do with the actual grammatical and quality aspect of the essay (Item 4: 'While writing an academic essay, I check my text for spelling and grammatical errors' (M=3.54, N =167, SD=0.209). This suggests that the students prioritised grammatical errors and spelling compared to other aspects of essay writing.

Table 4: Self-regulation in essay writing questionnaire

ITEM	M	N	SD
1. Before writing an academic essay, I think about how to organise my essay.	3.21	169	0.671
2. While writing an academic essay, I check if my text fits my plan.	3.01	160	0.549
3. While writing an academic essay, I check whether everything I wanted to say is in the text.	3.22	169	0.612
4. While writing an academic essay, I check my text for spelling and grammatical errors.	3.54	167	0.209
5. While writing an academic essay, I check if my argument is logical.	3.20	168	0.575
6. While writing an academic essay, I check if the organisation of the essay is clear.	3.23	167	0.601
7. While writing an academic essay, I check that I have fully answered the question.	3.26	168	0.602
8. While writing an academic essay, I check if I have correctly acknowledged the work of other authors.	3.09	169	0.717
9. While writing an academic essay, If I am not satisfied with what I have written, I make changes immediately.	3.16	167	0.640
10. While writing an academic essay, I change things that I have written that I'm not satisfied with.	3.11	168	0.633
11. While writing an academic essay, I reread my text and make changes if necessary.	3.24	168	0.631
12. While writing, I think of how I could have done better.	3.16	169	0.743
13. While writing, I think about the improvements I could make in my next essay.	3.21	169	0.698

Adapted from: Wilby, J. (2020). Motivation, self-regulation, and writing achievement on a university foundation programme: A programme evaluation study. *Language Teaching Research*, 1362168820917323.

Relationship between self-regulation and essay writing proficiency

Unlike for motivation, all the proficiency levels in the self-regulation variable recorded the mean of around 3 although the 'Poor' category recorded a border line case of 2.54 between 'agree' and 'disagree'. Furthermore, Table 5 shows that majority of the students regraded their writing proficiency by self-regulation as moderate to excellent (96%, n=147) as was the case with motivation. The Pearson Product Moment results showed a significant but strong negative correlation between self-regulation and essay writing proficiency, $r([153]) = [-0.27] = [<0.001]$.

Table 5: Writing self-regulation by proficiency

Essay Writing Proficiency	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Excellent	3.2430	7	0.478
Good	3.3463	89	0.523
Moderate	3.0598	51	0.310
Poor	2.5385	5	0.344

The above findings confirm previous research that self-regulated learning correlates with other assessment factors such as achievement goals, and subjective task value.

Limitations and implications

The following limitations are observed in this study. First, the sample consists of only social sciences students and so the findings may not be transferable to other faculties. Therefore future comparison with other faculties may yield a richer level of data. Second, the small sample size also limits the generalizability of the findings of this study across all tertiary institutions in Botswana. Therefore the findings of this study should be interpreted tentatively. Third, the results of this study are based on student's self-reports and are therefore tantamount to bias as observed by Virtanen and Nevgi (2010).

Notwithstanding the above limitations, the findings of the current study should still be instrumental in encouraging educators and lecturers, who as in the context of Botswana still have to improve their efforts to boost their students' academic essay writing motivation and self-regulation. The findings show that the students' academic essay writing motivation and self-regulation were at the time of this study within the average range and therefore the students needed to be assisted in this regard. As observed by Bai and Guo (2021), lecturers do not design and conduct classroom instructions in a way that will effectively help the students understand the impact of self-regulation and motivation on academic essay writing proficiency. Bai and Guo (2021) argue that skilled writers do plan and revise their work at the discourse level while the unskilled ones focus on the words and phrases. Another implication of this study is that the students were probably not satisfactorily given enough opportunities to write essays, as well as more constructive feedback to boost their confidence, and to sustain their self-regulation and motivation to write academic essays. This is another area that needs improvement, especially in the context of Botswana. Finally, the students can be helped to become more intrinsically motivated to find joy in writing academic essays by increasing their autonomy and building their sense of competence in this skill. This will of course be tied to their extrinsic motivation through encouragement and improved performance in academic essay writing. As previously indicated, the findings showed that the students were more extrinsically than intrinsically motivated to write academic essays for reasons provided earlier on.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the current study buttresses previous findings that there is a relationship between writing motivation, self-regulation, and proficiency. This study is a worthwhile

contribution to reduce the dearth of research noted by Bai, Shen, and Mei (2020), that writing self-regulation is not fully explored despite its importance in students' learning and achievement. As also observed by Yu, Lo, and Lincoln (2017), self-regulation in L2 learning is still a fairly new concept, especially in ESL and EFL writing.

With a view to the above, the following recommendations are made in this study: First, students should be equipped with motivation and self-regulated academic essay writing strategies so that they can improve in this area of study. As indicated above, their academic essay writing motivation and self-regulation were at the time of this study within the average range and therefore they needed to be assisted to improve in these areas. Second, more research is needed to augment the scarcity of studies on writing self-regulation and motivation, especially in writing at tertiary level. Third, an increased use of a variety of research approaches or methods in this topic will yield more data which will provide more insights to the educators and lecturers to enrich the teaching strategies they use to motivate the students and to help them become more self-reliant writers. Finally, more research on how the technology or online platforms can be effectively used in the teaching of essay writing will provide more opportunities for increasing the students' writing motivation and self-regulation. This is because the findings of this study showed that the students were not that satisfactorily motivated to use online platforms.

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