Drawing about Writing: Exploring Egyptian Middle School Students’ Writing Motivation and Perceptions

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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Drawing about Writing: Exploring Egyptian Middle School Students’ Writing Motivation and Perceptions

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Applied Linguistics

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts

In Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

By Maryam George ElBayady

Under the Supervision of Dr. Atta Gebril

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To my parents, who have supported me without fail, listened to me without judgment, and love me to no end.
Acknowledgments

Despite the hard work that it took to complete this thesis, I found support in every corner. Above all, I am thankful for the comfort of faith; when the process seemed to be unraveling into something much harder, faith is what held me together. Whenever things would go wrong, the pieces tended to reorganize themselves and fall wonderfully back into place. I thank God for that.

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have shown up for me without fail. I thank all of you for loving me unconditionally and, most importantly, celebrating my triumphs.
Abstract

The principal aim of this study is to explore Egyptian middle school students’ perceptions of their writing experiences using artistic expression, specifically drawings. It also aims to understand their levels of writing motivation using the Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS) (Wright et al., 2019). Finally, it examines the relationships among participants’ perceptions, motivation, and their narrative writing performance. The view that students’ voices are valuable to research geared towards school improvement has largely propelled this study (Bland, 2018; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). In addition, due to the limited literature about middle school students enrolled at private Egyptian schools, this study fills a research gap by venturing into largely unexplored avenues relating to private education in Egypt.

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection, utilizing drawings to serve as expressions of student perceptions, the Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS) to gather information about their writing motivation, and narrative writing samples to measure their writing performance. The total number of participants was 49 students from grades six, seven, and eight who were enrolled at a private school in Cairo. The qualitative data pertaining to students’ drawings pointed to three general categories of perceptions, namely positive, negative, and mixed perceptions. A closer look brought to light more specific themes, including different types of emotions expressed in the drawings, such as joy, sadness, anxiety, and combinations of these. One of the major contributors to students’ mixed emotions towards writing was a perceived lack of choice. Specific themes also included students’ confidence in themselves as writers, their levels of engagement, who they portrayed in their drawings, and the different ways through which they expressed their perceptions. Moreover, the quantitative SWAS data yielded insights into different aspects of students’ writing motivation. For example,
participants mostly wished they wrote less in school despite having relatively positive feelings about writing. In addition, even though most students believed that finishing writing tasks is important and that improving as a writer is a positive thing, a few number of students reported enjoying checking their writing for errors. Regarding the final research question, which was concerned with the relationships among students’ perceptions, writing motivation, and their narrative writing performance, the findings reflected moderate, but statistically significant correlations between most motivational variables and students’ narrative writing scores. In addition, in order to explore the relationship between perceptions and writing performance, four different student “vignettes” were constructed: positive perceptions- high performance, positive perceptions- low performance, negative perceptions- high performance, and negative perceptions- low performance. These two variables were also cross-referenced with the four students’ SWAS results. The purpose of this analysis was to explore the interactions among student perceptions, writing motivation, and performance. Interestingly, some features of those students’ writing mirrored the quality of their perceptions. For example, the student who fell into the positive perceptions- high performance category made mention of self-regulation strategies in her writing, while the participant who fell into the negative perceptions- low performance category showed a sense of apathy in her narrative composition, which was reflected in her writing style.

These results have implications for writing instruction. For example, teachers are encouraged to develop their students’ sense of autonomy by implementing collaborative writing activities, introducing self-regulation learning strategies, and fostering open communication in the classroom. In addition, recommendations are made for how to improve writers’ sense of confidence and raise student engagement with writing tasks. Other stakeholders who might
benefit from these results include writing textbook designers, language assessment specialists, and also language programs at large.

*Keywords:* Writing perceptions, Writing motivation, Writing performance, Writing attitude, Self-efficacy, Self-concept, Beliefs about writing, Autonomy, Writing engagement, Drawings, Artistic expression
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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

EVT: Expectancy-Value Theory.

L1: First Language.

L2: Second Language.

SRL: Self-Regulated Learning.

SWAS: Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Writing is a “phenomenon” that is deeply connected to the human experience. Not only is it associated with abilities, such as literacy, but it also manifests itself in social conventions, institutions, and human relationships (Cumming, 2016, p.65). The variability and importance of writing as a social practice can be seen in the way learners around the world are constantly creating texts that differ according to their communicative purpose and the social context in which they are produced (Cumming, 2016). Writing is therefore widely recognized as a fundamental literacy skill that is usually taught to students at the earliest stages of their education (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2013). It is also a complex phenomenon that is often viewed as a process of “individual problem-solving” (Hyland, 2003, p. 18) characterized by a cognitive struggle to convey meaning. Hayes’s (2012) adult writing model, for example, emphasizes the inner-works and strategic process of the competent writer, who ideally sets goals and generates, evaluates, translates, transcribes, and revises ideas (Hayes & Olinghouse, 2015). Furthermore, the model was adjusted for younger writers who are in their early school years and encounter their own set of unique writing challenges. Viewed through a socio constructivist lens, writing entails a balance between cognitive subskills and an awareness of “socially mediated acts” (Hirvela & Belcher, 2016, p.590). In a similar vein, genre pedagogies aim to equip students with an understanding of different text types rather than “the strategies of good writers” (Hyland, 2003, p.21). Less priority is given to the cognitive dimensions of writing and more time is spent exploring the creation of meaning in context (Hyland, 2003). Writing is then viewed as a social
activity that centers on text producers’ awareness of their context, which includes their readers (Hyland, 2003).

Due to this variability in writing pedagogies, models, and approaches, writing challenges are not uncommon. These challenges are further magnified when learners are expected to write in a second language (L2) (Ahmed, 2010a). Egyptian students, for example, encounter context-specific writing difficulties spanning well beyond acquiring linguistic competence (Ahmed, 2010a). Despite this, not only are students expected to meet set standards, but their writing ability is also routinely and rigorously assessed. Yet, how often do we, as teachers, stop to ask ourselves how our learners feel about writing? Since students’ writing performance significantly contributes to their success on many high-stakes assessments and in other areas of life, it is important that teachers “take the temperature of their classrooms” (Zumbrunn et al., 2017, p. 668). This entails gauging how students feel about writing, their writing beliefs, and how they perceive themselves as writers (Zumbrunn et al., 2017). All of these factors could contribute to their motivation (Wright et al., 2019). Understanding how students experience writing helps instructors diagnose their needs and therefore cultivate a positive classroom environment (Zumbrunn et al., 2017).

The current study takes a genuine interest in the inner-world of the student. It considers their existing level of motivation as well as their perception of their writing environment the starting point for evaluating and bettering writing instructional practices. In this way, the student’s voice is extended in their education. This study also attempts to fill a gap in the literature about Egyptian students, specifically those enrolled at private schools. These private schools, often labeled as “international schools”, represent a unique educational climate in a country where the English language is becoming increasingly relevant to professional life. With
this research, I aimed to understand Egyptian middle school students’ perceptions of writing, how motivated they are to write, and how their perceptions and levels of motivation interact with their writing performance.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 The Relationship between Writing Motivation and Performance

Writing motivation refers to “the variety of reasons a child may choose to engage in a writing task or decide to take steps to avoid that task” (Wright et al., 2020, p. 153). Writing motivation research has spanned over four and a half decades (Abdel Latif, 2020). Motivation influences the extent to which children will engage with tasks, which is why it is also closely related to achievement (Vecchione et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2020). Recent findings suggest that students’ low writing performance is linked to issues with writing motivation (Wright et al., 2019; Abdel Latif, 2020). Further evidence of this conclusion can be found in Hayes’s (2012) writing model, which regards motivation as the top predictor of the subsequent cognitive processes involved in writing.

Writing motivation is a multifaceted construct with a narrower history of development compared to broader constructs, such as L2 learning motivation (Abdel Latif, 2020). Researchers have, however, attempted to categorize the different motivational variables involved in writing. For example, Daly (1985) discerned between writing motivational beliefs and perceptions that are long-lasting and those that are temporary and situation-specific. Hidi and Boscolo (2007) highlighted the “motivational problems” involved in writing, which include interest, one’s perceptions of their ability to write (self-efficacy), self-regulation, and the social dimension of writing (p.145). In a more recent model of writing motivation, Wright et al. (2019) defined
writing motivation in terms of beliefs and pre-dispositions. More specifically, beliefs about oneself as a writer, beliefs about writing, and attitudes towards writing are all thought to contribute to one’s writing motivation. Based on the literature and the theoretical models it has to offer, it can be concluded that “writing motivation” is an overarching term encompassing one’s like or dislike for writing, perceptions of the value of writing, the feelings experienced during writing situations (and how they are regulated), beliefs about oneself as a writer, and one’s goals for learning how to write (Abdel Latif, 2020).

To date, eight main motivational constructs have emerged across studies, namely, “writing apprehension, attitude, anxiety, self-efficacy, self-concept, outcome expectancy/achievement goal orientation, perceived value of writing, and motivational regulation of writing” (Abdel Latif, 2020, p.4). Graham et al. (2017) found that writing self-efficacy and attitudes (two motivational variables) both significantly and collectively predicted fourth graders’ narrative writing performance. It is worth noting that this genre of writing was chosen on the basis of familiarity, as in, it was widely practiced in the participating fourth-grade classrooms (Graham et al., 2017). In a similar vein, Troia et al. (2013) provided narrative writing prompts in their study involving elementary, middle, and high school students. That is because this genre is widely researched in the writing literature (in fact, Troia et al. (2013) posited that it is the most widely researched genre), it is emphasized in the curriculum across all grades, it is used in most norm-referenced writing tests, and it understates the relevance of content knowledge for writing performance (Troia et al., 2013). Among the motivational variables that were found to predict narrative writing quality were task value/interest (one’s personal involvement in a task) and attributions (the reasons that individuals attach to success or failure) (Troia et al., 2013). Wright et al.’s (2019) model of writing motivation, which will be adopted for
this study, takes into account four motivational constructs: writing self-efficacy and self-concept, beliefs about writing, and writing attitudes. The following sections will focus on each of these variables and its connection to writing performance.

1.2.2 The Relationship between Writing Self-Beliefs and Performance

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) posits that individuals are more likely to engage with a task if they believe they have some chance of success (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Therefore, writing self-beliefs are at the heart of motivation. These beliefs are separated into two conceptually distinct categories: self-efficacy and self-concept (Wright et al., 2019). Whereas self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s confidence in their ability to plan and execute a task while persevering in the face of challenges, self-concept is a holistic view of oneself and their ability in a particular domain (Bandura, 1977; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Troia et al. (2013) posit that writing self-efficacy is the strongest contributor to writing outcomes compared to other motivational variables. Prat-Sala and Redford (2012) found stronger correlations between writing self-efficacy and essay writing performance in sophomore (rather than freshman) psychology students, which highlights the relationship between writing experience and awareness of competence. Bruning et al. (2013) conceptualized writing self-efficacy as a multidimensional construct, proposing a three-factor model which takes into account the following aspects of individuals’ writing experiences: ideation (writers’ confidence in their ability to generate ideas), conventions (their perception of their ability to follow commonly accepted writing rules), and self-regulation (their confidence in their ability to regulate their emotions while writing). Bruning et al. (2013) and Zumbrunn et al. (2020) both found that, of all three subscales, self-efficacy for writing conventions, which is concerned with participants’ confidence in their ability to follow writing rules, most strongly predicted their actual writing
performance. A potential explanation for this would be teachers’ overemphasis on mechanics in writing instruction (Zumbrunn et al., 2020). In addition, current research about multifactorial models of writing self-efficacy and writing performance has yielded contradictory results (Zumbrunn et al., 2020), which could be attributed to how writing performance is operationalized. Bruning et al. (2013), for example, relied on high-stakes assessments and self-reported data for middle and high school students’ writing scores, which were examined in relation to self-efficacy for writing. Self-efficacy was measured using Bruning et al.’s (2013) Self-Efficacy for Writing Scale (SEWS), which is a 16-item survey that measures participants’ self-efficacy for ideation, conventions, and self-regulation. Results showed that all three self-efficacy factors related to students’ writing examination and self-reported grades. By contrast, Zumbrunn et al. (2020) collected elementary and high school students’ classroom performance grades, which were examined in relation to their writing self-efficacy using an adapted version of Bruning et al.’s (2013) SEWS. The adapted version consists of nine instead of 16 items. Only self-efficacy for conventions was found to significantly relate to students’ writing performance scores, which contradicted Bruning et al.’s (2013) findings. A possible explanation for this could be the inconsistent scoring procedures employed across studies (Zumbrunn et al., 2020). Like self-efficacy, self-concept is thought to predict academic achievement (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Varying levels of self-concept may be easier to observe in populations who face context-specific literacy challenges, such as Spanish heritage learners in the United States (Beaudrie, 2018). Due to this population’s limited exposure to their heritage language, linguistic insecurities may arise. It could be useful to look into studies whose participants are particularly vulnerable to linguistic insecurities because this accentuates the relationship between writing self-concept and performance. Another example includes students with special educational needs (Stranghöner et
al., 2021). In both cases, it was confirmed that self-concept predicts writing (and reading) performance.

The literature emphasizes the relationship between individuals’ beliefs about themselves as writers and their writing performance. Two key concepts related to self-beliefs have been considered across the studies I reviewed: self-efficacy and self-concept. Whereas some researchers have focused mainly on the relationship between individuals’ self-efficacy and writing performance (Bruning et al., 2013; Zumbrunn et al., 2020), others have explored the contribution of self-concept to participants’ writing performance (Beaudrie, 2018; Stranghöner et al., 2021). It is worth noting that self-efficacy for writing has often been considered a multidimensional construct. For example, Bruning et al. (2013) took into account three efficacy-related dimensions, namely ideation, conventions, and self-regulation. The contributions of these individual factors to writing performance have varied across studies. These inconsistencies could be attributed to differences across studies, such as how writing performance is operationalized.

1.2.3 The Relationship between Beliefs about Writing and Performance

In addition to writing self-beliefs, educational psychologists are interested in students’ beliefs about writing and their effects on performance. EVT posits that individuals will engage in a task if they believe it to be valuable (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). White and Bruning (2005) suggested that these “implicit beliefs”, which they categorized as transmissional and transactional beliefs, impacted students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioral writing process and thus influenced performance. Individuals who hold transmissional beliefs are thought to view writing as a means of reporting information from external sources (e.g., Good writers include a lot of quotes from authorities in their writing), while those with transactional beliefs conceive of writing in a more purposeful way and generally display higher cognitive and affective
engagement with writing tasks (e.g., *Writing’s main purpose is getting information across to readers*) (White & Bruning, 2005, p.177). Students with high transactional beliefs are thought to produce higher quality texts (Sanders-Reio, 2014; White & Bruning, 2005). Similarly, Villalón et al. (2015) suggested that some individuals hold an epistemic view of writing, which means that they believe it to be a learning tool, while others adopt a reproductive view and conceive of academic writing as a mechanical process. The latter are more likely to base their understanding of good writing on adherence to rules and conventions, have a tendency to “tell” information, and give little priority to planning and revision (Villalón et al., 2015). Epistemic writing conceptions (e.g., *Writing is a complex, recursive process*) were shown to positively contribute to students’ writing performance (Villalón et al., 2015, p.657). These findings could be interpreted within the framework of Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), which emphasizes utility as one aspect of task value. In other words, it can be concluded that participants who held an epistemic view of writing (or, in terms of EVT, found writing to be useful), engaged with the writing task more, and thus produced higher quality texts.

### 1.2.4 The Relationship between Writing Attitude and Performance

Writing attitudes reflect an individual’s “motivational perceptions”, which entail the extent to which one likes/dislikes writing (Abdel Latif, 2020, p.11). Despite the wealth of research that conceptualizes writing attitudes as a purely affective construct, there is growing evidence that it is a meta-construct composed of affective, cognitive, and motivational components (Ekholm et al., 2017). Whereas some researchers have considered attitude and motivation to be theoretically distinct (Troia et al., 2012), others have suggested that attitude is a sub-construct of motivation (Graham et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2019). The latter suggestion is in line with the theoretical framework used for this study, which considers motivation a
multidimensional construct that includes attitude. Learners’ attitudes towards writing differ from their beliefs about writing in that the former represent more stable judgments rooted in students’ previous writing experiences, whereas the latter are context-specific (Wright et al., 2020).

Bearing in mind the conceptual ambiguities surrounding writing attitudes, evidence from existing literature demonstrates a positive relationship between students’ writing attitudes and their writing performance (Ekholm et al., 2017). Graham et al. (2007), for example, relied on self-reported data to understand first and third graders’ attitudes towards writing. Worth noting is the fact that each survey item began with the stem: “How do you feel”, and was followed by phrases such as, “about writing for fun at home.” The way that the items are formulated further reinforces Graham et al.’s (2007) perspective that attitudes are an affective construct. Results showed that students who have a positive attitude towards writing exert more effort in writing tasks (for example, by choosing to write in their free time) and are therefore more likely to be successful than those who have negative writing attitudes (Graham et al., 2007). In a similar vein, Lee (2013) found that positive writing attitudes correlated with better writing performance. Interestingly, Graham et al. (2012) found no significant relationship between first-graders’ writing attitude and performance, which could be attributed to the participants’ limited writing experience. This finding majorly contributed to deciding the target population for the current study, which focused on sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. As learners grow older and acquire more writing experience, their attitudes become more stable (Graham et al., 2007; Wright et al., 2020). It can be argued, then, that positive writing experiences are fundamental to the formation of positive writing attitudes (Petric, 2002). However, attitude may contradict with writing behavior. Petric (2002) used Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior to explain that having a positive attitude towards a writing strategy may not spontaneously lead to its use because other
factors may intervene, such as students’ perceived inadequacy or lack of control due to looming deadlines. This demonstrates how the relationship between writing attitude and performance may be mediated by another motivational variable, such as self-efficacy (an individual’s belief that they can successfully plan and execute a task while persevering in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1977)).

1.2.5 Children’s Drawings in Writing Perceptions Research

Researchers have suggested that students’ individual perceptions of their school environment have a powerful effect on their motivation and subsequent academic achievement (Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Ruzek & Schenke, 2019). The term psychological environment was coined by Maehr and Midgley (1991), who posited that a student’s personal interpretations of their school and, by extension, their classroom climate, strongly predict their academic beliefs, behaviors, and emotions (Ruzek & Schenke, 2019). Most research involving students’ perceptions has relied on self-reported data. Others have championed visual arts as a means of gauging individuals’ perceptions of their learning experiences (Alerby, 2000). Weber and Mitchell (1995) suggested that drawings “can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious” (p.304). In addition, Flowers et al. (2015) put forth a number of reasons for using art as an evaluative data collection tool. First, artistic expression helps children engage with complex topics. Second, it enhances communication and critical thinking skills. Third, it “has a unique ability to connect children’s minds with their hands” (Flowers et al., 2015, p. 847). Therefore, evidence from research suggests that art has a pedagogical value and can capture the richness of children’s perceptions. The practice of using children’s drawings in research can also be explained through the lens of Complexity Theory, which posits that humans’ subjective experiences are inseparable from the
objective world and attempts to subvert objective/subjective dichotomies by allowing learners to produce their own context-driven text (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). In a similar vein, Phenomenology “values children’s perceptions of the world as a legitimate form of knowing, which is rooted in human experience” (Darling-McQuistan, 2017, p.283). Image-based research has yielded rich data about students’ feelings about writing, their writing self-efficacy, beliefs, anxiety, and their perceptions of student-teacher interactions (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Darling-McQuistan, 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). All of these variables form the larger picture of learners’ writing perceptions.

1.2.6 L2 Writing and the Egyptian Context

Ahmed (2010a) describes L2 writing as “one of the most challenging areas for teachers and students” (p. 503). Meanwhile, in his metaanalysis of writing motivation, Abdel Latif (2020) states that motivation “cannot be ignored” in a conversation about writing. In addition, Skehan (1989) suggested that motivation comes in as a close second to language aptitude as the most powerful predictor of L2 learning. Based on this, it can be concluded that motivation plays a pivotal role in L2 writing performance (Abdel Latif, 2020). In a similar vein, students’ writing motivation tends to interact with performance-related factors as well as student beliefs and behaviors (Abdel Latif, 2020). Some of these factors become especially pronounced in an L2 learning environment. For example, learners’ language proficiency was shown to affect students’ writing motivation. In Egypt, writing instruction is largely examination oriented (Ahmed, 2016). Students therefore become motivated by the common goal of attaining a grade. In that sense, writing becomes a product rather than a representation of student voices and opinions (Ahmed, 2016). A study by Ahmed (2010b) investigated the nature and focus of EFL writing instruction in an Egyptian university classroom context. 14 student teachers and seven essay writing
instructors, most of whom were Egyptian, were interviewed and observed. Results revealed that EFL instruction was centered on mechanics, content, structure, and writing strategies. Interview data reflected a number of instructional practices and philosophies obstructing students’ writing development, such as teachers’ prioritization of mechanics over content and organization skills, their lack of awareness of revision strategies (i.e., peer reviewing), and a tendency to overlook the role of reading in the L2 classroom. In addition, some students reported feeling dissatisfied with the course materials, either finding them too simple or challenging, which speaks to the role of the teacher in diagnosing and tending to their learners’ individual needs. For example, even though some instructors found it useful to teach idiomatic expressions, especially when low proficiency levels were a concern, some students expressed dissatisfaction with this practice as it wasted too much class time (Ahmed, 2010b). Overall, students made points about some of their instructors’ lack of teaching qualifications, their negative attitude towards writing, a lack of professional development, and incoherent syllabi and teaching materials (Ahmed, 2010b).

Another study by Ahmed (2010a) used questionnaire, interview, and observation data to provide a unique perspective of Egyptian Helwan University students’ English essay writing difficulties, citing “socio-political” as well as “socio-cultural challenges.” Those included the suppression of students’ voices in their writing, the encouragement of writing clichés and memorization, and the lack of teacher training (Ahmed, 2010a).

In order to tap into the range of perceptions that students have of their writing experiences, perhaps it is necessary to explore alternative means of tapping into those insights, which may be hard to express. It has been suggested that artistic productions, such as drawings, can be considered a language in their own right, and that this language has its own grammar (Alerby, 2000). Based on this, I hypothesized that providing middle school students with an
alternative language (i.e., drawing) to express their perceptions of writing would yield sophisticated insights that may touch upon similar socio-cultural challenges as the ones mentioned by Ahmed (2010a).

1.3 Research Gap

Based on the previous review, it is clear that a considerable number of research projects have investigated students’ writing motivation, but only a few have used instruments that recognize the multidimensional nature of the construct. Wright et al.’s (2019) Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS), which recognizes the different aspects of writing motivation, provides an opportunity for more accurate results, thus a deeper understanding of students’ writing experiences. Second, existing writing motivation research has mainly relied on questionnaire and interview data. Not only does the current study make use of survey data to understand middle school students’ writing motivation (which encompasses their writing self-beliefs, beliefs about writing, and writing attitudes), but it also provides the additional opportunity for self-expression through drawing. The aim of this was to expand the view of writing motivation by incorporating an open-ended activity that will tap into perceptions. By examining several variables in a systematic way, this mixed methods study attempted to adopt a more integrative approach to understanding Egyptian middle school students’ writing experiences. Third, reviewing the literature has informed my belief that the number of studies conducted in the Egyptian context is scarce. More specifically, L2 writing perceptions research mainly revolves around Egyptian public university students, and to my knowledge, no studies have been done about Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school. Finally, three consecutive years of teaching fifth graders have informed my personal belief that a considerable
number of students have negative perceptions of writing, which manifests in their lack of motivation.

Information about students’ perceptions of their academic experiences is valuable. The ultimate goal of this study is to make suggestions for improved writing instruction at this particular school setting, taking this understanding of how students feel about writing as a point of departure.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned reasons, I formulated the following research questions:

1. How do Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school perceive their L2 writing experiences?
2. What are the Egyptian middle school students’ levels of writing motivation, as measured by the SWAS?
3. What is the relationship among the Egyptian middle school students' perceptions of writing, their writing motivation, and their narrative writing performance?

1.5 Delimitations

The present study attempted to tap into how Egyptian middle school students perceive their L2 writing experiences. It also aimed to assess their writing motivation and its relation to their narrative writing performance. Worth noting is the fact that this research included a sample of 49 Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school in Cairo. At this school, the main language of instruction is English, while the students’ L1 is Arabic. A distinction must therefore be made between the aforementioned educational context and the public schooling
system, which represents the majority of Egyptian schools. As a result, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the Egyptian instructional context, but can constitute a point of departure in understanding L2 writing motivation and perceptions.

1.6 Theoretical and Operational Definitions

1.6.1 Theoretical Definitions

1.6.1.1 Writing Perceptions. Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2013) define writing perceptions as “a cognitive characteristic of how the individual feels about writing” (p.347). In a broader sense, researchers have argued for the importance of measuring how students perceive, or mentally represent, their school climate. Even though various aspects of the educational environment can be observed directly, some of the most important features of the classroom exist in students’ minds in the form of perceptions (Ruzek & Schenke, 2019). Therefore, students’ mental representations (or perceptions) of their writing environment might be just as valuable to educational researchers as their observable environment.

1.6.1.2 Writing Motivation. According to Wright et al. (2020), writing motivation can be defined as “the variety of reasons a child may choose to engage in a writing task or decide to take steps to avoid that task” (p.153). It is also a “dynamic construct” that can be discipline-specific (Wright et al., 2019, p. 66). For example, a student may feel motivated to write scientific reports but not literature essays. In a similar vein, Wright et al. (2019) explained motivation in light of Sociocultural Theory, which suggests that motivation interacts with other factors, such as context and societal expectations, in the production of student writers. This might explain why some students feel motivated to write at home rather than during class time. Furthermore, writing
motivation is thought to be multi-dimensional (Wright et al., 2019). The following sections expand on Wright et al.’s (2019) motivational variables.

1.6.1.2.1 Writing Self-Beliefs. Wright et al. (2019) define beliefs about the self as a writer in terms of EVT, which suggests that individuals’ engagement in a task is influenced by the extent to which they believe that they can be successful (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to Wright et al.’s (2019) model of writing motivation, self-concept and self-efficacy make up a person’s self-beliefs. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but they are conceptually distinct. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) define self-concept as “a composite view of oneself” (p.2). This perception of the self may influence an individual’s actions which may, in turn, affect how they perceive themselves (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). By Bandura’s (1977) definition, self-efficacy is concerned with an individual’s belief that they can successfully plan and execute a task while persevering in the face of challenges. Even though self-concept and self-efficacy are both related to academic motivation and can predict an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and actions, self-concept is an evaluation of one’s abilities in a particular domain, while self-efficacy is the perception of how these abilities could be geared towards accomplishing a task (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Wright et al., 2019). In the context of writing, for example, self-concept refers to judgments about oneself as a writer (e.g., I am a bad writer), whereas self-efficacy entails beliefs about one’s skills as a writer attempting to accomplish a writing task (e.g., I got a bad grade on this essay because I lack organization skills) (Wright et al., 2019).

1.6.1.2.2 Beliefs about Writing. The second component of writing motivation can also be defined in terms of EVT; if a student believes that a task is valuable, they are more likely to engage with it (Wright et al., 2019). Students’ beliefs about writing may be domain-specific. For
example, a student might feel driven to become a proficient storyteller but not see the value in writing speeches.

1.6.1.2.3 Writing Attitudes. The third and final component of writing motivation is writing attitudes, which are defined as the feelings that students harbor towards writing tasks, ranging from positive to negative (Ekholm et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2019). Students’ attitudes towards writing differ from their beliefs about writing in that attitudes are more stable judgments rooted in students’ previous writing experiences (Wright et al., 2020).

1.6.1.3 Writing Performance. Writing performance is determined by writing standards, which are the rules and expectations that constitute “good writing.” However, Beaufort (2007) argues that it is not that simple. Writing standards do not develop in a vacuum; they are governed by context-specific expectations. From here emerges the notion of the discourse community, which is the context that determines the standards of “good writing.” It can then be argued that writing performance is “cultural and socially specific” (Beaufort, 2007, p.11) and not a universal gauge of writing ability.

1.6.2 Operational Definitions

1.6.2.1 Writing Perceptions. Alerby (2000) proposed a reasonable point of departure in the operationalization of children’s perceptions, which were visualized through drawings. She justifies this by first explaining the interaction between thoughts and experiences; people’s perceptions allow them to experience things, and their experiences in turn affect their thoughts. She then follows this by suggesting that there is a strong connection between art and thinking (Vygotsky, 1971, as cited in Alerby, 2000), and that “visual arts are a source of visual thinking, because thinking calls for images, and images contain thoughts” (Arnheim, 1969, as cited in
Alerby, 2000, p.209). Since children’s thoughts are often rich and complex, researchers have turned to drawings in order to gain insight into their “cognitive, affective, and social development” (Bowker, 2007, p.79). Based on this, the present study operationalizes middle school students’ L2 writing perceptions as ideas, thoughts, and cognitions that can be translated into drawings. In order to ensure interpretability, participants will be asked to comment on their drawing in writing. Each drawing and its corresponding written caption will therefore be viewed as one “unit” or artifact of the student’s writing perceptions.

1.6.2.2 Writing Motivation. More recent operational definitions of writing motivation view it as a multi-faceted construct. Wright et al.’s (2019) model of writing motivation, which is adopted in the current study, recognizes three components that make up the larger construct: writing self-beliefs (self-concept and self-efficacy), writing beliefs, and attitudes towards writing. In an attempt to operationalize writing motivation, Wright et al. (2019) designed the Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS) (see Appendix A). It is a questionnaire that includes 30 Likert scale items asking students to rate statements on a scale from one to four. Worth noting is the fact that the SWAS was originally designed to measure adolescents’ writing motivation, which makes it a good fit for the current sample of middle school students.

1.6.2.3 Writing Performance. Gauging students’ L2 writing performance entailed scoring a narrative composition that they were asked to write as part of this study. At the most basic level, writing performance is assessed based on criteria such as cohesion, vocabulary level, syntactic complexity, grammar, and spelling. However, for the purpose of this study, measuring participants’ writing performance depended largely on the expectations of the discourse community (Beaufort, 2007). In other words, the genre of the writing assignment depended on
what was currently being taught in the classroom as well as the course objectives. At the school whose population I had access to, narrative writing is the first genre that is taught across all middle school grades. Another reason for the selection of this genre is that it is widely researched and de-emphasizes content knowledge in its evaluation of writing performance (Troia et al., 2013). Furthermore, the rubric that was used for grading purposes was adopted from the Holt McDougal Literature Program, which follows the US Common Core Standards. Students were therefore assessed on the quality of their ideas, their organization skills, word choice, and conventions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter reviews two broad themes: writing motivation and perceptions. First, the theoretical background of writing motivation is considered by shedding light on different conceptualizations of the construct. Research about its relationship (as a higher-order construct) with writing performance is thoroughly reviewed. I then offer a different perspective with Wright et al.'s (2019) model, which deconstructs writing motivation into three motivational variables whose relationship with writing performance is also thoroughly surveyed in this section. The second broad theme is concerned with writing perceptions. I highlight the different benefits of using drawings in perceptions research as seen through the lens of Complexity Theory and Phenomenology. Notable examples of studies that have relied on image-based data collection methods are provided, in addition to research that has investigated writing perceptions from a fresh angle. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide background about writing motivation --including its evolution as a construct in the literature-- and give credibility to using artistic expression in perceptions research.

2.2 Writing Ability

Diagnosing writing ability is closely intertwined with conceptualizing writing. In recent years, three approaches to the conceptualization of writing have been emphasized in the literature: the product-oriented approach, the process-oriented approach, and the genre-oriented approach (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). The product-oriented approach, which received attention in the audiolingualism era, heavily emphasized syntax, form, and rhetorical drills in writing instruction (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). The final outcome, which is often a product of
imitating given patterns, is the main focus of the product approach, and markers of writing ability include the skill of reproducing written works as well as knowledge about language structures. In contrast, the process approach focuses on how one goes about writing a text. Writing is viewed and conceptualized as a recursive process of prewriting, drafting, evaluating, and revising (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). The process approach has been extensively represented in a sequence of writing models by Hayes and his colleagues, the most recent of which was proposed by Hayes (2012). One of the major components of this model is the role of long-term memory in storing task schemas for different writing tasks, such as revision and summarization (Hayes, 2012). These schemas, which are molded and modified by writing instruction, are largely relevant to writing ability. In addition to task schemas, the long-term memory also stores topic, audience, linguistic, and genre knowledge (He et al., 2021). China’s Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) partially draw upon the process-based approach by emphasizing the cognitive dimension of language proficiency (He et al., 2021). The parameters of CSE include writing purposes, writing strategies, and writing knowledge scales, all which represent L2 writing ability. More specifically, writing purpose scales cover six subscales, namely written description, narration, exposition, instruction, argumentation, and interaction. Writing strategy scales are concerned with planning, formulation, and revision. Finally, writing knowledge entails four components, namely grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, functional knowledge, and sociolinguistic knowledge (He et al., 2021). The genre-based approach, which is the third approach to conceptualizing writing, can be considered as an extension of the product approach because it emphasizes the linguistic aspect of writing (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). It does, however, prioritize the social context in which text is produced, offering learners explicit information about writing genres as socially-situated
communicative events (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). In that sense, genre knowledge, which entails an awareness of the audience and how a text is organized, becomes a primary marker of writing ability. In Egypt, private language schools, a portion of which are marketed as “international” schools, tend to adopt American and British writing curricula. The Holt McDougal Literature Program (an American curriculum that is set across middle school grades at the private school where this study was conducted) adopts a blended approach to writing instruction, incorporating elements of both process and genre approaches. For example, the sixth grade writing curriculum centers on different writing genres, provides models for each genre, and emphasizes the need for a drafting process. In Egyptian public schools, a product-oriented approach remains common. Students are often provided with writing models and “templates” to follow when completing a writing assignment. Conceptualizing writing is therefore closely linked to defining writing ability in different contexts.

2.3 Writing Motivation

2.3.1 Theoretical Background of Writing Motivation

Writing motivation is a multifaceted construct (Abdel Latif, 2020). In order to understand the different strands of writing motivation, it is useful, according to Abdel Latif (2020), to examine it in light of a more general and widely-researched construct, which is L2 learning motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) described the theoretical history of L2 learning motivation as moving through three stages of development: the social psychological period or “beginnings”, the cognitively-oriented period, and the process-oriented period (p.40). Gardner and Lambert, who pioneered a non-cognitive (but social psychological) perspective on language learning, emphasized the role of the social context alongside attitudinal factors in L2 learning.
motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Later, in the 1990’s, a paradigm shift emphasized the need for cognitive frameworks in motivational psychology. One of the reasons for this is that social psychological research was perceived as detached from the “classroom reality of motivation” and was therefore not practically relevant to teachers (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p.44). In a similar vein, researchers like Crookes and Schmidt called for more classroom-centered theories of language learning motivation that took into account teachers’ experiences and concepts of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). At the turn of the century, researchers like Dörnyei and Ottó attempted to construct a comprehensive framework that represents a process model of L2 learning motivation. This model consists of two dimensions, namely Action Sequence and Motivational Influences. The former is a behavioral component that entails one’s hopes and desires, which are ideally transformed into goals, intentions, action, and eventually, the accomplishment of these set goals. The second component of Dörnyei and Ottó’s model entails the motivational forces influencing behavior, such as learner beliefs and attitudes towards the target language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Over time, these frameworks tend to build on each other, providing a more comprehensive view of L2 learning motivation. Norton (2000, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021) emphasized the socially-situated nature of motivation. According to this view, an individual’s desire to learn a language cannot be divorced from the social context that is fueling this desire. For example, language learners may be motivated by professional opportunities or greater social power. It can therefore be said that current theories of L2 learning motivation take into account (to varying degrees) the social, psychological, and cognitive aspects of language learning.

In the face of these developments, fewer attempts have been made to conceptualize writing motivation (Abdel Latif, 2020). However, efforts have been made to categorize the
different motivational variables involved in writing. For example, Daly (1985) discerned between writing motivational beliefs and perceptions that are long-lasting and those that are temporary and situation-specific. Hidi and Boscolo (2007) highlighted the “motivational problems” involved in writing, which include interest, one’s perceptions of their ability to write (self-efficacy), self-regulation, and the social dimension of writing (p.145). In a more recent model of writing motivation, Wright et al. (2019) defined writing motivation in terms of beliefs and pre-dispositions. More specifically, beliefs about oneself as a writer, beliefs about writing, and attitudes towards writing are all thought to contribute to one’s writing motivation. Based on the literature and the theoretical models it has to offer, it can be concluded that “writing motivation” is an overarching term encompassing one’s like or dislike for writing, perceptions of the value of writing, the feelings experienced during writing situations (and how they are regulated), beliefs about oneself as a writer, and one’s goals for learning how to write (Abdel Latif, 2020).

Not only is writing motivation multidimensional, but it also differs across domains, developmental stages, environments, and tasks (Wright et al., 2019). Abdel Latif (2020) highlights eight motivational constructs that have been researched to varying degrees: “writing apprehension, attitude, anxiety, self-efficacy, self-concept, outcome expectancy/achievement goal orientation, perceived value of writing, and motivational regulation of writing” (p.4). Wright et al.’s (2019) writing motivation model encompasses some of these constructs, which will be expanded on in this section.

On developing their models of writing motivation, scholars such as Pajares and Cheong (2003) and Wright et al. (2019) adopted Eccles and Wigfield’s (2002) Expectancy-Value Theory, which suggests that learners are more likely to engage in a task if they believe they have some
chance of success. That is why students’ writing self-beliefs are, according to Wright et al.’s (2019) model, at the heart of writing motivation. At a deeper level, writing self-beliefs consist of writing self-efficacy and self-concept. Albert Bandura’s self-efficacy theory informed researchers’ early conceptualizations of the construct, which is domain-specific and plays a vital role in individuals’ task performance (Bandura, 2006). McCarthy et al. (1985) defined writing self-efficacy as “writers’ evaluations of their own general writing skills and the overall quality of their written products” (p.465). Generally, early conceptualizations of writing self-efficacy viewed the construct as unidimensional (MacArthur et al., 2016). Later, researchers adopted a more focused approach to defining writing self-efficacy (Abdel Latif, 2020). MacArthur et al. (2016), for example, pointed to the specificity of writing self-efficacy, which may vary across multiple aspects of writing. For example, an individual may feel confident in their ability to write grammatically sound sentences, but not in their ability to generate ideas. It therefore became apparent that writing self-efficacy is not a unidimensional construct, but a multidimensional one. Even more recently, researchers have refined conceptualizations of writing self-efficacy. Bruning et al. (2013) defined the construct in terms of three factors: ideation (writers’ confidence in their ability to generate ideas), conventions (their confidence in their ability to follow commonly accepted writing rules), and self-regulation (their confidence in their ability to regulate their emotions while writing). It is worth noting, however, that different researchers have prioritized different factors of writing self-efficacy, further reinforcing the notion that the construct is task-specific (Abdel Latif, 2020). Self-concept is another construct that is conceptually distinct from self-efficacy; whereas the former is a general evaluative judgment of oneself, the latter is task-specific (Abdel Latif, 2020). Similar to self-efficacy, however, self-concept has undergone several phases of conceptualization in research. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) emphasized the
difficulties associated with conceptualizing --thus operationalizing-- self-concept, which was often confused with other terms, such as “self-esteem.” This ambiguity has therefore motivated researchers to (1) recognize self-concept as a multi-faceted and domain-specific construct and (2) discard any notions of “globality” when defining self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 4).

The second construct of Wright et al.’s (2019) writing motivation model is beliefs about writing, also referred to as “perceived value of writing.” The contributions of this variable to writers’ motivation can also be explained by Expectancy-Value Theory. If a student does not believe that a writing task is valuable, it is unlikely they will engage in it (Wright et al., 2019, 2020). Thus, valuing the writing task and expecting some chance of success are at the heart of motivation. Like most constructs, writing beliefs have been conceptualized differently across studies. For example, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) highlighted four aspects of task value: attainment value (the personal importance of performing the task successfully), intrinsic value (the enjoyment that one derives from engaging in the task), utility value (the usefulness of the task), and cost value (the disadvantages of performing the task). Abdel Latif (2020), however, sheds light on the dispositional component of writing beliefs as conceptualized by Eccles and Wigfield (2002). If one of the four dimensions of writing beliefs is intrinsic value, and if intrinsic value equals enjoyment, then there seems to be an overlap between writing beliefs and writing attitudes (Abdel Latif, 2020). Wright et al. (2019) do, however, distinguish between those two constructs in their conceptualization of writing motivation. Whereas beliefs in this context represent how much value is attached to writing, attitude is considered a form of predisposition, or prominent feelings that students have towards writing.

The third and final variable is attitudes towards writing. According to Ekholm et al. (2017), there seems to be no universal definition of writing attitudes. Whereas research has
demonstrated that attitude consists of not just affective, but also cognitive and motivational components, many studies have focused solely on the affective aspect of an otherwise multidimensional construct. Petric (2002), for example, defined attitudes as “an affective response” that is determined by beliefs, “which are basically cognitive” (p.10). On the other hand, Graham et al. (2007) defined attitude as an “affective motivational state” (p.518). In a similar vein, Graham et al. (2007) emphasized that writing attitudes are one aspect of writing motivation, which is in line with Wright et al.’s (2019) model. Attitudes have also been contrasted with emotions, which are more intense and likely to subside once the triggering object or event is removed. Attitudes, on the other hand, tend to be more permanently associated with a particular object or event, and “can be produced on demand” (Ekholm et al., 2017, p.829). This explains why a student may maintain a positive attitude towards writing, but experience negative emotions while completing a strenuous writing task (Ekholm et al., 2017). Even though attitudes are more stable than emotions, they are more short-lived than traits, which are “personality-like characteristics that make up a person’s general temperament” (Graham et al., 2007, p. 518). The affective state that lies between emotions and traits, and which most closely represents attitudes, can be identified as an individual’s “mood” (Roseburg, 1998, as cited in Graham et al., 2007).

Conradi et al. (2014) defined attitudes as feelings that “predispose an individual to engage in or avoid” a particular activity (p.154). Wright et al. (2019, 2020) therefore consider an individual’s attitude towards writing to be a type of predisposition that is based on previous writing experiences and their interpretation of those experiences.

The purpose of this section was to (1) shed light on the multi-dimensional nature of writing motivation by identifying its different components, (2) inquire into the components that make up Wright et al.’s (2019) framework of writing motivation, which was adopted for this
study, and (3) emphasize the theoretical significance of those components in writing motivation research.

Worth noting is researchers’ lack of consensus on what constitutes writing motivation. What is more is the varying conceptualizations of those components. Pajares (1992) justifies this, stating that “all broad psychological constructs at some point must come before the reductionist, multidimensional, or hierarchical chopping block to better suit the needs and requirements of research. . . . One may choose the model of knowledge structures that one prefers” (p.315). It can therefore be concluded that there is no singular or universal definition for writing motivation or the variables that constitute it; researchers must adopt models that best suit the context and purpose of their study.

### 2.3.2 The Relationship between Writing Motivation and Writing Performance

Researchers have taken an interest in the relationship between writing motivation and writing performance. Graham et al. (2017), for example, aimed to investigate whether fourth grade students’ motivation and strategic writing behavior predicted their writing performance. Here, writing motivation was defined in terms of two components: writing self-efficacy and attitudes. Strategic behavior included interpreting the writing task, planning, drafting, and considering the audience (Graham et al., 2017). 227 fourth grade students enrolled in schools in the United States were asked to complete a personal narrative writing task alongside scales for writing self-efficacy, writing attitudes, and strategic writing behaviors. Results showed that both motivational variables significantly and collectively predicted participants’ narrative writing quality. In addition, strategic writing behaviors were positively correlated to students’ overall writing performance.
Another study by Camacho et al. (2021) examined the relationships among Portuguese students’ writing self-efficacy, writing attitudes, writing frequency, and writing performance. Similar to Graham et al.’s (2017) study, motivation was defined in terms of writing self-efficacy and attitudes. This study did, however, adopt Bruning et al.’s (2013) model of writing self-efficacy, which recognizes three aspects of the construct: self-efficacy for ideation, conventions, and self-regulation. 605 students between fifth and eighth grade completed the Self-Efficacy for Writing Scale (SEWS), an attitudes towards writing scale, and a writing frequency scale. Participants also wrote a narrative as well as an opinion piece. Findings revealed that participants’ writing attitudes predicted writing quality across genres. Both writing attitudes and self-efficacy for ideation were shown to positively correlate with students’ writing frequency. Interestingly, only self-efficacy for self-regulation was significantly correlated with students’ narrative writing performance, but the same did not hold true for opinion writing. Camacho et al. (2021) hypothesized that, since students were not previously familiar with writing opinion essays, they could not accurately determine their self-confidence in that area. This speaks to the role of the discourse community’s expectations in shaping the study design. This study has implications for the usefulness of self-regulation strategies as a means of improving students’ self-efficacy, and consequently, their writing performance. It also further reinforces the importance of cultivating positive writing attitudes inside the classroom.

In their conceptualization of writing motivation, Troia et al. (2013) took into account the following factors: self-efficacy beliefs, task value and interest, success attributions, and mastery, performance, and avoidance goals. In the literature, self-efficacy is widely recognized as a prime determiner of writing motivation. Task value and interest are related to Expectancy-Value Theory and reflect personal importance and involvement in the task (Troia et al., 2013).
Attributions are the reasons that individuals attach to success or failure. These reasons are likely to determine learners’ adaptive patterns. For example, attributing one’s failure to bad luck may result in a helpless motivational pattern. On the other hand, attributing poor performance on a task to insufficient effort, for example, or other factors that can be controlled, may result in a more adaptive motivational pattern (Troia et al., 2013). Finally, individuals adopt different goal orientations when they take on a task. Mastery goals are focused on acquiring knowledge, skills, and a general sense of competence; performance goals are linked to skill demonstration, being recognized by others, and competition; and avoidance goals are oriented in the opposite direction, which is avoiding displaying incompetence (Troia et al., 2013). In this study, which was conducted in the United States, 618 students between fourth and tenth grade completed the Writing Activity and Motivation Scales (WAMS) and a fictional story writing task. The WAMS is a 30-item survey addressing different aspects of participants’ writing motivation, including task interest/value and mastery goals. The findings confirmed that motivational beliefs (writing self-efficacy, task interest/value, and attributions) positively and significantly correlated with students’ story writing quality. Motivational beliefs also largely contributed to participants’ goal orientations.

To conclude, more recent writing motivation research has considered it a multidimensional construct. However, there is no consensus about the components that make up the construct. Across the studies I reviewed, the different components that made up writing motivation included self-efficacy, attitude, beliefs about writing, task value/interest, success attributions, and mastery, performance, and avoidance goals.
2.3.3 Wright et al.'s Model of Writing Motivation

Wright et al. (2019) shed light on the conflicting effects of writing interventions on students’ writing outcomes, hypothesizing that motivation may be a mediating factor. In an effort to accurately measure writing motivation, Wright et al. (2019) designed the Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey (SWAS), which serves as a multidimensional instrument. They argue that other measures of writing motivation do not take into account cognitive and/or sociocultural factors influencing writing performance. To remedy this, Wright et al. (2019) adopted Wigfield’s (2002) Expectancy-Value Theory and Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) Theory of Attitude in their construction of this framework. These theories serve to explain the development of writers’ identities. Building on the aforementioned theorists’ as well as Conradi et al.'s (2014) work, Wright et al. (2019) classified relevant affective concepts into two categories: beliefs (writing self-beliefs and beliefs about writing) and pre-dispositions (writing attitudes).

Because writing engagement is believed to result from (1) believing that writing is valuable and (2) believing that one has a fair chance at being successful (Wright et al., 2019), measuring both writing self-beliefs (self-concept and self-efficacy) as well as beliefs about writing are equally as important in determining learners’ writing motivation. Furthermore, attitude is an essential contributing factor to students’ writing motivation. For example, poor writing experiences may result in a negative attitude towards writing and, consequently, a lack of writing motivation (Wright et al., 2019). Examining these beliefs and pre-dispositions can help education researchers gain a fuller picture of learners’ writing motivation.

Despite the existence of other multidimensional instruments measuring writing motivation, Wright et al. (2019) contend that low reliability estimates called for the creation of a new instrument. The low reliability scores of some subscales suggests that the questionnaire
items are not assessing what they claim to assess. To address this, the SWAS underwent factor analyses to establish structural validity. In addition, reliability coefficients and external validity were both established for the SWAS.

2.3.4 The Relationship between Writing Self-Efficacy and Performance

Troia et al. (2013) posit that writing self-efficacy is the strongest contributor to writing outcomes compared to other motivational variables. For that reason, most writing motivation research takes into account participants’ self-efficacy for writing. Prat-Sala and Redford (2012), for example, sought to examine the relationship between writing self-efficacy and essay writing performance. 145 first and second year psychology students enrolled at a UK university took part in this study. They were asked to complete a self-efficacy for writing scale that specifically assesses perceived essay writing competence. In order to evaluate writing performance, students were required to write an essay that also counted towards their coursework. The findings reflected a strong positive correlation between writing self-efficacy and writing performance scores (Prat-Sala & Redford, 2012). Interestingly, a stronger correlation was found in second year students, a finding which can be attributed to more expansive essay writing experience and thus a better awareness of competence.

Just like motivation, researchers have argued for the multidimensional nature of writing self-efficacy. Bruning et al. (2013) proposed a three-factor model, which takes into account the following aspects of individuals’ writing experiences: ideation (writers’ confidence in their ability to generate ideas), conventions (their confidence in their ability to follow commonly accepted writing rules), and self-regulation (their confidence in their ability to regulate their emotions while writing). In an effort to better understand the link between these factors and other variables such as actual and self-reported writing performance, Bruning et al. (2013) tested the
Self-Efficacy for Writing Scale (SEWS) with 563 high school students enrolled in ELA courses in the United States. Self-reported data about participants’ writing performance was also collected alongside their statewide writing assessment (SWA) scores. All three writing self-efficacy subscales were found to positively correlate with self-reported writing performance (Bruning et al., 2013). Furthermore, among the three SEWS subscales, conventions scores showed the strongest relationship to students’ actual writing (SWA) performance. Both regulation and ideation scores showed positive but mild correlations with SWA scores. These mixed results can be attributed to timeliness. Students completed the SEWS approximately one month prior to sitting for the SWA, which makes room for other factors to mediate the relationship between writing self-efficacy and performance (Bruning et al., 2013).

Aiming to expand on researchers’ understanding of writing self-efficacy, Zumbrunn et al. (2020) adapted Bruning et al.’s (2013) SEWS. In this large-scale study spanning across six US elementary schools and two high schools, Zumbrunn et al. (2020) worked with 992 elementary and 518 high school students. One of the purposes of this study was to further examine the relationship between writing self-efficacy dimensions and writing outcomes. Participants completed the adapted SEWS and their writing grades were collected as a marker of their performance. Contrary to Zumbrunn et al.’s (2020) initial hypothesis, only self-efficacy for writing conventions was shown to significantly correlate with both elementary and high school students’ writing grades. These findings mirror those of Bruning et al.’s (2013) study. According to Zumbrunn et al. (2020), current research about multifactorial models of writing self-efficacy and writing performance has yielded contradictory results. A potential explanation for these discrepancies lies in how writing performance is operationalized. Whereas some studies have relied on high-stakes assessments for writing performance grades (Bruning et al., 2013), others
have turned to classroom performance grades (Zumbrunn et al., 2020). The inconsistent scoring procedures that follow may therefore result in these inconsistent findings. In addition, the instructional environment might be playing a role in students’ self-perceptions and writing performance. For example, teachers might be overemphasizing mechanics and conventions in their instructional practices rather than idea generation and self-regulation (Zumbrunn et al., 2020).

2.3.5 The Relationship between Writing Self-Concept and Performance

Like self-efficacy, self-concept is thought to predict academic achievement (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). While writing self-efficacy entails one’s confidence in their ability to perform specific writing tasks on a number of levels, writing self-concept is a more general, complex view of oneself in achievement situations (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). This complex view is thought to encompass one’s perceptions of their own competence, self-worth, interest, enjoyment, and intentions (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Beaudrie (2018) aimed to investigate the relationship between 281 Spanish heritage language learners’ self-concept and their literacy performance. This study took into account three domains: reading, writing, and spelling. This is a particularly unique population that experiences a set of context-specific literacy challenges, such as linguistic insecurities (Beaudrie, 2018). That is due to the learners’ limited exposure to their heritage language in a US context. Some similarities may be drawn between a Spanish heritage language learning context and an L2 learning context. In both domains, for example, linguistic insecurities may be playing a role in learners’ perceived competencies. Beaudrie (2018) administered a self-concept questionnaire containing 12 statements for each of the three domains being considered (reading, writing, and spelling). For each domain, three subcomponents of self-concept were recognized: difficulty, perceptions of competence, and attitude. It is worth
mentioning that researchers are not in consensus about whether affective constructs (i.e.,
attitudes) are a part of self-concept, or if they are conceptually distinct. This study considers
attitudes to be a part of self-concept. In addition to the questionnaire, participants were required
to write an opinion essay to evaluate writing performance. Findings showed that students’ self-
perceptions, which included difficulty and competence perceptions, significantly predicted
performance in all three domains.

In a rather unique study, Stranghöner et al. (2021) investigated the role of self-concept
(among other variables) in the academic performance of students with special educational needs.
The population included 363 German elementary school students with mild learning difficulties.
They were asked to complete a survey that assessed self-concept in two domains: reading and
writing. In addition, participants were assessed for reading and writing performance with a
standardized test. Prior performance in these two domains was also taken into consideration. In
line with Stranghöner et al.’s (2021) hypothesis, self-concept predicted literacy performance.
Prior performance was, however, the most significant predictor of participants’ performance in
literacy, which points to the necessity of “rank stability of prior performance” (Stranghöner et
al., 2021, p. 9) as well as the teacher’s role in enhancing students’ self-concept in the different
domains.

Even though self-concept and self-efficacy are related constructs, they are conceptually
distinct. Like self-efficacy, self-concept is thought to predict literacy performance, which
includes writing performance. It is also a complex construct that represents one’s perceptions of
their own competence, self-worth, interest, enjoyment, and intentions (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).
2.3.6 The Relationship between Beliefs about Writing and Performance

Aside from writing self-beliefs, researchers are interested in exploring the relationship between learners’ beliefs about writing and their performance. White and Bruning (2005), for example, used Bandura’s Social Learning Theory to explain the term “implicit beliefs.” As individuals acquire knowledge, some of it manifests in their behavior. However, evidence of this knowledge in people’s behavior may be impacted by motivational variables, such as implicit beliefs. Implicit writing beliefs are thought to have transmissional and transactional dimensions, which are not mutually exclusive. In other words, an individual may hold both types of beliefs simultaneously (White & Bruning, 2005). Learners who hold transmissional beliefs conceive of writing as a means of reporting information from other sources and thus display low levels of cognitive and affective engagement with writing tasks. On the other hand, individuals with transactional beliefs view writing in a more purposeful way, are more motivated to integrate personal ideas, and generally display higher cognitive and affective engagement with writing tasks (White & Bruning, 2005). White and Bruning (2005) looked into these two dimensions of implicit writing beliefs and assessed their influence on the writing process. 170 students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a Midwestern university participated in this study. They completed the Writing Beliefs Inventory (WBI), a writing experience questionnaire, and a written response to a story titled The Book of Sand by Borges (1977). Four categories of writing beliefs were extracted from the data analysis: high transmissional- high transactional, high transmissional- low transactional, low transmissional- high transactional, and low transmissional- low transactional (White & Bruning, 2005). Findings revealed that participants with low, rather than high, transmissional beliefs produced higher quality written responses. More specifically, students with low transmissional writing beliefs scored higher on idea
development, voice, organization, and conventions. On the other hand, learners who held low transactional beliefs produced lesser quality texts than those with high transactional beliefs.

Other researchers have adopted a slightly different framework in their conceptualization of writing beliefs. According to Villalón et al. (2015), students’ conceptions (or beliefs) about writing are “the different ways students conceive and approach writing” (p.654). These conceptions can be either epistemic or reproductive (Villalón et al., 2015). Students who hold an epistemic view of writing believe it to be a learning tool, while those who adopt a reproductive view conceive of academic writing as a mechanical process. Despite adopting a similar approach to White and Bruning’s (2005), Villalón et al. (2015) were less concerned with learners’ personal engagement with the writing process and more interested in their conceptions about the functions of writing (Villalón et al., 2015). As part of their study, they aimed to more deeply explore the link between high school students’ writing beliefs and their performance on a complex synthesis task. 111 tenth graders enrolled at eight schools in Madrid completed a writing conceptions questionnaire which is based on the two-conception model. In order to evaluate their writing performance, participants also completed a written synthesis task. The findings reflected a positive relationship between epistemic writing conception and writing performance. More specifically, students who simultaneously held high epistemic conceptions and low reproductive conceptions were better writers than those who held high epistemic and high reproductive conceptions. Furthermore, participants who held low epistemic conceptions demonstrated poorer writing performance regardless of their reproductive writing conceptions (Villalón et al., 2015). These findings could be interpreted within the framework of Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), which emphasizes utility as one aspect of task value. In other words, it can be theorized that
participants who held an epistemic view of writing (or, in terms of EVT, found writing to be useful), engaged with the synthesis task more, and thus produced higher quality texts.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the beliefs that individuals hold about writing and their performance on writing tasks. These beliefs have been identified differently across studies and include transmissive versus transactional beliefs as well as reproductive versus epistemic views.

2.3.7 The Relationship between Writing Attitudes and Performance

Graham et al. (2007) considered writing attitude to be an affective component of motivation. They also defined attitudes as a type of pre-disposition, which is consistent with Wright et al.’s (2019) perspective. The purpose of Graham et al.’s (2007) study was to investigate the relationship between elementary students’ writing attitudes and their performance. The participant sample included 128 first graders and 113 third graders enrolled at a large metropolitan school in the United States. They wrote a composition and completed a written expression test as well as a survey assessing their attitudes towards writing. It is worth noting that each survey item began with the stem: “How do you feel”, and was followed by phrases such as, “about writing for fun at home.” The way that the items are formulated further reinforces Graham et al.’s (2007) perspective that attitudes are an affective construct. Results revealed that students’ writing attitude influenced their performance. More specifically, students who had positive writing attitudes engaged with and exerted more effort in writing tasks, whereas those with negative attitudes tended to avoid writing altogether and exerted little effort when required to write (Graham et al., 2007). It can therefore be concluded that motivational variables (i.e., attitudes) serve as a catalyst for writing development. Graham et al. (2007) also tested whether writing attitudes and performance would have a reciprocal relationship, as in, they
hypothesized that writing performance could influence students’ attitudes. However, the findings did not support this hypothesis. Since the children have limited writing experience due to their young age, the effects of their writing performance on their attitudes towards the activity may not have been evident (Graham et al., 2007). Age should therefore be taken into consideration as a factor influencing the interaction between writing attitudes and performance. As children grow older and acquire more writing experience, their attitudes are likely to change and become more robust, potentially altering the patterns between writing attitudes and performance (Graham et al., 2007).

More recently, Graham et al. (2012) investigated whether reading and writing attitudes were distinct constructs. Identical to Graham et al.’s (2007) study, the participant sample consisted of 128 first graders and 113 third graders. They completed a survey assessing their reading and writing attitudes and wrote a personal essay. Factor analyses reflected a distinction between the elementary school students’ reading and writing attitudes, with some overlapping aspects. One of the aims of this study was to investigate whether reading and writing attitudes make separable contributions to participants’ writing performance. Regression analyses revealed that, even though both reading and writing attitudes made statistically significant contributions to third-graders’ writing performance, writing attitudes more significantly predicted writing quality. This finding aligned with the hypothesis that reading and writing attitude are two distinct constructs. In contrast, neither reading nor writing attitudes made notable contributions to the first-graders’ writing performance which, again, could be attributed to the participants’ limited writing experience and subsequent inability to distinguish between reading and writing activities (Graham et al., 2012). These findings were monumental in deciding the target population for the current study, which focused on sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. One of the reasons for this is
that more extensive writing experience essentially leads to greater awareness of motivational variables, such as attitudes.

Another study by Lee (2013) explored the relationships among writing attitudes, learning behavior, writing performance, and gender based on eighth-grade assessment data extracted from the 1998 and 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Since the population sample is large (N = 20,586 in 1998 and 139,900 in 2007), this is the only reviewed study about writing attitudes that yielded nationally representative data in the United States. Alongside the writing assessment scores, questionnaire data about students’ demographics, writing attitudes, and learning behaviors was collected as part of the NAEP (Lee, 2013). Contingent with the results of other studies, positive writing attitudes were shown to correlate with better writing performance. Even though gender differences are not of interest in the current study, it is useful, for contextual purposes, to probe the findings related to gender and writing achievement. Even though a strong correlation was found between participants’ attitude towards writing and their performance, this relationship was stronger within the female group. In addition, female participants outperformed their male counterparts despite similar levels of writing attitude. This implies that female students were more able to channel their positive writing attitude into the writing assessment task (Lee, 2013). Surprisingly, the data obtained from the 2007 NAEP revealed that female students with negative writing attitudes demonstrated better performance than their male counterparts with positive attitudes. Despite these results, evidence from other studies as well as this one suggests that the disparities between genders cannot be explained by attitudinal and behavioral differences alone (Lee, 2013), and that further research is needed to resolve issues related to gender and writing.
2.4 Writing Perceptions

2.4.1 Classroom Psychological Environment

Researchers have suggested that students’ “idiosyncratic perceptions” of their school environment have a powerful effect on their motivation and subsequent academic achievement (Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Ruzek & Schenke, 2019, p.904). The term *psychological environment* was coined by Maehr and Midgley (1991), who posited that a student’s personal interpretations of their school and, by extension, their classroom climate, strongly predict their academic beliefs, behaviors, and emotions (Ruzek & Schenke, 2019). Even though some aspects of the school environment are observable, researchers have taken an interest in the version of this environment that exists in the learners’ minds. Based on this, Ruzek and Schenke (2019) linked the notion of the psychological environment to Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the role and manifestations of internal beliefs in observable behavior. In a similar vein, educational psychologists and researchers in general have investigated the relationships among students’ perceptions, motivation, and learning behavior.

2.4.2 Students’ Perceptions of Their Writing Experiences

Understanding students’ perceptions of their writing experiences not only entails how they perceive writing, but also how they perceive themselves as writers. It is therefore not surprising that having negative perceptions of writing and of oneself as a writer negatively affects writing performance (Nobles & Paganucci, 2015). It is worth noting that, in the literature, the term “perceptions” has been used to refer to writers’ self-efficacy, how they feel about writing, and their attitude towards writing (Nobles & Paganucci, 2015; Wingate, 2010; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). Conceptually, writing perceptions constitute the cognitive dimension of
how one feels about writing (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2013), which explains that overlap between perceptions and feelings in some studies. Similarly, it is hard to separate between learners’ perceptions of themselves as writers and their perceptions of their writing experiences as a whole. Wingate (2010), for example, found that freshman students who had negative perceptions of themselves as writers (or a low sense of writing self-efficacy) were less likely to engage with formative feedback. What is interesting is that these negative self-perceptions can take more than one form. Whereas some students in Wingate’s (2010) study attributed their poor perception of themselves as writers to external variables, such as the quality of their education, others were aware that these poor self-perceptions were the direct result of a lack of effort.

The effect of writers’ perceptions extends beyond their engagement with feedback. Ryan et al. (2022) found that elementary students’ perceptions of writing, which were partially shaped by their learning environment, tended to influence their decision-making modes. This large-scale study involved eight Australian elementary schools, 19 teachers of grades three to six, and 570 students aged between eight and 12 years. Data was gathered using a range of instruments, including teacher and student interviews, video recorded classroom observations, questionnaires addressing students’ decision-making styles, and writing samples. Eight “student vignettes” corresponding to the different decision-making modes were extracted from the findings. Those included communicative writers, who sought feedback from their teachers and needed confirmation of their work; autonomous writers, who were independent; meta-reflexive writers, who were “value-driven and analytical” (Ryan et al., 2022, p.10); and fractured writers, who were reliant on others and often overwhelmed by their situation. Not only did the findings of this study reveal students’ perceptions of their approach to the writing process, but they also highlighted the misalignment between student and teacher perceptions. Despite this, it is evident
that the learning environment cultivated by the teachers influences writers’ decision-making. For example, Ryan et al. (2022) hypothesized that a fractured writer may have experienced little writing support from their teacher. Teachers are therefore encouraged to gear formative assessment towards supporting students’ individual writing modes.

Some researchers recognized the power of metaphors as a “perception tool” that can facilitate the transfer of meanings (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2013, p. 348). A study by Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2013) used metaphor analysis to explore Turkish fifth graders’ writing perceptions, which they defined as “a cognitive characteristic of how the individual feels about writing” (p.347). 594 students were asked to complete the following sentence: “Writing is like… because…” (p.349). The metaphors were grouped under 14 conceptual categories, examples of which are “informative”, “joyful”, “never ending”, and “horrible.” One student wrote, “Writing is like eternity, because writing has no end” (p.350). The activity was also compared to “opera”, in terms of being boring, “sports” because it’s exhausting, and “a magic wardrobe [sic]” because “when you open it, you will always find different things” (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2013, pp. 350, 351). Nevertheless, results revealed that most students liked writing and perceived it in a positive light. Furthermore, participants who viewed writing as “informative” and as a “need” arguably recognized the usefulness of writing. Indeed, the metaphors yielded from this study have uncovered children’s perceptions, which included their attitudes and beliefs about writing. I mainly reviewed this study because it provides an alternative means of tapping into student perceptions other than questionnaires, interviews, and familiar self-report measures.

In the shifting sands of the current technological landscape, some researchers have turned their attention to students’ perceptions of technology-mediated writing. Because much of what we do in the classroom has grown to involve technology, Nobles and Paganucci (2015) aimed to
compare the way that high school students perceive an online writing environment versus a traditional writing environment, which involves using a pencil and paper, for example. 18 high school students completed various digital writing assignments, such as online poetry reflections, as part of a four-week online writing class. They then completed a survey about their perception of writing quality, skills, and audience in an online versus traditional writing context. The findings reflected the dominant perception that writing using digital tools fosters writing development and skills. The affordances of technology allows writers to develop their organization, structure, spelling, and vocabulary. Students were also more open to revision and feedback in an online writing environment. In addition, respondents expressed an enhanced awareness of audience that was partially mediated by the ease of giving writing feedback online. This study taps into a specific dimension of writing perceptions that is relevant to current technological shifts in education.

2.4.3 Using Drawings to Understand Children’s Perceptions

2.4.3.1 Complexity Theory and Phenomenology. Oftentimes, classroom practices derive from positivist traditions that emphasize “objectivity” in their philosophy (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). This is an epistemological stance that has been criticized by some educational researchers, who posit that classroom practices, such as drawing, should expand beyond a purely representational role. Darling-McQuistan (2017) adopted Complexity Theory and Phenomenology to explain how children can represent evidence of their subjective experiences using drawing as a medium. Complexity Theory is rooted in the notion that humans’ subjective experiences are inseparable from the objective world (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). It proposes an alternative way of viewing education, which often adopts a prescriptive approach to learning. Instead, Complexity Theory attempts to subvert objective/subjective dichotomies by engaging
learners with the world around them and allowing them to produce their own context-driven text. An example of this would be encouraging them to engage in meaning-making by drawing. Not only can drawing serve as a pedagogical tool, but it can also allow children to take control of their own learning by “decentralizing” and shifting power relations between teacher and student (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). In this case, I attempted to use drawings to extend students’ voices in their education by taking their writing experiences into account.

Phenomenology values human experience and understanding over abstract knowledge (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). Like Complexity Theory, Phenomenology “values children’s perceptions of the world as a legitimate form of knowing, which is rooted in human experience” (p.283). In addition, reflection is central to a Phenomenological learning approach, which assumes that the overlap between “objective” reality and people’s perceptions of it constitutes a point of departure for understanding the world. Therefore, reflections, rather than standardized evaluations of children’s knowledge acquisition, are central to their meaning making (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). Phenomenology regards children as “competent social actors” whose perceptions of their learning experiences are central to learning itself. The current mixed methods study adopts a phenomenological approach to gauging students’ perceptions of their writing experiences, while acknowledging the benefits of discrete data sets. In other words, this study both captured the richness of students’ visual reflections and made use of “objective” discrete survey items.

2.4.3.2 Why Drawings? Most research involving students’ perceptions has relied on self-reported data. Others have championed visual arts as a means of gauging individuals’ perceptions of their learning experiences (Alerby, 2000). Children’s perceptions are composed of their ideas, experiences, interpretations, and values (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). According to
Alerby (2000), children’s thinking can be “made apparent” with the help of creative activities, such as drawing (p.206). In a similar vein, Weber and Mitchell (1995) suggested that drawings “can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious” (p.304), further highlighting the usefulness of freehand drawing in research. In addition, Flowers et al. (2015) put forth a number of reasons for using art as an evaluative data collection tool. First, artistic expression helps children engage with complex topics. Second, it enhances communication and critical thinking skills. Third, it “has a unique ability to connect children’s minds with their hands” (Flowers et al., 2015, p. 847). Therefore, evidence from research suggests that art has a pedagogical value and can capture the richness of children’s perceptions.

2.4.3.3 Notable Examples. Her ethos rooted in Complexity Theory and Phenomenology, Darling-McQuistan (2017) took part in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, which permitted the exploration of collective meaning-making through drawing. PAR is a methodological approach that actively engages children in the processes of reflection and action. Children between the ages of five and seven participated in this project, which encouraged walking and open discussions alongside drawing. At the start of the process, the students were asked to respond to the following prompt in drawing: “What is learning?” In their analysis, Darling-MacQuistan (2017) adopted Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006) adaptation of Halliday’s (1973) linguistic framework, which provides guidelines for contextually understanding visuals. For example, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) suggested that the distance between figures in a drawing might imply perceptions of power dynamics (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). Not only did the analysis open the path for a rich student-teacher dialogue, but it also brought to light issues that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. For instance, one drawing depicted the teacher sitting
on a chair with their students positioned on the carpet. The analysis shed light on perceived teacher-student dynamics, which placed the children in a “lower” status (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). Allowing students to respond to an insightful prompt in drawing has therefore allowed them to communicate their rich thoughts and perceptions.

Zumbrunn et al. (2017) compared understanding students’ perceptions of their learning experiences to taking a child’s temperature. Once a fever is detected, a parent may take the necessary steps to care for their child. Similarly, gauging students’ writing perceptions is the first step towards bettering instruction inside the classroom. Further emphasizing the value of using drawings in research, Zumbrunn et al. (2017) suggest that more conventional methods, such as surveys, may not capture the complexity of students’ perceptions. In addition, other methods, such as open-ended writing prompts, may not do justice to students who have negative writing attitudes and may therefore be incapable of sufficiently expressing themselves in writing. Therefore, Zumbrunn et al. (2017) turned to drawings as a medium through which students can “communicate internal representations of what they know and experience” (p.668). Fifth grade students enrolled across eight classrooms and two schools in the Southeastern United States participated in this project. They were asked to respond to the following prompt in drawing: “Draw a picture about a recent experience you had with writing and how that experience made you feel” (Zumbrunn et al., 2017, p. 668). Participants were also asked to describe, in writing, their drawings. Because it is possible that some students may not be comfortable expressing their feelings in drawing, the purpose of the written responses was to supplement their visual representations and ensure interpretability. It is worth noting that the drawing prompt, which asks participants to express their feelings towards their writing experience, implies an affective component of perceptions. The construct, which is often loosely defined across studies, could
include self-perceptions (i.e., self-efficacy), beliefs about writing, and related aspects of the writing experience. It is therefore wise to employ other methods of data collection alongside drawings, especially if other aspects of writing are being considered, such as writing motivation. Thematic analysis of the children’s drawings yielded four categories: emotions, who is depicted in the drawings, engagement, and writing motivation. Emotions included joy, apathy, anxiety, frustration, and unhappiness. Participants also demonstrated varied depictions of student-teacher interactions, ranging from positive to negative. Confidence, which is conceptually similar to self-efficacy, as well as writing autonomy were also among the themes that emerged (Zumbrunn et al., 2017). Interestingly, a study about students’ writing perceptions yielded insight into participants’ feelings, attitudes, writing anxiety, self-efficacy, and writing beliefs. Based on this, it can be concluded that including multiple measures in a study adds value and richness to the results.

Triplett and Barksdale (2005) adopted a similar approach in their study about elementary students’ perceptions of high-stakes assessments. Even though this thesis is interested in writing perceptions, I reviewed Triplett and Barksdale’s (2005) study because its methodological approach includes drawings. In addition, the image-based research about learners’ perceptions of writing is scarce. Triplett and Barksdale (2005) collected drawings and written responses about 225 third through sixth graders’ most recent testing experience. One of the themes that emerged was the teacher’s role, which ranged from monitor to uninterested observer (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). Mirroring Darling-McQuistan and Zumbrunn et al’s (2017) findings, negative student-teacher interactions were represented by a large distance between exam monitor and anxious test-taker. Surprisingly, however, over half of the students depicted themselves sitting alone at a desk with no one else present. Isolation was therefore a recurring theme that led to
speculations about the test-takers’ environment. Another particularly interesting category was metaphor. Participants compared difficult math problems to a “black cloud” and the ease of solving simpler ones to “pushing a button on a cola machine” (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 249). In addition, the analysis revealed that children as old as ten commonly depict emotion by carefully detailing the mouth. Varied drawn lines therefore adequately conveyed emotions such as nervousness, anger, frustration, and boredom (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). Anxiety was also among the recurring themes that emerged, which in itself is not surprising, but raises concerns when even high-achieving students rarely associated their test-taking experiences with feelings of achievement. The insight gained from this study as well as others further reinforces the benefits of using drawings to gauge children’s perceptions of their learning experiences.

A thorough review of the literature informed this study’s perspective of writing motivation, perceptions, and performance. Wright et al.’s (2019) three-factor model of writing motivation was shown to be a good fit for this study because it takes into account the cognitive, affective, and predispositional dimensions of the construct. The SWAS was also selected because it was shown to be both valid and reliable as a data collection instrument. The current study aims to challenge positivist traditions that emphasize objectivity by looking at writing perceptions through the lens of Complexity Theory, which posits that humans’ subjective experiences are inseparable from the objective world (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). In practical terms, this study uses drawings, instead of discrete survey items, in order to tap into students’ perceptions of their writing experiences.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

The current study aims to (1) explore middle school students’ perceptions of their writing experiences, (2) assess the participants’ writing motivation, and (3) explore the relationships among students’ perceptions of writing, writing motivation, and narrative writing performance. This section therefore provides a detailed explanation of a mixed methods approach to data collection, which includes gathering questionnaire data, students’ drawings, short written responses, and narrative writing samples. In addition, approaches to both quantitative and qualitative data analysis are described in detail.

3.2 Study Design

The current study adopted a mixed methods approach to collecting data about the following variables: perceptions of L2 writing, writing motivation (defined in terms of beliefs about the self as a writer, beliefs about writing, and attitudes towards writing), and writing performance. A mixed methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection, provides a clearer picture of the research situation (Woodrow, 2020). In addition, as mentioned previously, a mixed methods approach aims to enrich and contextualize quantitative data about students’ writing motivation by highlighting their subjective experiences with writing.

Therefore, students’ perceptions were explored qualitatively, while writing motivation and performance were measured quantitatively. Gathering numerical data about writers’ motivation and performance while being mindful of the subjective nature of perceptions aligns with a pragmatist and phenomenological approach that attempts to capture participants’
individual writing experiences. Participants’ drawings were analyzed using Zumbrunn et al.’s (2017) inductive category development framework, which entails the extraction of themes based on patterns in the data (in this case, students’ drawings and corresponding written responses). Correlational analysis was run to determine the relationships among the different motivational variables, participants’ perceptions of their writing experiences, and their narrative writing performance scores.

3.3 Participants

Originally, a total of 100 Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school in Cairo were meant to take part in this study. However, a total of 49 parental consent forms were obtained in time for data collection, so the conclusive number of participants was 49. The school follows national (Thanaweya Amma), British (IGCSE), and American curricula; the classes that were selected for this study, which constitute a convenience sample, follow the Holt McDougal Literature curriculum, which is part of an American literacy program. Private Egyptian schools normally prioritize English language (L2) learning over Arabic (L1) learning, which often leads to a gap in proficiency between students’ L1 and L2. For example, students receive science and math instruction exclusively in English across all three divisions. By contrast, attached to the Arabic language is an unspoken “niche” quality that reduces it from a native language to a secondary one. It is therefore not surprising that only three subjects are taught in Arabic, namely the Arabic language, Arabic social studies, and religion. Consequently, many students struggle to write and read Arabic, which is a widespread issue across private Egyptian schools.

For the current study, intact sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classrooms were selected, with 14-17 students enrolled in each class. However, as previously indicated, not all students
were able to participate in the study. The final participant sample consisted of 20 sixth graders, 18 seventh graders, and 11 eighth graders enrolled across six classes. Middle school grades were chosen due to the gap in the research conducted about this age group. They were also favored over elementary school students because they have acquired more writing experiences. As Bland (2018) noted, whereas very young children (under the age of seven) might not produce drawings that are useful as primary data, older children exhibit simultaneous intellectual and drawing development. At around the age of 9-11, children become capable of more accuracy, which ties into realism and the consequent ease of interpretation of their drawings (Bland, 2018). It can therefore be concluded that the older the participants are, the more able they are to translate their perceptions into visual work. Another reason for the selection of this participant sample is related to continuity; because the Holt McDougal Literature Program is employed consistently across all three grades, this harmony constitutes a reasonable point of departure in the sampling procedure. Sixth grade participants are aged 11-12 years, seventh graders are aged 12-13 years, and the eighth graders are aged 13-14 years. The ratio of girls to boys is roughly 1:1. Each year, students are routinely classified according to their reading proficiency levels. Each class includes students who are classified as “above level”, “on level”, and “below level.” Placement is not decided by a diagnostic proficiency test, but by the teacher after some exposure to their learners. Despite the problematic nature of this placement approach, it has been applied steadily by policy makers and teachers over the past few years. One reason for this could be a lack of resources necessary to design diagnostic proficiency assessments for placement purposes. In addition, due to the fact that the participants are enrolled at a private Egyptian school where English is the main language of instruction, it follows that the data gathered from this study was centered on L2 rather than L1 writing experiences.
3.4 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

3.4.1 Students’ Drawings

In order to qualitatively explore participants’ perceptions of their L2 writing experiences, drawings and short written responses served as the main data collection instruments. It is worth noting that the use of visual work in research does not always yield useful results, such as in the case of very young children. Starting at the age of eight, however, children become capable of “visual realism”, which allows for more sophisticated expression of ideas in drawing (Barraza, 1999). Later, at around 9-11 years old, accuracy is taken into account as children continue to develop both cognitively and intellectually. Based on this, it was expected that sixth, seventh, and eighth graders would be able to put their graphic language into use and produce useful visual work that can be interpreted (Bland, 2018). All 49 participants were provided with papers and varied art supplies to motivate them to draw. They were shown the following prompt: “Draw a picture about a recent experience you had with writing and how that experience made you feel” (Zumbrunn et al., 2017, p.668). In order to ensure interpretability of the data, and because not all students were comfortable expressing their ideas in drawing, they were asked to describe their work in one or two sentences. The following prompt was shown: “What did you draw?” The back of the page was used for this purpose and students were free to write in their L1 (Arabic) or L2 (English). Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete both tasks. Furthermore, in order to ensure reliability of the data, two coders were needed to analyze student responses. In order to ensure intercoder reliability, coder agreement was established by going over the qualitative data analysis procedure, which entailed comparing patterns in the data, developing initial feature codes for the visual and written responses, and then refining those codes until full coder agreement was reached (Zumbrunn et al., 2017).
3.4.2 Questionnaire (SWAS)

Originally designed by Wright et al. (2019), the SWAS is a multidimensional instrument that quantitatively measures students’ writing motivation. It includes 30 Likert scale items asking students to rate statements related to their writing attitude, beliefs, self-efficacy, and self-concept on a scale from one to four. One indicates a statement that is “very different from me”, whereas four indicates a statement that is “a lot like me” (Wright et al., 2020, p. 154). In an effort to design a reliable multidimensional instrument, Wright et al. (2019) ran multiple factor analyses to establish structural validity. External validity was also established by comparing participants’ SWAS scores with their teachers’ perceptions. Students’ self-reported data significantly correlated with their teachers’ perceptions. In addition, the SWAS yielded a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ of 0.92. This is consistent with the reliability scores obtained by Wright et al. (2019) ($\alpha = 0.936$ and 0.943). The aforementioned reliability coefficients indicate that the SWAS yields reliable measurements of students’ writing motivation.

One of the main reasons that this instrument was selected for the current study is that it was originally intended for adolescent learners. Even though it was designed for native English speakers, the SWAS items were judged as suitable for this sample of middle school participants, who receive their instruction mainly in English, not Arabic. Therefore, owing to a private schooling context that mainly prioritizes English as the primary language of instruction, the SWAS was administered in English. It was also administered online using Google Forms to ensure quick and efficient data collection. Each student used their phone or was provided with a school laptop in order to complete this task.
3.4.3 Narrative Writing Samples

Participants were asked to complete a narrative writing task in order to assess their writing performance. The nature of the writing prompt was decided after conferencing with each grade teacher to get a sense of the content being covered in class. The purpose of this is to align my expectations of “good writing” with those of the discourse community (Beaufort, 2007). In this case, each class (with its students, English language teacher, and the knowledge, skills, and expectations they associate with good writing) comprise a discourse community. In the end, it was decided that students would respond to the following prompt: “Write about your winter break.” Students across all three grades were assessed on the quality of their ideas, organization, word choice, and conventions as per the Common Core Standards (see Appendix B). Participants were provided with lined paper to accomplish this task. They were not given specific instructions about how to plan or organize their composition in order to ensure internal validity. Instead, they were encouraged to rely on their schema knowledge in order to complete this task. In addition, in order to ensure inter-rater reliability, two trained raters scored the writing pieces using the analytical rubric provided in the curriculum (see Appendix B). Each writing sample was given a maximum score of 24, with equal weight distribution across the four rubric criteria.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Participants’ drawings and written responses underwent inductive category development (Zumbrunn et al., 2017), which yielded the themes necessary to understand their L2 writing perceptions. Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient was employed to investigate the relationships among motivational variables, student perceptions, and their narrative writing performance scores.
3.6 Data Needed to Answer Research Questions

3.6.1 RQ 1: How do Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school perceive their L2 writing experiences?

Inductive category development yielded codes, or tentative categories, based on recurring patterns in the data. This was followed by revisions and the subsequent narrowing down of the codes and their reformulation into themes. There were two datasets, one pertaining to participants’ drawings and the other to their written responses. Even though they aim to complement each other, each dataset was analyzed separately for themes alongside the “clues” found in the material that determined those themes. For example, a frowning face could be considered a clue pointing to sadness as a theme. This approach to data analysis is adapted from Zumbrunn et al. (2017). Based on the results of other studies, I hypothesized that participants’ drawings and written responses would reflect their ideas, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about their writing experiences, all of which pour into their perceptions. While the quantitative dataset represents specific aspects of writing motivation, the qualitative data is meant to contextualize, complement, and highlight this data.

3.6.2 RQ 2: What are the Egyptian middle school students’ levels of writing motivation, as measured by the SWAS?

49 students’ SWAS results were first organized into an Excel sheet and then analyzed using SPSS in order to determine the mean and standard deviation for each survey item. These descriptive statistics reflected the extent to which participants identified with each SWAS item. In addition, separate scores were calculated for each motivational variable (writing self-beliefs, beliefs about writing, and writing attitude) in order to analyze the different dimensions of writing
A Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient was employed in order to explore the relationships among the different motivational variables.

3.6.3 RQ 3: What is the relationship among the Egyptian middle school students' perceptions of writing, their writing motivation, and their narrative writing performance?

In order to investigate the relationships among participants’ perceptions, writing motivation, and writing performance scores, correlational analysis was run between these variables. Since writing motivation is operationalized in terms of participants’ writing self-beliefs, beliefs about writing, and writing attitudes, each sub-variable was examined in relation to writing performance. The purpose of this was to understand if some motivational variables were more influential than others. In addition, there was room to make additional connections between participants’ drawings and their writing performance scores. For that reason, four students were selected using in the following categories: positive perceptions- high performance, positive perceptions- low performance, negative perceptions- high performance, and negative perceptions- low performance. Connections were made based on participants’ perception and performance data in each of these categories. This was a form of qualitative analysis that entailed noting interesting patterns that emerged across the datasets pertaining to each one of the four participants.
Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Chapter Overview

The current study aimed to explore Egyptian middle school students’ perceptions of their classroom writing experiences. It also investigated the connections among the participants’ perceptions, their writing motivation, as measured by the Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS), and their narrative writing performance. This study adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection. Perception data was gathered in the form of 49 student drawings and written responses, participants’ writing motivation was measured using the SWAS, and their narrative writing performance was evaluated using an analytical rubric that assessed quality of ideas, organization, word choice, and conventions (see Appendix B).

First of all, this chapter describes the participants’ perceptions of writing. Related to that are the following issues: (1) The nature of students’ emotions towards their writing experiences, (2) their confidence in themselves as writers, (3) their levels of engagement, (4) who they portrayed in their drawings, and (5) the different ways by which they expressed their perceptions. Second of all, based on the SWAS data, this chapter describes participants’ writing motivation, which is encompassed in their attitudes, beliefs about writing, self-concept, and self-efficacy. Third of all, the chapter explores the relationships among the different motivational variables, as well as among students’ perceptions, writing motivation, and narrative writing performance.

4.2 RQ 1: How do Egyptian middle school students enrolled at a private school perceive their L2 writing experiences?

In order to explore students’ perceptions of writing, they were asked to “draw” their perceptions by responding to the following prompt: “Draw a picture about a recent experience
you had with writing and how that experience made you feel” (Zumbrunn et al., 2017, p. 668). They were also asked to briefly describe their drawing in writing in order to ensure interpretability. All 49 student drawings and written responses were analyzed by two coders (myself and a colleague) following Zumbrunn et al.’s (2017) inductive category development framework, which entails independent extraction of themes followed by collaborative development of feature codes.

In the initial stages of the analysis, the coders agreed to classify the drawings and their corresponding written responses into three categories: positive, negative, and mixed perceptions. This was a holistic evaluation of each response, which was treated as one unit or artifact. The purpose of this was to establish common ground at the beginning stages of the analysis before independently coding for more specific features. Each artifact was evaluated based on the presence of positive and negative “clues.” For example, clues that indicated joy (a positive emotion) included smiley faces, hearts, and adjectives, such as “fun”, “happy”, and “intense.” On the other hand, clues that pointed to sadness (a negative emotion) included frowning faces, tears, and words, such as “crying” and “depression.” Drawings that only featured positive clues were classified as positive writing perceptions, those that only featured negative clues were classified as negative perceptions, and those which featured both positive and negative clues were considered mixed perceptions. Whereas 11 learners (22 percent) had positive perceptions of their writing experiences, 18 (37 percent) had negative perceptions. In addition, 20 students (41 percent) had mixed perceptions about writing (see Figure 1). The following stage of the analysis involved developing more specific features or categories based on patterns in the data. The final agreed upon features were positive emotion (joy, calm, and freedom), negative emotion (sadness, anger, and anxiety), mixed emotions (combinations of happiness and sadness, anger, anxiety, or
boredom), confidence (high versus low), engagement (active engagement versus disengagement), and presence of others (writing with/around others versus writing in isolation) (see Table 1). In addition, some insights emerged about the way that participants expressed positive perceptions about writing compared to negative perceptions. Connections were made between this point and the notion of voice in writing.

**Table 1**
*Features in Students’ Drawings and Written Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Drawing Clues</th>
<th>Writing Clues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Birds flying, sun, smiley face, heart eyes, stars</td>
<td>&quot;Feel good&quot;, &quot;fun&quot;, &quot;wohoo&quot;, &quot;happiness&quot;, &quot;happy&quot;, &quot;intense&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Clouds, birds flying, sun</td>
<td>&quot;Calming&quot;, &quot;calm&quot;, &quot;up in the clouds&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Expressing my feelings&quot;, &quot;expressing my thoughts&quot;, &quot;write my emotions&quot;, &quot;big imagination&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Emotion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Frowning face, crying face</td>
<td>&quot;Sad&quot;, &quot;crying&quot;, &quot;depression&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Grimacing face, person cursing, throwing writing in trash</td>
<td>“Angry”, “mad”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Screaming face, sweating face, wiggly line for mouth, to-do list, clock, low battery, scribbles, exclamation marks</td>
<td>&quot;Too much words&quot;, &quot;struggling to finish&quot;, &quot;time consuming&quot;, &quot;specific time to submit&quot;, &quot;deadline&quot;, &quot;pressuring&quot;, &quot;stressed&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Emotions</td>
<td>Half-happy/half-sad face, multiple faces depicting range of emotions</td>
<td>“Mixed emotions”, “IDK” [I don’t know], “I like it, but I hate it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness and Sadness/Anger/Anxiety/Boredom</td>
<td>Half-happy/half-sad face, multiple faces depicting range of emotions</td>
<td>“Confident”, &quot;I improved&quot;, &quot;good grades&quot;, &quot;best I ever wrote&quot;, &quot;easy&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>A+ paper, thumbs up</td>
<td>&quot;Don't know what to write&quot;, &quot;don't have ideas&quot;, &quot;my work is bad&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Confidence</td>
<td>C+ paper</td>
<td>&quot;Confident&quot;, &quot;I improved&quot;, &quot;good grades&quot;, &quot;best I ever wrote&quot;, &quot;easy&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Student drawn writing/typing, thinking bubbles</td>
<td>&quot;Focused&quot;, &quot;think of ideas&quot;, &quot;I have ideas&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Engagement</td>
<td>Student drawn writing/typing, thinking bubbles</td>
<td>&quot;Focused&quot;, &quot;think of ideas&quot;, &quot;I have ideas&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>Student drawn crying while writing, student drawn avoiding writing</td>
<td>“Don’t want to write”, &quot;bad prompt&quot;, &quot;prompt is boring&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Others</td>
<td>Writing With/Around Others</td>
<td>“The miss” (referring to teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in Isolation</td>
<td>Teacher drawn writing alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student drawn writing alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, the analysis yielded themes based on patterns in the data. These patterns were translated into features, namely emotion, confidence, engagement, and the presence of others. Those features are elaborated on in the following section.

### 4.2.1 Emotion

#### 4.2.1.1 Positive Emotion.
4.2.1.1 *Joy.* More than half (31) of the students’ drawn and written responses showed evidence of positive writing perceptions. Of those 31 responses, 20 conveyed mixed perceptions and 11 reflected purely positive perceptions of the participants’ writing experiences. These positive perceptions included positive emotions, such as joy. Figure 2 illustrates one student’s enthusiasm to write. These feelings of joy experienced while writing are depicted by visual cues, such as a smiley face, as well as the adjective “happy.”

**Figure 2**
*Student Drawing Depicting Joy*

4.2.1.2 *Calm.* Other students reported feeling calm and relaxed while writing. Figure 3 shows a student seated at a desk, happily completing a writing assignment. In his description, he wrote, “While writing my essay, I felt calm, like it was only me, my pencil, my paper, and my desk. Nothing else but that.” Another student, who also reported feeling calm while writing, wrote, “I feel like I’m in a diff [different] event, calming place while writing. Like up in the
4.2.1.3 Freedom. For some students, writing seemed to evoke a sense of freedom that stems from the ability to express thoughts and ideas. In Figure 4, there is an apparent magic to the freedom of writing, which is symbolized in the drawing on the left by the stars emerging from a computer. This participant wrote, “Expressing my thoughts and feelings into words & letting the words express themselves.” Similarly, the drawing on the right depicts a grinning student with a “big imagination”, reflecting a relationship between free expression and positive writing perceptions.
Students who experienced positive emotions while writing, such as joy, calm, and freedom, also showed a positive attitude towards writing. Attitude can be defined here as “a set of acquired feelings” about writing (Conradi et al., 2014, p.154). These feelings are likely to predispose the student to engage in or avoid writing tasks. In addition, as previously mentioned, writing attitudes reflect an individual’s “motivational perceptions”, which entail the extent to which one likes/dislikes writing (Abdel Latif, 2015, p.11). In their responses, students expressed positive writing attitudes using symbols, such as smiley faces, heart eyes, and stars, and verbs, such as “like” and “love.”

4.2.1.2 Negative Emotion.

4.2.1.2.1 Sadness. Unfortunately, not all participants perceived their writing experiences in a positive light. Overall, 38 out of 49 student responses showed evidence of negative writing perceptions (this number includes responses that reflected mixed perceptions). Of those 38 drawings and written responses, 18 reflected purely negative perceptions about writing. Those
perceptions included feelings of sadness, which are demonstrated by Figure 5. In these drawings, the prevalent visual cue is tears. Whereas in the drawing on the left, words such as “sad” and “crying” describe this participant’s emotions writing, the written responses in the remaining two drawings carry an attitudinal dimension. More specifically, the phrase, “I hate writing” further reinforces these participants’ negative attitude towards the subject.

**Figure 5**
*Student Drawings Depicting Sadness*
4.2.1.2.2 Anger. For some participants, writing seemed to evoke feelings of anger and frustration (see Figures 6 and 7). Figure 6, which depicts a student grimacing, provides evidence of his anger while he seemingly struggles through a writing assignment. Similar to Figure 5, the text points to this student’s negative attitude towards writing.

**Figure 6**  
*Student Drawing Depicting Anger and Frustration*

![Student Drawing Depicting Anger and Frustration](image)

**Figure 7**  
*Student Drawing Depicting Anger*

![Student Drawing Depicting Anger](image)
4.2.1.2.3 Anxiety. Some students reported feeling anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed while writing. Examples of anxiety-inducing factors included looming deadlines, a heavy workload, and writer’s block. These factors seemed to be contributing to feelings of anxiety and students’ subsequent negative perceptions of their writing experiences. For example, the clocks in Figure 8 symbolizes imminent deadlines, which seem to be contributing to these students’ writing anxiety. In addition, one student wrote, “I don’t like writing because it’s too much words”, which could be a testament to a heavy workload.

Another apparent cause of participants’ writing anxiety was writer’s block. For example, one student wrote, “In this picture there is a bad prompt and I don’t know what to write. This actually happened to me during a test and it made me dislike writing [sic] a bit more.” Because there is a link between positive writing experiences and positive writing attitudes (Petric, 2002), it is therefore not surprising that this student’s negative testing experience has contributed to a negative attitude towards writing.

Figure 8
Student Drawings Depicting Anxiety
4.2.1.3 Mixed Emotions. Oftentimes, students showed ambivalence towards their writing experiences. 20 (almost 41 percent) of all student drawings showed evidence of mixed emotions and/or attitudes towards writing. This means that more students reported having mixed emotions towards writing than purely positive or negative emotions. For some students, happiness coexisted with feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, and boredom. Others mentioned liking and disliking writing at the same time. Sometimes, these feelings and attitudes were not justified in writing, as shown in Figure 9, yet they captivatingly reflect these learners’ writing perceptions.

Figure 9
*Student Drawings Depicting Mixed Emotions*

It is important to note that more than half of ambivalent participants attributed their mixed emotions and attitudes to a lack of autonomy. In fact, around 30 percent of all participants expressed concern about a lack of choice, which contributed to both mixed and negative emotions towards writing. For example, Figure 10 illustrates one student’s reluctance to write, which has resulted in feelings of anger. This is juxtaposed with feelings of contentment that arise from a willingness to engage in writing. In a similar vein, one student wrote, “I think writing is really fun when you’re not obligated to do it (...) When I feel obligated to do it, it doesn’t make
me feel better after writing because there is a deadline and I’m forced to do it.” Another participant wrote, “When I write I feel good about it, however if I have a specific time to submit it, it makes me feel stressed and not have much fun. Also, it depends on the prompt. If it’s not that good I don’t really like it, and don’t feel good while writing it.” Many students expressed a general liking for writing if given the opportunity to write about topics that interest them. In a similar vein, some students said that they struggled to generate ideas for “bad prompts”, which evoked feelings of low confidence, boredom, and stress. These responses demonstrate the relationship between some participants’ ambivalence and a lacking sense of autonomy, which was attributed to seemingly inflexible deadlines and prescribed prompts.

**Figure 10**
*Student Drawings Depicting Mixed Emotions (Autonomy)*
4.2.2 Confidence

4.2.2.1 High Confidence. Some students’ positive perceptions of their writing experiences seemed to be related to good or improved performance. For example, Figure 17 illustrates a student holding an “A” paper. She wrote, “Last time I wrote an essay I got a 24/25, I jumped out of happiness, once I received my grade I really felt that I improved.” This student’s feelings of pride and confidence seem to be connected to writing improvement as reflected by her grades. Another student reported similar feelings of accomplishment, mentioning that her most recent writing composition was “intense, fun, and the best I ever wrote.”

Figure 11
Student Drawings Depicting High Confidence
4.2.2.2 Low Confidence. Students’ low confidence was shown to be related to writing grades. Figure 12 (left) depicts a student crying while holding a “C” paper. “It was terrible,” this learner wrote, suggesting a low sense of confidence that is a consequence of a poor writing grade. In a similar vein, Figure 12 (right) shows a teacher returning a writing test to a distressed student. While the student waits apprehensively, the teacher is shown to be smiling, which reflects a negative teacher-student interaction.

Figure 12
*Student Drawings Depicting Low Confidence*
4.2.3 Engagement

4.2.3.1 Active Engagement. 23 out of 49 students drew themselves interacting with writing one way or the other. Among the indicators of positive writing perceptions was students’ active engagement with writing tasks or writing in general. For example, one student expressed a desire to “publish many books” (see Figure 13), while another wrote, “I’m very focused on my writing.” Visual markers of active engagement included students’ depictions of themselves holding pencils, writing at desks, typing on keyboards, and generally engaging with writing tasks. Active engagement with writing tasks was also shown to be associated with positive emotions towards writing.

Figure 13
Student Drawing Depicting Active Engagement
4.2.3.2 Disengagement. By contrast, 13 students depicted themselves as disengaged from the writing process. Figure 14, for example, shows a student in fetal position, avoiding her writing assignment because she does not “know what to write.”

**Figure 14**  
*Student Drawing Depicting Disengagement*

More “extreme” depictions of disengagement are shown in Figure 15, where students have depicted themselves as totally disconnected from the writing process. Figure 15 (left) portrays a student thinking about a “burger” instead of working on his writing task. Similarly, one student drew herself crying with an ominous figure standing at the foot of the bed (right). It is not clear, however, what the masked figure represents. Possible interpretations include a negative student-teacher interaction, a negative portrayal of a parent/family member, or a
personification of writing as a diabolical creature. In this specific figure, even the written
description did not ensure interpretability of the student’s intention.

**Figure 15**
*Student Drawings Depicting Extreme Disengagement*

![Student Drawings Depicting Extreme Disengagement](image)

This dramatic portrayal of disengagement is echoed in Figure 16, which also serves as a
vivid depiction of ambivalence. Torn between enjoying writing and disliking it, this student
seems to be engaging with the writing task on the one hand (with their pencil pointing towards
the paper) and actively disengaging on the other hand, waving their pencil around like some sort
of weapon. Not surprisingly, students who depicted themselves as disengaged from the writing
process were also more likely to harbor negative emotions towards writing, such as anxiety.
4.2.4 Presence of Others

4.2.4.1 Writing With/Around Others. It was also useful to look at who students drew in their pictures. For this part of the analysis, the drawings which depicted students interacting with writing were coded. As previously mentioned, 23 out of 49 students illustrated some form of interaction (engagement or disengagement) with writing tasks. Teachers were not often present in participants’ drawings. In fact, only four out of the 23 drawings that depicted interaction with writing featured an individual other than the student. Figure 17 represents contrasting perceptions of student-teacher interactions; whereas the drawing on the left highlights the power dynamic between student and teacher, the one on the right is a positive portrayal of the teacher as a supportive figure.
4.2.4 Writing in Isolation. By contrast, 19 out of 23 students (almost 83 percent) drew themselves alone. Writing, then, is mainly regarded by students as a solitary activity, irrespective of their emotions towards it.

4.2.5 Use of Figurative Language

One of the insights that emerged from the analysis was related to the different ways that students described their perceptions. More specifically, students who had positive perceptions about writing were more likely to use figurative language, such as metaphors. For example, one student compared the activity to being “up in the clouds.” Another participant wrote, “Expressing my thoughts and feelings into words & letting the words express themselves.” By contrast, students who had negative perceptions of their writing experiences did not use figurative language. One observation is that some of them used creative license in their visual depictions of their emotions, but fell short of written elaboration (see Figure 18). All four drawings in Figure 18 are accompanied by concise written declarations. By contrast, they are rich in clues that represent how the participants feel. These include intense facial expressions.
(grimacing and crying) and emotionally-charged actions, such as tossing one’s own writing in the trash.

**Figure 18**
*Student Drawings Depicting Negative Perceptions of Writing*
4.3 RQ 2: What Are the Egyptian Middle School Students’ Levels of Writing Motivation, as Measured by the SWAS?

The second research question revolves around the middle school participants’ writing motivation, which is a multidimensional construct. Wright et al.’s (2019) Self-Beliefs, Writing-Beliefs, and Attitude Survey (SWAS) was therefore used to measure different aspects of writing motivation. Those aspects are attitude, beliefs about writing, self-concept, and self-efficacy. Participants completed the survey, which consists of 30 Likert items, via Google Forms. The final Excel sheet, which contains 49 student responses, was entered into SPSS in order to determine the mean and standard deviation for each item. It is important to note that items one, six, 19, and 28 were reverse-coded for analysis.

In order to answer this research question, items pertaining to each motivational variable were grouped together and analyzed. Items that held the highest and lowest mean values were noted and the following conclusions were reached: (1) Participants mostly wished they wrote less in school despite having relatively positive feelings about writing, (2) even though most participants believed that finishing writing tasks is important and that improving as a writer is a positive thing, a lesser portion of them reported enjoying checking their writing for errors, (3) students were relatively confident in their overall writing ability, but they did not believe that it was their best subject, (4) writers attributed their success to hard work rather than luck, and (5) students felt relatively comfortable sharing their writing with their peers, but this item held a lower mean than others pertaining to self-efficacy. In addition, it was also useful to look into the relationships among the different motivational variables. The findings reflected moderate to strong correlations among the variables of writing motivation.
4.3.1 Attitude

As shown in Table 2, the highest mean value pertained to item number nine (Writing can be a lot of fun) (mean = 2.71), followed by item number eight (Overall, I have positive feelings about writing) (mean = 2.67). This indicates that participants had relatively positive emotions towards writing. By contrast, items number one (I don't like having to rewrite my paper*) and six (I wish we wrote less in school*) both held the lowest mean value pertaining to students’ attitudes towards writing (mean = 1.84). Since the two items are reverse-coded, this result suggests that participants strongly agreed that (1) they do not like having to rewrite their paper and (2) they should write less in school. Both of these items bear a relation to the amount of work that middle schoolers are expected to complete.

4.3.2 Beliefs about Writing

Participants strongly identified with item number 14 (I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved), which held the highest mean value in this SWAS section (mean = 3.67). In addition, there was a general consensus about the importance of finishing every writing assignment (mean = 3.53). Also under the theme of improvement, most participants held the view that becoming a better writer is a positive thing (mean = 3.33). Item 13 (I enjoy checking my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly) held a lower mean in comparison (mean = 2.69).

4.3.3 Self-Concept

This section of the SWAS was meant to tap into participants’ self-concept, which is “a composite view of oneself” (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 2). The mean score for item number 19 (I don't get good grades in writing because I'm just not smart enough*) was 3.29, which is the
highest mean score in this section of the SWAS. Because this item is reverse-coded, the result suggests that participants did not attribute poor writing grades to lower intelligence, or that they did not perceive their writing grades as poor at all. Respondents were mostly confident that they can write to persuade, inform, entertain, or express (mean = 2.88). They were also relatively confident in their overall writing abilities (mean = 2.80). Interestingly, participants least identified with item number 21 (In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at writing) (mean = 1.92). Even though they were shown to be relatively confident writers, they did not seem to think that writing is their “best” subject.

4.3.4 Self-Efficacy

The final section of the SWAS measured participants’ self-efficacy for writing, which is their perception of their ability to plan and execute a task while persevering in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1977). Respondents most strongly identified with item number 27 (When I get a good grade on a paper, it’s because I tried really hard) (mean = 3.57), which means that they attributed success in writing to hard work. Item 28 (When I get a good grade on a writing assignment, it’s because I got lucky*) also strongly resonated with participants (mean = 3.39). Because item 28 is reverse-coded, this finding means that participants did not attribute writing success to sheer luck. There therefore seems to be a logical connection between students’ strong agreement with item number 27 and their strong disagreement with item 28. On the other hand, item number 25 (I feel confident sharing my writing with my friends) held the lowest mean (mean = 2.67).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I don't like having to rewrite my paper.*</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like to write.</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I like writing long stories or reports at school.</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think it would be fun to be an author who writes books.</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I think it would be fun to have a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine.</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I wish we wrote less in school.*</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I would rather write a story than do homework.</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Overall, I have positive feelings about writing.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Writing can be a lot of fun.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs About Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I believe it is very important to be a good writer.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I don't mind when the teacher asks me to go back and change some of my writing.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I enjoy checking my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly.</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I think it would be great to become an even better writer than I already am.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Writing helps me learn.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Concept</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I am confident that I can write to persuade, inform, entertain, or express.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I can write good papers because writing is easy for me.</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I don't get good grades in writing because I'm just not smart enough.*</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I feel confident in my overall writing abilities.</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at writing.</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.909</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. When I write a paper, it's easy for me to come up with ideas.  
23. When my class is asked to write an essay, report, or story, mine is one of the best.  
24. When I'm writing, it's easy for me to think of the right words.  
25. I feel confident sharing my writing with my friends.  
26. I know that I will do well in writing this year.  
27. When I get a good grade on a paper, it's because I tried really hard.  
28. When I get a good grade on a writing assignment, it's because I got lucky.*  
29. When I'm proofreading, it's easy for me to catch my mistakes.  
30. When writing, it's easy to me to decide what goes 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so on.

| Self-Efficacy                                                                 | Score | Value
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------
| 22. When I write a paper, it's easy for me to come up with ideas.             | 2.65  | .903  
| 23. When my class is asked to write an essay, report, or story, mine is one of the best. | 2.16  | 1.007 
| 24. When I'm writing, it's easy for me to think of the right words.            | 2.76  | .969  
| 25. I feel confident sharing my writing with my friends.                      | 2.67  | 1.088 
| 26. I know that I will do well in writing this year.                           | 2.71  | .957  
| 27. When I get a good grade on a paper, it's because I tried really hard.     | 3.57  | .791  
| 28. When I get a good grade on a writing assignment, it's because I got lucky.* | 3.39  | .812  
| 29. When I'm proofreading, it's easy for me to catch my mistakes.              | 2.90  | 1.026 
| 30. When writing, it's easy to me to decide what goes 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so on. | 2.86  | .979  

Note: Items marked with an asterisk were reverse-coded.

**4.3.5 Correlations among Writing Motivation Variables**

Even though the second research question is mainly concerned with the students’ levels of writing motivation, it was also useful to look at the relationship among the four motivational variables (attitude, beliefs about writing, self-concept, and self-efficacy). As previously mentioned, participants’ writing motivation was measured using the SWAS and the data was exported as an Excel sheet. The scores pertaining to each survey section, each representing a different motivational variable, were grouped. A Pearson correlation was run among the four variables of writing motivation using SPSS software (see Table 3). Moderate to high correlations were found among the variables. For example, a relatively strong correlation \((r = .699)\) was found between participants’ attitude towards writing and their writing self-concept. Statistically strong correlations were also found between students’ writing attitudes and their beliefs about writing \((r = .663)\), and between their writing self-concept and self-efficacy \((r = .569)\). Moderate
correlations were found between writers’ self-concept and their beliefs about writing ($r = .483$), their self-efficacy and beliefs about writing ($r = .467$), and their attitudes and self-efficacy ($r = .454$).

Table 3
Correlations among SWAS Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Beliefs about Writing</th>
<th>Self-Concept</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.663**</td>
<td>.699**</td>
<td>.454**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>.663**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.483**</td>
<td>.467**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>.699**</td>
<td>.483**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.569**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.454**</td>
<td>.467**</td>
<td>.569**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.4 RQ 3: What is the Relationship among the Egyptian Middle School Students' Perceptions of Writing, their Writing Motivation, and their Narrative Writing Performance?

The third research question aimed to explore the relationship between participants’ writing motivation and their narrative writing performance. Students were asked to respond to the following writing prompt: “How did you spend your winter break?” The writing samples were scored by two raters according to an analytical rubric that takes into account the following criteria: focus/support, organization, word choice/voice, and conventions (see Appendix B). Each composition was given a score out of 24. The first ten writing samples were scored independently, then interrater reliability was established by comparing scores until rater...
agreement was reached. In the end, an average writing score was obtained for each student by adding the final scores by both raters and dividing that value by two. In addition, the scores pertaining to each SWAS section, each representing a different motivational variable, were grouped and summed for each student. A Pearson correlation was then run between participants’ narrative writing scores and their SWAS scores (see Table 4).

### 4.4.1 The Relationship between Writing Motivation and Writing Performance

Moderate, but statistically significant correlations were found between most motivational variables and students’ narrative writing scores (see Table 4). For example, moderate correlations were found between students’ average writing scores and their beliefs about writing ($r = .453$), as well as between their writing scores and attitudes towards writing ($r = .416$). A comparatively weaker relationship was found between students’ writing performance scores and their self-concept, ($r = .290$), as well as between their writing performance and self-efficacy ($r = .168$).

**Table 4**
*Correlations between SWAS Factors and Writing Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Writing Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td>.416**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs about Writing</strong></td>
<td>.453**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Concept</strong></td>
<td>.290*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>.168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
The relationship between students’ writing perceptions and their writing performance was also worth exploring. From the sample of 49 students, four students were picked in the following categories: positive perceptions- high performance, negative perceptions- high performance, positive perceptions- low performance, and negative perceptions- low performance (see Table 5). Individual student “profiles” were constructed with the purpose of exploring the different themes that emerged in their drawings and their connection to their performance on the narrative writing task. In order to paint the whole picture for each student, their SWAS results were also taken into consideration when making connections between the variables.

**4.4.2 Positive Perceptions- High Performance.** This student represented positive perceptions of her writing experiences in her drawing and obtained a high narrative writing score. She drew herself as actively engaged with a writing task, comparing writing to being up on a cloud. In her narrative piece, she wrote about “improving” over the winter break; “Firstly, it’s important to mention what it was I did that made me feel like I improved. I started focusing a little more on myself, prayed more, and even started using daily planners which, if you know me, is quite rare.” She also went on to mention that, even though she was only “productive in the first and last few days, it was the best improvement in organization and self-improvement I’ve made in a long time.” At the same time, her SWAS scores generally indicated high levels of writing motivation. A closer look revealed that this student did not mind having to rewrite her papers. Interestingly, she strongly disagreed that having a job as a newspaper or magazine writer would be fun. She also expressed difficulty coming up with ideas for papers, catching her mistakes, and deciding what goes first, second, and third. Despite this awareness of dislikes and potential areas
of improvement, this student generally showed high levels of writing motivation, a positive perception of writing, and obtained a high writing performance score.

4.4.2.2 Negative Perceptions- High Performance. Despite expressing anger and anxiety associated with writing, this participant obtained a high narrative writing score. In her drawing, she explained that “writing is time consuming” and that she usually does not have the time to “sit down to write.” This is interesting given the fact that she wrote a noticeably lengthy and well-organized piece of writing. In addition, some aspects of her SWAS scores were highly consistent with her negative perceptions of writing. For example, in her responses she indicated that she mostly does not like writing and does not believe it is very important to be a good writer. Her results also indicated a low self-concept. This student was not confident sharing her writing with peers, and neither was she confident that she would do well in writing this year.

4.4.2.3 Positive Perceptions- Low Performance. Expressing his joy with a wide-eyed smiley face, this student seemed to have a positive outlook on his writing experiences. This corroborated his positive attitude and beliefs about writing as indicated by his SWAS scores. By contrast, this participant did not think that writing is his best subject, and neither did he believe that his writing pieces lean towards being “the best.” Generally, however, he showed high levels of writing motivation despite obtaining a low narrative writing score. Unfortunately, this student scored especially low on the focus/support (idea generation) and word choice/voice criteria. His writing piece was short and underdeveloped, which culminated in an overall low writing performance score.
### 4.4.2.4 Negative Perceptions- Low Performance

One participant expressed feelings of sadness and anger associated with her writing experiences. This was interestingly reflected in her writing. For example, she opened her introductory paragraph with the statement, “The mid-year holiday was good, fun.” The shortness of her sentences (and overall narrative piece) reflected a sense of apathy towards this particular writing task. These negative emotions were consistent with low levels of writing motivation. As predicted, her SWAS scores were noticeably low. Despite this, she strongly agreed that finishing every writing assignment is important to her, and that she feels most successful if she sees that her writing has improved. Unfortunately, this participant showed a low self-concept and a slightly higher sense of self-efficacy.

**Table 5**

*Relationships between Writing Perceptions and Narrative Writing Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Perceptions</th>
<th>Negative Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Performance</strong></td>
<td>In Drawing and Written Responses: Expressed feelings of calm, active engagement with writing (solitary), used figurative language</td>
<td>In Drawing and Written Responses: Expressed feelings of anxiety related to deadlines, no interaction with writing task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>In Narrative Writing</strong> Sample: Obtained high scores across four rubric criteria (focus/support, organization, word choice/voice, and conventions), wrote about personal improvement</td>
<td><strong>In Narrative Writing</strong> Sample: Obtained high scores across four rubric criteria, wrote lengthy and detailed personal narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Low Performance** | In Drawing and Written Responses: Expressed                                      | In Drawing and Written Responses: Expressed                                      |
feelings of joy and positive attitude towards writing, no interaction with writing task

feelings of sadness and anger, no interaction with writing task

**In Narrative Writing**
**Sample:** Scored low on focus/support (idea generation) and word choice/voice

**In Narrative Writing**
**Sample:** Scored low across four rubric criteria, wrote very short personal narrative

The quantitative data gathered for this study allowed for statistical exploration of participants’ writing motivation, while the drawings contextualized those findings, positioning them within the bigger picture of middle schoolers’ perceptions of their writing experiences. First of all, the drawings were a window into students’ emotions towards writing, their confidence as writers, their levels of engagement, and their perceptions about writing as a social activity. These themes were constructed based on the clues found in the drawings and their corresponding written responses. Combinations of those themes or features came together to provide a fuller picture of students’ writing perceptions. Out of 49 drawings, only 11 reflected purely positive perceptions about writing. A greater proportion of student drawings reflected purely negative perceptions about writing (18), as well as mixed perceptions (20). Expanding on this point, I noticed that the majority of responses were more nuanced. A considerable number of students (20) had mixed emotions and perceptions about writing. For example, some participants reported generally liking writing despite having reservations against it. These reservations carry implications for writing instruction. In addition, participants who had negative perceptions of writing represented these perceptions differently than those who had positive writing perceptions.
The quantitative data pertaining to students’ writing motivation reflected mixed results. With regards to their attitude, students reported having relatively positive feelings about writing, but they also strongly agreed that they should write less in school. With regards to their beliefs about writing, students attributed much importance to becoming a better writer. Interestingly, they reported enjoying checking (and therefore potentially improving) their writing to a lesser degree. Moreover, students were shown to be relatively confident in their overall writing abilities, but did not think that writing was their best subject. Finally, participants were shown to attribute success in writing to hard work rather than luck. Moderate to high correlations were found among the four dimensions of writing motivation, but the analysis reflected weaker relationships between the dimensions and students’ narrative writing performance. Whereas moderate correlations were found between students’ average writing scores and their beliefs about writing as well as between their writing scores and attitudes towards writing, a weak relationship was found between writers’ writing performance scores and their self-concept, and the relationship between their writing performance and self-efficacy was not statistically significant.

Furthermore, four student profiles were put together in order to explore the interactions among perceptions of writing, motivation, and performance. The following categories were developed: Positive perceptions- high performance, positive perceptions- low performance, negative perceptions- high performance, and negative perceptions- low performance. These cases were not to be generalized, but represented unique student vignettes. For example, the student who fell into the positive perceptions- high performance category also showed high levels of writing motivation. Interestingly, in her narrative writing piece, self-improvement and self-regulating strategies, such as planning, were a recurring theme. Even though, initially, the
content of these participants’ writing was not to be considered a source of qualitative data, the “stories” that these students told in their narratives added an interesting dimension to my understanding of their writing experiences.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

The findings of this study open up paths to several discussions. These discussions related to the nature and underlying reasons for participants’ positive, negative, and mixed emotions. I also discuss the apparent link between participants’ emotions and their attitudes towards writing. Moreover, I discuss the role of grades and writing improvement in students’ perceptions of confidence, explore the underlying reasons for student engagement (or disengagement) from writing, analyze students’ perceptions of writing as a solitary activity, and compare the different ways by which participants expressed their perceptions. Furthermore, I attempt to explain some conflicting findings yielded by the SWAS. Even though, at first glance, some results appear to be contradictory, these findings can be better explained using the appropriate theoretical frameworks. Finally, I explore the relationships between writing motivational variables and participants’ narrative writing performance, and attempt to explain why some correlations are stronger than others.

5.2 Egyptian Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Writing

5.2.1 Emotion

5.2.1.1 Positive Emotion. Even though only a minority of students reported purely positive perceptions, more than half of all student drawings showed evidence of positive perceptions, which included positive emotions towards writing. Participants reported feeling happy, calm, and free while writing. Those who expressed a sense of freedom in their drawings seemed to view writing as an escape. This feeling was mainly attributed to the ability to express
one’s ideas and thoughts in writing. There was also emphasis on the imagination as an integral component driving the writing process. These findings reflect a relationship between free expression and participants’ positive perceptions of their writing experiences. Interestingly, those participants did not mention feeling stifled by prescribed writing prompts, which was a common theme expressed by students who had negative and mixed perceptions of writing. Whereas one group of students interpreted writing prompts as being told what to write, another saw writing as an opportunity to creatively express their ideas. The former were more likely to feel negatively towards writing, while the latter reported enjoying it. Petric (2002) suggested that attitudes tend to form as a non-linguistic outcome of learning; even though they are likely to be rooted in underlying beliefs, they can also change in light of acquired experiences. This means that students’ negative attitudes and consequent perceptions of their writing experiences may change if these experiences are overridden by more positive ones.

5.2.2.2 Negative Emotion. A greater percentage of students had purely negative perceptions of writing than those who reported purely positive ones. Writing made those students feel sad, angry, and anxious. Factors that contributed to feelings of anxiety included looming deadlines, a heavy workload, and writer’s block. A common denominator between those three factors is a perceived lack of control over a writing situation. This notion was discussed by Petric (2002), who posited that pressing deadlines, among other external factors, may cause students to feel like they are losing control over their situation. Furthermore, meeting writing deadlines is closely related to students’ self-regulation, which is the ability to accomplish learning goals using a range of self-directed strategies (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). Writing self-regulation, which entails adopting strategies to control one’s feelings, cognitions, and behaviors while writing, is linked to writing performance (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). Evidence of this relationship was found
when constructing the student vignettes. In her narrative writing piece, the student who fell into the positive perceptions—high performance category wrote about self-regulation strategies. It is possible, then, that this student’s self-regulation could be contributing to her success in writing. Interestingly, the student who fell into the negative perceptions—high performance category wrote a lengthy and organized narrative despite struggling with deadline-related anxiety. This poses the question of whether self-regulation is at play here. Even though there is no explicit evidence of this student’s adoption of writing self-regulation strategies, the fact that one could simultaneously perceive their writing experiences as negative and be a good writer implies that perceptions alone do not account for high writing performance. Another factor that contributed to students’ feelings of anxiety was writer’s block, which is “an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment” (Rose, 2009, p.3). Not only is it related to writing anxiety, but it can also affect students’ career choices (Rose, 2009). It is important that teachers ask themselves why their students are struggling to “come up with ideas” for their writing. Even though it has been suggested that writer’s block is a mysterious affective phenomenon, Rose (2009) emphasizes the cognitive dimension of blocking as seen through an opportunism lens. Opportunism suggests that writing is not a hierarchical process; as in, writers will shuttle between general and specific strategies as they go about composing a text (Rose, 2009). The need to edit may, for example, interrupt the writing itself. Therefore, Rose (2009) posits that cognitive variables may be responsible for writer’s block. Students may be adopting inflexible rules, which hinders production. For example, teachers often instruct their learners to always end their first paragraph with a thesis statement, but such absolute statements fail to take into account the context. Students might also be editing too early into the composition process, which often results in surface-level error correction rather than fundamental idea development.
In addition, learners may be adopting rigid writing strategies that do not lend themselves to the recursive nature of the writing process. Finally, students might internalize (and thus refer to) inaccurate evaluation criteria when judging their own writing (Rose, 2009). Indeed, the aforementioned cognitive variables may contribute to writer’s block.

5.2.2.3 Mixed Emotions: “I Like Writing, But…” Around 41 percent of students represented mixed writing perceptions in their drawings and written responses. A dominant theme that governed these mixed perceptions was having reservations despite generally enjoying writing. These reservations tended to revolve around a lack of choice. One of the most common concerns that students with mixed perceptions shared was feeling forced to write about a particular topic. A considerable number of participants who reported mixed emotions said that they are happy to write about a topic they are interested in. It is clear from the findings that a lack of interest (and subsequent lack of commitment) to the assigned topic is a contributing factor to students’ mixed emotions and seeming inability to respond to writing prompts. However, Flowerday and Stevens (2004) argued that situational interest, rather than topic interest, have a significant effect on attitude and engagement. Situational interest is thought to precede personal interest and arises in response to context-dependent curiosity (Flowerday & Stevens, 2004). In other words, the way that a new topic is presented in class may pique students’ curiosity, arouse situational interest, and therefore positively affect their attitude and engagement with the writing process.

5.2.2.4 The Relationship between Emotion and Attitude. Participants who only represented positive emotions in their drawings also tended to have positive attitudes towards their writing experiences. One of the indicators of positive attitude was the use of verbs such as “like” and “love.” Because attitudes include an affective component (Conradi et al., 2014;
Ekholm et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2019), it is safe to assume that students’ positive emotions towards writing may also reflect their positive attitude towards it. Writing attitudes also entail an individual’s dis/liking of writing (Abdel Latif, 2020). As previously mentioned, students who felt positively towards writing were also likely to report “liking” and “loving” it in their written descriptions. By contrast, participants who communicated predominantly negative emotions in their drawings were more likely to report “hating” writing, and those who reported mixed emotions mentioned liking and disliking writing at the same time. This is further evidence of the relationship between students’ emotions and attitudes towards writing. In addition, these findings confirm that drawings can indeed capture children’s attitudes towards a subject.

5.2.2 Confidence

Students’ drawings and written responses revealed a positive relationship between writing grades and perceptions. This relationship was mediated by students’ sense of confidence. Improved writing grades were associated with feelings of pride, confidence, and overall positive writing perceptions, while poor writing performance was associated with feelings of sadness, low confidence, and negative writing perceptions. Surprisingly, this was not mirrored by the quantitative findings, which reflected weak correlations between participants’ writing scores and their self-efficacy and self-concept. In a similar vein, one student vignette (negative perceptions-high performance) illustrates the possibility of having low self-concept while attaining a high narrative writing score. Even though this finding cannot be generalized, it corroborates the weak correlations found between self-concept and writing performance. Nevertheless, based on the qualitative findings pertaining to the drawings, it can be surmised that increased confidence, which is related to self-efficacy beliefs, may improve students’ perceptions of their writing experiences. In addition, feelings of confidence were associated with positive emotions, such as
joy, while a lack of confidence was associated with negative emotions, such as sadness. This corroborates Zumbrunn et al.'s (2017) findings, which highlighted a link between students’ high confidence in themselves as writers and feelings of accomplishment.

### 5.2.3 Engagement

Students were creative in their visual depictions of writing engagement. Whereas almost half of all drawings showed students interacting with writing one way or the other, these interactions included both active engagement and disengagement from writing tasks. Students who felt positively about writing were more likely to depict themselves as actively engaged with the writing process which, again, aligns with Zumbrunn et al.'s (2017) findings. On the other hand, disengagement from writing tasks was associated with negative emotions, such as anxiety. Students who harbored mixed emotions about writing displayed inconsistent engagement with writing tasks, which means that engagement (and subsequent performance) are conditional. One of the most obvious “conditions”, as shown by the drawings, was the choice of writing prompt. However, as indicated above, arousing students’ situational interest in the topic is more central to their engagement than option choices (Flowerday & Stevens, 2004). Whereas option choices refer to letting students choose between writing topics, action choices, which are more effective, refer to providing options for self-regulating learning strategies (Flowerday & Stevens, 2004).

Zhou and Hiver (2022) highlight the relationship between L2 learners’ self-regulated learning (SRL) strategy use and their writing engagement. In the context of L2 writing, self-regulated learning can be defined as conscious, goal-oriented attempts to make writing easier and more enjoyable (Zhou & Hiver, 2022). SRL strategies include setting goals, brainstorming ideas for writing, using peer and teacher feedback, motivational self-talk, and attempts at regulating emotions during the writing process (Zhou & Hiver, 2022). The use of SRL strategies is thought
to increase student engagement with writing and therefore improve writing performance (Zhou & Hiver, 2022).

5.2.4 Presence of Others

Consistent with Zumbrunn et al.’s (2017) findings, most students drew themselves writing in isolation. Even though most students viewed writing as a solitary activity, this perception was not necessarily a “bad” thing. To elaborate, students who had positive perceptions of their writing experiences were just as likely to draw themselves alone as their peers who had negative perceptions. Whereas some writers seemed to enjoy getting lost in their imagination and typing away at their keyboards, others were portrayed struggling in isolation. Most students who did draw themselves writing around other people mostly featured a teacher in their drawing. Teacher-student interactions ranged from supportive to oppressive, which is a testament to the teacher’s role in “setting the affective tone for the classroom” (Zumbrunn et al., 2017, p. 673). In addition, it is important to consider the role of process writing approaches in students’ perceptions of their writing environment. Process approaches, which are commonly implemented in the writing classroom, deemphasize the social functions of language (Hyland, 2003). They center on the individual writer, which could contribute to feelings of isolation associated with writing. Writing, then, becomes a “solo mission” that is devoid of human interaction and collaboration.

5.2.5 Use of Figurative Language

“Voice” is a relatively vague term that attempts to capture “a distinct quality in written discourse that can be discerned by readers but not readily identifiable in terms of a single linguistic or rhetorical feature” (Matsuda, 2001, p.37). In the current study, voice was
operationalized in terms of word choice (according to the analytical rubric used). Even though students’ written responses, which accompanied their drawings, were not scored, a distinction was made between the ways that learners with contrasting perceptions expressed themselves in writing. Writers with negative perceptions mainly described their emotions using adjectives, such as “sad”, “confusing”, and “angry.” They also occasionally provided brief explanations of their emotions. Other learners, however, employed figurative language in their written responses. As previously mentioned, one student mentioned that writing feels like being “up in the clouds.” Another learner wrote that the words tend to “express themselves.” Overall, the only four students who employed figurative language in their written responses had positive perceptions of their writing experiences. Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2013) highlighted the usefulness of metaphors as “cognitive tools” that help represent abstract concepts “in a high level” (p.348). Because writers’ use of figurative language is related to their ability to capture abstract concepts in writing, it is also closely related to voice. Instances of unique voice in writing were closely related to positive writing perceptions.

5.3 Egyptian Middle School Students’ Writing Motivation

5.3.1 Attitude

Even though students were shown to have relatively positive attitudes towards their writing experiences, they also strongly agreed that they should write less in school. This could potentially be explained by Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior, which posits that positive attitudes do not necessarily manifest in behavior (Petric, 2002). Other factors may come into play, such as a heavy workload or students’ self-efficacy beliefs. In a similar vein, students did not show much enthusiasm about having to rewrite their paper which, again, could be indicative
of a heavy academic load. It could also be related to the way that teachers provide feedback, which could potentially be obstructing the revision process.

5.3.2 Beliefs about Writing

Not only did students strongly acknowledge the importance of finishing writing assignments, but they also believed in the importance of improving as a writer, as indicated by their SWAS results. In the context of the current study, it is unclear whether the former is a strong indicator of positive beliefs about writing. It is possible that students believe finishing writing assignments to be important because they are fixated on the consequences. In that sense, they are not intrinsically motivated by beliefs about the value of writing. However, the fact that they attributed feelings of success to writing improvement (and saw merit in writing improvement in general) do not corroborate the view that they are only extrinsically motivated. Another point is that participants’ agreement about the value of improvement contradicts with their reluctance to check their writing for errors. Again, this can be explained by Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior; wanting to improve as a writer does not necessarily lead to the adoption of behaviors that would lead to such improvement.

5.3.3 Self-Concept

The self-concept section of the SWAS also yielded conflicting findings. On the one hand, most respondents were relatively confident in their writing ability, but they did not seem to think that writing was their best subject. The general consensus over this statement is concerning and might indicate issues with the quality of writing instruction (compared to other school subjects), teacher feedback, or other variables. As indicated by Ruegg (2018), the relationship between teacher feedback and learners’ confidence is mediated by other variables, such as teaching style
and attitude, the method of giving feedback, and the overall instructional environment. Another reason that might be contributing to students’ perception that writing is not their best subject could be related to the grading approach. Because writing is rarely awarded a full grade (at least in the discourse communities taking part in this study), it is safe to assume that the grading approach might be contributing to writers’ low self-concept. This could be compared to the more prominent possibility of attaining a full grade on scientific subjects that lend themselves to objective test items.

5.3.4 Self-Efficacy

Participants were shown to attribute writing success to hard work rather than luck. One reason for this could be related to the nature of writing as a productive skill that inherently requires learners to “create” with language. It could also be related to how writing is taught; since writing instruction often lends itself to a lengthy scaffolded process, it is likely that students will perceive it as “hard work.” What is more is that students reported feeling comfortable sharing their writing with peers to a lesser extent. Again, the role of the teacher is emphasized here, since teachers are responsible for creating a classroom culture that feels safe and promotes collaboration.

5.4 The Relationships among Egyptian Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Writing, Writing Motivation, and Narrative Writing Performance

5.4.1 Correlations among Writing Motivation Variables

Moderate to high correlations were found among the variables of writing motivation. This is not surprising given the relatedness of these variables in the literature. For example, whereas this study considers attitude and self-efficacy to be distinct motivational constructs,
other studies have considered self-efficacy a component of attitude (Ekholm et al., 2017). Regardless, in Wright et al.’s (2019) model of writing motivation, the four variables complement each other, representing dispositional and cognitive aspects of the larger construct of motivation.

5.4.2 Correlations between Writing Motivation and Narrative Writing Performance

The findings pertaining to this research question were consistent with Wright et al. (2019), who found modest, but statistically significant correlations between 53 students’ self-reported SWAS scores and writing performance. The small sample size in both studies, combined with statistically significant correlations between writing motivation variables and performance, point to real effects (Wright et al., 2019). In the current study, however, weaker relationships were found between participants’ self-concept and writing performance, as well as between their self-efficacy and writing performance. This may have been a result of the small sample size because, as demonstrated by the literature, there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and writing performance (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Bruning et al., 2013; Troia et al., 2013). In addition, the low-stakes nature of the narrative writing task, which did not count as part of the students’ regular instruction, may have affected their performance. This is therefore a recognized limitation.

5.4.3 The Relationship between Perceptions of Writing and Narrative Writing Performance

Finally, the four student vignettes open up the path for several discussions. What particularly stood out about the student who fell into the positive perceptions- high performance category was the content of her narrative writing piece, which revolved mostly around self-improvement. She even mentioned self-regulation strategies, such as planning. Even though these behaviors were not explicitly linked to writing, or even academics, it makes sense to
question whether these self-regulation strategies are being transferred to an academic context and if they have an effect on writing performance. The student who fell into the negative perceptions-high performance category expressed deadline-related anxieties in her drawing, but was able to produce a highly organized (and lengthy) piece of writing for this study. A potential explanation for this could also have to do with self-regulation strategies that the student is adopting as they are engaging with a writing task. Despite her high performance, however, this student did not feel confident in her writing ability, which highlights an inconsistency between actual and perceived performance. This speaks to the role of self-efficacy in writing motivation. In addition, the student who fell into the positive perceptions- low performance category expressed positive perceptions of writing despite an apparent awareness that his writing pieces are not “the best” compared to his peers (as indicated by his SWAS results). Finally, the student who fell into the negative perceptions- low performance category displayed a sense of apathy in her writing piece, which was evident in her lexical choices, as indicated in the findings. Interestingly, not only did the participants’ drawings reflect their emotions and attitudes towards writing, but those emotions and attitudes manifested in their narrative writing pieces, too.

5.5 Study Implications

5.5.1 How to Deal with Writer’s Block

As indicated by the findings, some students struggled with writer’s block regardless of whether or not they were interested in the topic. These learners may be adopting rigid rules and writing strategies that do not lend themselves to the recursive nature of the writing process (Rose, 2009). These strategies are likely to have been picked up in the writing classroom. It is therefore suggested that teachers avoid absolutes. For example, instead of instructing an entire
class of students to organize their compare and contrast essay into four paragraphs, they could emphasize the organizational function that paragraphs serve. That way, students are not driven by inflexible rules, but by an awareness of functions that can be generalized across contexts. Teachers could also discourage students from premature editing and encourage the submission of several drafts, instead. In this way, they are prioritizing writers’ idea development while fostering a classroom environment that embraces writing as an imperfect process. In addition, instructors could share their grading rubrics with their students, given that the evaluation criteria are explained in a way that is accessible to learners. In other words, students should be aware of what, in a specific writing situation, makes a “good” piece of writing in order to eliminate false conceptions. Moreover, it is possible that students’ inability to generate ideas extends beyond a lack of commitment. That is not to say that all learners experience writer’s block for the same reasons. In other words, whereas teachers are encouraged to be mindful of the reasons that contribute to their students’ struggles to generate ideas for their writing, importance of assigned topics should not be underestimated. To elaborate, genre knowledge is central to writing instruction because it connects language to the social context (Hyland, 2003). Therefore, specific writing topics may be integral to acquainting students with different writing genres. Instead, teachers could work towards arousing students’ situational interest in the assigned writing topic by presenting background information in a way that learners will find appealing.

5.5.2 How to Develop Writers’ Sense of Autonomy

A considerable number of students expressed concern about a lack of choice. Autonomy is important in the classroom. In the literature, students who perceived their teachers as more autonomy-supportive were shown to be more motivated, perceived themselves as more competent, and received higher grades (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students should therefore be
encouraged to take charge of their learning. To help with this, teachers are encouraged to implement collaborative writing in the classroom. Following a project-based model, for instance, students can work in groups to analyze and evaluate model essays, negotiate to choose a topic, outline, draft, and present their final essay. This is particularly relevant to the findings of this study as most students viewed writing as a solitary activity. This could be a consequence of the process approach to writing, which is commonly adopted across all three stages participating in this study. From a social perspective, the process-based approach paints writing as a struggle to convey individual voice (Hyland, 2003). It does not necessarily take into account the dynamic between a text and the social context from which it emerged, which decontextualizes writing and isolates individual writers. Indeed, this view is apparent in the participants’ drawings, which often depicted individual students working at their desks or typing on their laptops, sometimes late into the night, in isolation. Writing workshops are another way to promote collaborative writing in the classroom. Students can engage in group dialogues during the prewriting phase, draft group essays together, or participate in group reflections in the post-writing phase. Both collaborative and reflective processes tend to increase students’ sense of autonomy (Tanyeli Zeki & Kuter, 2018). The affordances of user-friendly online platforms can help promote writers’ self-regulation (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). These features can facilitate writing strategies, such as brainstorming and goal-setting. In addition, collaborative writing further promotes self-regulation by encouraging students to hold each other accountable in a group work context. On the other hand, it is important to listen to students’ concerns. Oftentimes, learners feel burdened by heavy workloads. Previous teaching (and learning) experience has informed my personal belief that open communication helps students take charge of their learning. Negotiable assignment deadlines are an example of this.
5.5.3 How to Improve Students’ Confidence

Confidence was also an issue for some students. They also had reservations about sharing their writing with peers. Because self-efficacy often manifests in students’ willingness to engage with writing tasks (Alberth, 2019), teachers should actively incorporate platforms that facilitate writing engagement. The affordances of social media platforms allow learners to engage with writing (by sharing a post, for example) and with each other (by reacting to and commenting on each other’s posts). This facilitation of engagement and peer feedback can improve students’ self-efficacy for writing. It has been suggested by Ruegg (2018) that, when students share their writing struggles with each other, they gain confidence in their own writing abilities. In addition, it increases students’ sense of autonomy which, in turn, improves their confidence in their writing (Ruegg, 2018). Nevertheless, peer feedback alone is not enough to support writers’ self-efficacy. Ruegg (2018) posits that teacher feedback alone can increase students’ self-efficacy more than peer feedback alone. Notwithstanding its benefits, teacher feedback will not always improve writers’ self-efficacy. Other variables mediate the relationship between teacher feedback and learners’ confidence, such as teaching style and attitude, the method of giving feedback, and the overall instructional environment (Ruegg, 2018). For example, whereas praise may increase writing self-efficacy and motivation, too much praise may result in complacency. Instructors are therefore encouraged to navigate the gray area between duly praising and overpraising, bearing in mind individual learner differences. It is also suggested that teachers bring more opportunities for peer feedback into the classroom while bearing in mind the importance of sustained teacher feedback. Instructors could also keep in mind the inherent differences between both types of feedback. Ruegg (2015) suggests that, compared to teacher feedback, peer feedback tends to be less specific. Interestingly, frequent peer feedback was
associated with more successful writing revisions compared to frequent teacher feedback. This could be attributed to the decreased power distance between peers, which promotes follow up in case of misunderstanding. In light of the benefits of peer feedback, it follows that students should be trained to give each other specific feedback (Ruegg, 2015). Another way to improve students’ efficacy for writing is to help them see their own progress. This can be done by putting together student portfolios, which serve as a testament of success and accomplishment (Zumbrunn et al., 2017).

Further research is needed to investigate what makes writing appealing to Egyptian middle school students. For example, some students said they liked writing because it helps them express their emotions (this finding mainly pertained to female participants). This insight may encourage their teacher to incorporate journaling into the writing classroom. Understanding what learners like about writing can help teachers design activities that would appeal to students who lack this positive perspective.

5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite rich findings, it is recognized that limitations to this study exist. As previously mentioned, a small sample size may explain the weak correlation between participants’ narrative writing performance and their writing self-efficacy and self-concept. Even though all six classes contained a total number of 100 students, 49 consent forms were obtained in time for data collection. In addition, students’ awareness of the low-stakes nature of the writing task could have affected their performance and subsequent scores. Even though students were reassured that their drawing skills were not being assessed, some of them expressed feeling insecure about their
drawings. The concern that this may have limited the extent of their expression remains, but that was compensated for with their written responses.

Since, to my knowledge, this is the first study to look into Egyptian private school students’ writing motivation, a larger sample size is needed to accurately determine the relationships between variables. It would also be useful to examine the relationship between students’ motivation and their perceptions of their writing experiences, which would have to be quantified. Questionnaire data may be collected for that purpose. Moreover, further work needs to be done with other demographics of Egyptian students, including those who go to public schools. In that case, it would be more appropriate to look into L1 writing perceptions, since the English language is not often prioritized in the mainstream Egyptian schooling system. Nevertheless, this would provide a more holistic view of Egyptian students’ perceptions of their writing experiences as well as their motivation. Another point that is related to the demographic of participants is age. Future research is required to examine how Egyptian high school and university students view their writing experiences. A longitudinal study would be useful here in order to measure progression over time. For example, Wright et al. (2020) suggested that, as students enter middle school, their motivation and enthusiasm for writing dwindles. It would be useful to ask such questions in the Egyptian context, especially in a school setting, where students begin to develop their skills, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions.

Moreover, due to time constraints, only four student vignettes were constructed in order to qualitatively explore the relationships among participants’ perceptions of writing, motivation, and narrative writing performance. Even though each one of these vignettes represented a different “type” of student in this study, it would have been useful to look into more than one individual within the same category (or construct more categories). It is therefore recognized that
the connections yielded through the construction of these vignettes cannot be generalized, but they serve as useful “anecdotes” of individual writers nonetheless.

5.7 Conclusion

The principal aim of this study was to explore middle school students’ perceptions of their writing experiences by encouraging them to creatively express these perceptions. It also aimed to better understand the relationships among these students’ perceptions, motivation, and narrative writing performance. With this study, I attempted to fill a research gap by venturing into largely unexplored avenues relating to private education in Cairo. A mixed methods approach was deemed appropriate for this study because it both tapped into writing motivation and positioned it within a much more vivid picture of participants’ perceptions. The data provided me with access into middle school students’ positive, negative, and mixed emotions towards their writing experiences and environments. It also yielded insights into their attitudes, confidence, and engagement. All of those factors poured into their representations of their writing environments. The data also generated insights into students’ motivation for writing and its relationship with narrative writing performance. The findings of this study largely coincided with Zumbrunn et al.’s (2017) study, which also involved student drawings. Despite its limitations, this study has implications for several aspects of writing instruction, such as dealing with writer’s block and improving students’ sense of autonomy, confidence, and overall attitudes towards writing.
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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Original SWAS Items

https://forms.gle/hVRMXyRX4iJe4xBb8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SWAS Item</th>
<th>SWAS Item</th>
<th>SWAS Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to write.</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like writing long stories or reports at school</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it would be fun to be an author who writes books</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think it would be fun to have a job as a writer for a newspaper or</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>magazine</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish we wrote less in school</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather write a story than do homework</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I have positive feelings about writing.</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing can be a lot of fun.</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe it is very important to be a good writer</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t mind when the teacher asks me to go back and change some of</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy checking my writing to make sure the words I have written</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are spelled correctly</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved.</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it would be great to become an even better writer than I</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>already am</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
<td>Beliefs about Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing helps me learn</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in writing for many purposes (persuade, inform,</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entertain, or express)</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can write good papers because writing is easy for me.</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get good grades in writing because I’m just not smart enough</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident in my overall writing abilities.</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at writing</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I write a paper, it is easy for me to come up with ideas</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my class is asked to write an essay, report, or story, mine is</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one of the best.</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When writing it’s easy for me to think of the right words</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident sharing my writing with my friends.</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that I will do well in writing this year</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I get a good grade on a paper, it is because I tried really</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard.</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I get a good grade on a writing assignment, it’s because I got</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lucky.</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I’m proofreading, it’s easy for me to catch my mistakes.</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When writing, it’s easy for me to decide what goes 1 at, 2nd, 3rd,</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and so on</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Writing Rubric (Common Core Standards)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus/Support</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Word Choice/Voice</th>
<th>Conventions/Sentence Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Introduces topic or situation clearly, organizes ideas to support purpose, has relevant conclusion.</td>
<td>Links ideas with words, phrases, uses specific language, connects with reader in unique way.</td>
<td>Demonstrates exemplary command of conventions of standard written English, includes variety of complete sentences that flow smoothly, naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Introduces topic or situation, mostly organizes ideas to support purpose, has mostly relevant conclusion.</td>
<td>Links most ideas with words, phrases, uses specific language, connects with reader.</td>
<td>Demonstrates good command of conventions of standard written English, includes some variety of complete sentences that flow smoothly, naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Introduces topic or situation, adequately organizes ideas to support purpose, has adequate conclusion.</td>
<td>Links some ideas with words, phrases, uses some specific language, connects with reader.</td>
<td>Demonstrates adequate command of conventions of standard written English, includes some variety of complete sentences that flow smoothly, naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduces topic or situation, organizes some ideas to support purpose, has some relevant conclusion.</td>
<td>Links some ideas with words, phrases, may use some specific language, may connect with reader.</td>
<td>Demonstrates command of the conventions of standard written English, includes little variety of complete sentences that flow smoothly, naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>May introduce topic or situation, organized few ideas to support purpose, may have some relevant conclusion.</td>
<td>Attempts to link ideas with words, rarely uses specific language, may not connect with reader.</td>
<td>Demonstrates little command of conventions of standard written English, includes little sentence variety, incomplete sentences hinder meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May not develop topic or events with relevant facts or details.</td>
<td>May not link ideas with words.</td>
<td>Demonstrates little or no command of conventions of standard written English. Sentences do not vary, incomplete sentences hinder meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

IRB Approval

To: Maryam George ElBayady
   Atta Gebril

From: Heba Kotb Chair of the IRB
Date: 29/12/2022
Re: IRB approval

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled

“Examining the Relationships among Egyptian Middle School Students’ L2 Writing Perceptions, Motivation, and Performance: A Mixed Methods Study”

It required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. Your proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.
This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.
This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

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