

Primary School Children's Motivation for EFL Writing: The Case of Eighth-Graders

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Article information	Abstract
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Received: 28 Apr 2025	Numerous studies have explored motivation in language learning, yet few have focused on writing in English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly among primary school children. This study aimed to explore EFL writing motivation among Croatian young language learners (YLLs) at the end of primary education (Grade 8). It investigated both internal and external aspects of motivation. Employing a mixed methods design with a predominantly descriptive qualitative analysis, data were collected from 50 learners (aged 13–14) using a semi-structured, paper-based questionnaire. Findings show that eighth-graders exhibited a positive motivational profile toward writing in English. They were mainly intrinsically motivated, driven by the enjoyment of writing and a sense of ease and self-competence. They also showed extrinsic motivation, valuing English for future opportunities and global communication. Teacher influence and texting on mobile phones as a preferred writing form appeared to further support EFL writing motivation. The findings also reveal that though being negatively affected by limited practice, unengaging topics, word limits, and stress from time and grading pressures, YLLs had a positive view of writing compositions in English. Further results suggest that eighth-graders engaged in minimal additional EFL writing practice at home, suggesting a limited effort to develop writing skills outside the formal educational context. Finally, parental support for EFL writing was relatively low, implying that parent involvement was not consistently related to higher motivation for EFL writing among primary school children.
Keywords:	
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INTRODUCTION

Until the 1990s, in the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), writing skills were mainly seen as a means for language (grammar) practice and testing, in contrast to listening, reading and speaking skills, the acquisition of which was focused on communicative purposes (Zergollern-Miletić, 2007). However, today's society, due to ubiquitous digitalization and, consequently, the rapid flow of information, requires a higher level of writing skills than ever before in various domains of human activity. In addition to traditional formal writing, such as school essays, scientific papers, and newspaper articles, people are increasingly exposed to new forms of informal written communication, mainly due to the widespread use of email,

online chat, blogging, texting (SMS), and social networking platforms like Facebook and X (formally Twitter). The emergence of new forms of fast written communication is one of the reasons why today's foreign language teachers, compared to previous generations, need to devote much more time, effort and attention to developing writing skills (Ur, 2012). This is particularly evident in English, which, as *lingua franca*, is omnipresent in everyday communication, both oral and written, and is therefore extremely important in the exchange of political, economic and cultural information on a global level (Setyowati & Qibtiyah, 2017). Today, English also dominates the field of education (Hyland, 2013), with writing skills playing a crucial role in language production in terms of the global mediation of knowledge (Fareed et al., 2016). This highlights the increasing importance of early, systematic development of literacy skills in English. However, many empirical studies support the view that, due to its very complex and multi-layered nature, writing is the most demanding language skill for both EFL teachers and learners at different levels of language competence (e.g., Anh, 2019; Oktavia et al., 2022; Tillema, 2012; Trinh & Nguyen, 2014). Given the ever-increasing importance of writing in English, on the one hand, and the complexity of developing EFL writing skills, on the other, it comes as a surprise that writing skills are reported to be rather neglected in EFL classrooms (Alwasilah, 2006; Dixon, 2005 as cited in Astrid et al., 2019). Consequently, EFL learners' poor performance in writing has been confirmed globally (Bai et al., 2020; Harris & Graham, 2016), with a number of studies pointing to their lack of interest and negative attitudes towards writing in English, particularly at the later stages of learning (e.g., Harmer, 2008; Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016; Tuan, 2010). Manifold EFL writing issues have triggered a growing body of research in the field, but mainly with college and university students (Geng et al., 2021). Developing EFL writing skills with primary school children or young language learners (YLLs), a term referring to learners in primary education (Drew & Hasselgreen, 2008), has been a neglected yet relevant research area (Riazi et al., 2018), particularly with respect to the fact that writing constitutes a basic component of learners' literacy in primary and secondary schools (Lee, 2016). Given the intensifying global interest in EFL learning from early school age, the fact that learners from different language backgrounds face severe difficulties in developing writing skills in English (Khoii & Arabsarhangi, 2015; Stefanović et al., 2008) as well as the fact that the complex nature of writing requires developing literacy skills in English from an early school age (Vickov & Jakupčević, 2022), we believe that empirical research in a young learner context is crucial in providing a broader and more detailed perspective on EFL writing.

One of the areas that has attracted surprisingly little attention from researchers is related to primary school children's motivation for writing in English (Trüb, 2022). Motivation, generally taken as a key to success, is considered to be a central element in foreign language learning (Lăpădat & Lapadat, 2024) and is a dynamic process characterized by continuous change (Dörnyei, 2005). The extant studies in L1 writing reported a decreasing pattern of writing motivation as learners moved to higher grade levels (Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Pajares et al., 2007). The knowledge about primary school learners' development of motivation in EFL writing is still very scarce, particularly with respect to exploring general writing motivation encompassing both internal (e.g., learners' interests and attitudes) and external (e.g., social support provided by teachers and parents) motivational components. The present study attempts to address the stated research gap and provide an overall picture of YLLs' EFL writing motivation at the end of primary school education. As intrinsic motivation is claimed to be

more powerful than extrinsic motivation in encouraging individuals to engage in activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), the intrinsic aspects of motivation, such as attitudes, opinions and personal preferences, are the focus of the current study. It also addresses YLLs' attitudes toward writing compositions and essays in English as this is considered to be one of the most challenging language tasks for learners of various ages, language proficiencies, and cultural or sociological backgrounds. Psychological factors, such as a lack of motivation and interest, are often cited as reasons why learners find this activity difficult (Sogutlu & Veliaj-Ostrosi, 2022). Furthermore, the research at hand explores YLLs' additional EFL writing practice at home as Wallace and Leong (2020) identify effort put into studying (other than during regular English classes) as one of the motivational factors. Finally, the study offers an insight into the interaction of writing motivation with social (parental) support as this variable has been identified as another important factor influencing EFL learners' motivation (Wallace & Leong, 2020).

Given the scarcity of research into primary school children's motivation for EFL writing, particularly in the Croatian context, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the motivation of Croatian primary school learners for EFL writing in Grade 8 in the context of the following motivational factors: EFL writing attitude, perceived value of EFL writing, personal writing preferences, attitude toward writing compositions in English, and additional practice of EFL writing at home?

RQ2: What is the relationship between eighth graders' EFL writing motivation and parental support?

The results obtained from the study would not only add to the scarce literature on early EFL writing motivation but would also help in better understanding and enhancing the challenging process of developing writing skills in EFL classroom settings. The findings are expected to help EFL teachers raise their awareness of the importance of YLLs' writing motivation and select appropriate teaching methods and activities aimed at fostering their engagement in the process of EFL writing.

Theoretical background

As pointed out in the introductory section, due to its very complex and multifaceted nature, writing is considered to be the most difficult or the last language skill to be mastered by EFL learners (Hedge, 2005). Flower and Hayes (1980) describe writing as "juggling with constraints," attributing its complexity to the interplay of three key elements: the writer's long-term memory, the task environment, and the writing process. The writing process encompasses planning, translating (converting ideas into language), reviewing/revising, and monitoring, which oversees the other activities. During writing, all three elements must be managed, often at the same time, which is what makes the task so challenging and demanding. Given this, EFL learners' difficulties in producing coherent, well-organized texts in English should not come as a surprise. Their lower second (English) language proficiency limits their ability to transform their ideas into written words (Tillema, 2012). Insufficient English vocabulary, lack of competence in grammar, and the use of cohesive devices as well as mother tongue (L1) interference are some

of the factors identified as the ones that make it difficult for learners to write in English (Megaiaib, 2014; Richards & Renandya, 2002). In addition to this, when it comes to the initial stages of developing writing skills, EFL learners, particularly the ones whose L1 differs significantly from English, face difficulties related to the complexity of English spelling, handwriting, mastery of punctuation, and capitalization. Given this, along with systematic, long-term practice, developing writing skills requires a high level of motivation, which therefore warrants greater attention in EFL writing research (Shen et al., 2020).

The sustained, ever-growing research interest in second language (particularly, EFL) learning motivation has resulted in several theoretical frameworks that aim to define the nature of motivation and its impact on successful (E)FL learning. Some of the most established ones are Gardner's model (1985), Self-Determination Theory developed by Ryan and Deci (2000b), and the L2 Motivational Self System introduced by Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009). All three theoretical models share the idea of motivation being a complex construct encompassing variables ranging from internal (intrinsic) factors (e.g., learners' interests, attitudes, feelings, their idealised images of themselves and the others) to external (extrinsic) ones (e.g., instrumental motivation for learning, immediate learning environment, social support by parents and peers). As elaborated in Inostroza et al. (2024), the above-mentioned models have been found to have limitations when applied to YLLs. The complex nature of YLL motivation seems to be a distinctive phenomenon which requires an eclectic approach combining the factors from the three models.

With variability being a particularly emphasized trait in YLLs' motivation, Mihaljević Djigunović and Nikolov (2019) proposed a model for researching YLLs' motivation, taking into consideration children's developmental stages, the role of significant others (teachers, family, and peers) as well as the teaching and learning context (school and social surrounding). YLLs' fundamental psychological needs, primarily conditioned by their basic affective traits, differ largely from those of adolescents and adults. As stated by Mihaljević Djigunović (1999), YLLs' affective profile is characterized by openness, a high degree of curiosity, and a lack of inhibitions, which are considered to be the factors that initiate motivation. Though, for primary school children, EFL writing is a difficult and complex activity (Spanou & Zafiri, 2019; Tompkins, 2010, as cited in Swandi & Netto-Shek, 2017), they seem to show both interest and enthusiasm for this language skill at the initial stage of learning (Pinter, 2017).

As already pointed out, very little empirical evidence exists as regards primary school children's EFL writing motivation. Of the few studies, Vickov and Jakupčević (2025) explored first and second graders' EFL writing motivation which is one of the most underexplored topics in the field. Their findings suggest that YLLs aged 6-8 have positive attitudes toward EFL writing, with first graders even preferring writing in English to writing in their mother tongue. Though, being at the very beginning of formal EFL learning, children seem to be most motivated by the language features that do not exist in their L1 such as, as they called them, "strange" letters (q, w, x and y) and "strange" words spelled with double letters. YLLs also seem to gladly engage in initial writing exercises such as copying and writing short sentences about themselves and their immediate environment. However, a slight drop was detected in YLLs' interest in EFL writing at the end of Grade 2. This corroborates the findings of a study conducted by Shen et al.

(2020), who reported on Hong Kong primary school learners (fourth, fifth and sixth graders), demonstrating a medium level of English writing motivation, with a decline in the fifth grade. Bai and Guo (2019) also explored Hong Kong primary learners' (Grade 4) EFL writing motivation and found that they showed a low level of interest and a relatively high level of self-efficacy. A research study performed on Indonesian eighth graders by Setyowati and Qibtiyah (2017) suggests that their attitude toward EFL writing falls in the moderate category. The eighth graders seemed to be sufficiently confident about their writing in English and viewed writing as a fun activity and an enjoyable experience. Despite that, they admitted they faced problems in writing related to linguistic (grammar and vocabulary) and psychological aspects (writing apprehension caused by negative comments from peers and negative teacher feedback). Low EFL writing motivation was found with primary and secondary school learners, as perceived by their English teachers in a research study conducted by Jashari and Fojkar (2019). The study involved 85 Kosovar EFL teachers who identified writing as the most important yet most challenging language skill, and reported low student motivation to write in English. The findings indicate that these teachers tend to overlook writing in their lessons and fail to tailor writing tasks to meet the needs of their students. A few studies investigated primary children's motivation from a task-based perspective, i.e., by considering the choice of tasks or the activity type (e.g., collaborative or individual). The studies reveal that appropriate tasks may have a decisive impact on fostering YLLs' motivation. Shak and Gardner (2008), for example, investigated YLLs' attitudes towards different focus-on-form tasks such as dictogloss and consciousness-raising tasks, in terms of four criteria (enjoyment, ease, performance and motivation). The study involved 78 EFL primary school students (aged 9–12) in Brunei. Data were gathered through an attitude questionnaire and group interviews. The results showed a general tendency of positive attitudes among the children towards the tasks, with a particular preference for pair work over individual tasks. In a more recent study, Calzada and Garcia Mayo (2020) investigated the attitudes of 32 Spanish primary EFL learners (aged 11–12) towards collaborative writing and the dictogloss task. The findings confirmed YLLs' positive attitudes towards dictogloss and collaborative writing (at the level of both pair work and group work). Another, similar research study with young Spanish EFL learners (aged 11–12) was conducted by Kopinska and Azkarai (2020), who explored YLLs' task motivation, more precisely, their attitudes towards the dictogloss they performed. The findings corroborate the idea that dictogloss, along with collaborative writing, is a motivating task for YLLs, as they showed an overall positive disposition towards the dictogloss task.

According to the above-mentioned studies, primary school learners mainly tend to have more positive attitudes towards writing at the beginning of EFL learning (in the lower grades of primary school) and are moderately motivated for writing in English at later stages of primary education. The findings also identified dictogloss and collaborative writing as factors which may impact positively on primary school learners' EFL writing motivation. Finally, the findings indicated some demotivating factors related to the difficulties YLLs face while writing in English. Those factors refer primarily to the learners' linguistic incompetence and psychological issues reflecting YLLs' fear of being negatively evaluated by others.

The present study

Despite mounting evidence of severe difficulties learners have with writing in English, on the one hand, and significant, direct impact motivation exerts on L2 learning outcomes (Yousefifard & Fathi, 2021), on the other, EFL writing motivation, particularly at the primary school level, remains inadequately explored. Given that writing in English requires significant effort, patience, and a structured educational approach for YLLs (Srinivas Rao, 2019), we believe it is critical to investigate and understand the nature of YLLs' motivation for EFL writing. The present study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into YLLs' EFL writing motivation in Grade 8 (aged 13–14). The research is situated within the Croatian educational context, where a foreign language, predominantly English, is a mandatory subject starting from the first grade of primary school (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, 2019). Formal primary education in Croatia spans eight years, with EFL taught through two 45-minute lessons per week from grades 1 to 4 (70 lessons per year), and three 45-minute lessons per week from grades 5 to 8 (105 lessons per year).

METHODOLOGY

Though the study opts for a mixed methods research design, it employs a predominantly exploratory and descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative methods can provide researchers with deep insights into EFL learners' mindset, feelings and opinions, which can enable a better understanding of their motivation (Wallace & Leong, 2020). In this study, the term motivation encompasses both internal and external factors (Williams & Burden, 1997), ranging from primary school children's preferences and attitudes toward writing in English, perceived pragmatic value of EFL writing, to social support provided by parents. As to writing attitude, it refers to an affective disposition involving how the act of writing makes the author feel (Graham et al., 2007).

Participants

Using a convenience sampling method, 50 L1 Croatian eighth graders, aged 13–14, were recruited for the study. The sample was evenly distributed, with 48% female participants and 52% male participants. All the participants were recruited from the same state-run primary school and were taught by an experienced L1-Croatian EFL teacher, with over 15 years of teaching experience.

Data collection instrument and procedure

To address the research questions outlined above, the researcher developed a semi-structured, paper-and-pencil questionnaire (Table 1) that aligns with child-centred research principles, utilizing flexible, child-friendly techniques and ethical, age-appropriate data collection methods (Pinter, 2017). The questionnaire was written in Croatian to prevent any misunderstandings and enable learners to provide detailed responses. It consisted of six questions, five of which were close-ended. Four of these close-ended questions included open-ended sub-questions

aimed at gathering further explanations and more specific details for certain responses. For questions 1, 2, and 4, a five-point Likert scale (1 – I don't like it at all, 2 – I don't like it, 3 – I neither like it nor dislike it, 4 – I like it, 5 – I really like it) was used to measure the extent to which children (dis)liked writing in English, how important they considered writing in English, and how much they enjoyed writing compositions in English at school. Question 5, which used a four-point scale (1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – often, and 4 – very often), assessed how frequently children wrote in English during their free time at home. If the learners indicated they practiced writing at home, the related sub-question prompted them to list what they wrote in English at home. Question 3 asked the participants to identify the types of writing they enjoyed in English (e.g., emails, text messages, etc.) and explain why. Finally, question 6 relates to social, more precisely, parental support, which is, as already stated, one of the important factors influencing EFL learners' motivation. The question aimed to determine whether the participants' parents encouraged them to practice writing in English at home.

Table 1
Questionnaire items and corresponding motivational factors

Item Number	Questionnaire Item	Corresponding Motivational Factor
1a	Indicate how much you like writing in English.	Attitude (intrinsic)
1b	Explain.	
2a	In your opinion, how important is it to learn to write in English?	Opinion (intrinsic)
2b	Explain.	
3a	What do you like to write in English (for example, text messages, emails, essays, grammar exercises, etc.)?	Personal preferences (intrinsic)
3b	Explain.	
4a	Do you like writing compositions in English at school?	Attitude (intrinsic)
4b	Explain.	
5a	Besides homework, indicate how often you write in English in your free time at home.	Effort (intrinsic)
5b	If you write something at home in English (besides homework), specify what you write in English at home.	Personal preferences (intrinsic)
6	Do your parents encourage you to practice writing in English at home?	Social (parental) support (extrinsic)

To establish both validity and reliability, particularly in the data collection process, the strategy of triangulation was employed. This involved maintaining consistency in the question content across two different sampling groups, allowing for the corroboration of information from multiple perspectives. As a result, the credibility of the interpretations was strengthened, and the potential bias from a single data source was minimized (Ahmed, 2024). Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through a review by a panel of three EFL experts. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted prior to administering the questionnaire to ensure

clarity. Finally, care was taken to limit the information shared with the participants to make sure that the research was not biased with preconceived notions of the respondents.

The research was conducted in February and March 2025. After obtaining ethical approval from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split (Croatia) and securing consent from the school principal, teachers, the learners' parents, and the participants themselves, the questionnaire was initially administered to a randomly selected pilot group consisting of 5 learners. Based on their feedback, no adjustments were deemed necessary for the original questionnaire. Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants and ensured that they understood each item. The learners were also informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and were reminded to answer truthfully and respond to all questions. The questionnaire was completed within 30-40 minutes during the participants' regular English lessons.

Data analysis

The responses from close-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts) to identify patterns in learners' motivation for EFL writing. The data related to open-ended items were analysed according to Dörnyei's (2007) multi-level qualitative content analytical approach. The analysis started with pre-coding, which involved multiple readings of the data, reflecting on them, and taking notes on our observations. Initial inductive coding followed, with responses categorised by their nature. Responses to sub-questions for items 1, 2, 4, and 5 were grouped based on the Likert-scale selections, while the remaining items were reviewed and coded accordingly. Similar codes were iteratively grouped into broader categories to capture underlying patterns until data saturation was reached. A sample coding tree is provided in Appendix A. To improve the validity and reliability of the data analysis process, elements of consensus coding (Hemphill & Richards, 2018) were employed. Two researchers independently coded all responses to open-ended questions. They held weekly meetings to compare their results, with any minor disagreements resolved at the end of the coding process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Eighth-graders' motivation for writing in English

Attitudes toward EFL writing

With the exception of the sixth question, related to social (parent) support as an extrinsic motivational factor, all the previous five items address different intrinsic aspects of EFL writing motivation. Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of the participants' answers to the first questionnaire item focused on their general attitudes toward EFL writing.

Table 2
Eighth-graders' attitudes toward EFL writing

Likert Scale (1–5)	Response	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
1	I don't like it at all	6	12%
2	I don't like it	5	10%
3	I neither like it nor dislike it	14	28%
4	I like it	15	30%
5	I like it very much	10	20%
Total		50	100%

Eighth-graders were divided into three attitude levels based on their responses: positive attitude (levels 4 and 5), negative attitude (levels 1 and 2) and neutral attitude (level 3). The results show that half of the participants (50%) had positive attitudes toward writing in English as they opted either for "I like it" or "I like it very much." 22% of them expressed negative attitudes, indicating they did not like EFL writing, and 28 % had neutral attitudes. Given the close and well-established relationship between attitude and motivation in EFL learning (Inostroza, 2024; Wallace & Leong, 2020), with attitude being recognized as one of the most important factors that affect EFL writing (Fakeye, 2010), the eighth-graders who reported positive attitudes were regarded as highly motivated for writing in English. Learners who expressed negative attitudes were classified as poorly motivated, while those with neutral attitudes were considered moderately motivated for EFL writing. The rest of the questionnaire data would be interpreted from these perspectives.

Considering the majority of the participants exhibit at least a moderate level of motivation (28%), with half (50%) showing high motivation, it can be concluded that the findings suggest eighth-graders' generally positive motivational profile toward writing in English. Based on their responses to the first sub-question, most highly motivated learners enjoyed writing in English because they found it easy and enjoyable (Examples 1–3).

Example 1: I like writing in English very much because it is very easy and natural.

Example 2: I like writing in English because it brings me joy and pride knowing that I can write in another language.

Example 3: I enjoy writing in English because it's a great experience while I write.

These responses reflect intrinsic motivation, driven by the enjoyment of writing and a sense of ease and competence. This is unsurprising given YLLs' frequent exposure to English through media such as video games, music, films, and social networks. Modern technologies offer manifold opportunities for incidental vocabulary acquisition, which enhances communicative competence—often more crucial than grammar (Bobkina et al., 2025). Moreover, social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube encourage creative language use and self-expression, making English a tool for sharing personal experiences and opinions. As English is a language of global communication, some learners may begin to associate English with modernity, and may even develop a kind of bilingual identity, feeling more comfortable expressing themselves in English, as illustrated in the following example:

Example 4: English is like a second mother tongue to me, it's easier for me to express myself in English.

Many highly motivated eighth-graders even found writing in English easier than in Croatian, their L1 (Examples 5–7).

Example 5: I like writing in English very much because it's easier for me to express myself in English, it's easier to find words and the right expressions.

Example 6: I prefer writing in English because I make more mistakes in Croatian, and it's harder to write in Croatian.

Example 7: I find it easier to express my emotions in English.

This may be due to the high complexity of Croatian morphology and syntax (Blagus Bartolec, 2022), especially case systems, inflections, and verb conjugations—which can make English feel less demanding. Apart from this, English classes in primary education often focus more on short communicative and creative writing (e.g., personal letters, short compositions and stories), while Croatian language instruction tends to be more academic and analytical (e.g., essays, literary analysis), which YLLs may find more challenging or less engaging.

Apart from being intrinsically motivated, several highly motivated eighth-graders also reported being extrinsically motivated. They stated they liked writing in English because: *...it is important for the future; because many people use it; because it enables me to communicate with people who don't speak my [the Croatian] language; because I like to write in English on YouTube, and because my favourite teacher encourages me to do so.* The participants seemed to recognize the value of English for their future (e.g., career opportunities and education), which suggests they were motivated by the practical, long-term benefits of proficiency in English. They also appeared to be motivated by the global use of English which they acknowledged as a tool for communication across language barriers. The mention of writing in English to engage in a global, online community on platforms like YouTube suggests a contemporary, media-driven motivation. This is in line with Smith's (2018) findings that using language in digital settings is likely to affect learners' motivation, especially among YLLs who have been shaped by the constant presence of digital technology in their lives and sense of self. Finally, the participants' perceptions of writing in English seem to be positively influenced also by their teachers. The role of a teacher as a motivator indicates an extrinsic factor where positive reinforcement from authority figures (teachers) encourages engagement in the activity. This aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) assertion that teachers' behaviours and attitudes are powerful motivational tools that can significantly impact students' engagement and enthusiasm in language learning.

The participants with a moderate level of motivation for writing in English reported ambivalent perceptions. On the one hand, these learners expressed a certain degree of enjoyment when writing in English, with some even perceiving it as easier than writing in Croatian. On the other hand, they reported frustration primarily related to the conventions of English writing, particularly spelling (Examples 8–10).

Example 8: I do not mind writing in English, but I don't like the way words are written (spelling).

Example 9: I like it because it's interesting, but I don't like it because it's much easier to make mistakes than in Croatian.

Example 10: I don't enjoy writing a lot in English because I can mess up a letter, but I do enjoy writing something now and then.

The extent to which this issue can be frustrating for YLLs is illustrated in the following example:

Example 11: Because I don't know how to write a large number of words. I enjoy writing, but when I don't know how to write some words, I feel stupid.

The ambivalence of perceptions and feelings listed in the examples above appears to stem from a tension between intrinsic interest and linguistic insecurity. The participants' general liking for EFL writing seems to be undermined by their fear of making errors, especially those that may appear "trivial" (such as incorrect spelling), but which have a disproportionately negative impact on their confidence. The fear of making errors in spelling English words may, among other factors, stem from overly strict grading. However, regardless of the cause, and within the context of the significant differences between the spelling rules of Croatian and English, this highlights the need for a more systematic approach to teaching English spelling. Furthermore, these responses also point to the need to address affective factors, such as students' confidence and emotional responses to error. A pedagogical approach that fosters a safe, supportive environment for experimentation and error, combined with targeted feedback, may help reduce these negative emotions and support the development of more positive attitudes toward writing in English.

Responses from less motivated YLLs indicate that their perceptions of EFL writing are largely shaped by the belief that it is difficult and by a feeling of being forced to engage in it. Additionally, some participants in this group reported confusion regarding English spelling and expressed a lack of interest in the language. These findings suggest that for less motivated YLLs, emotional and psychological factors play a significant role in shaping their attitudes toward EFL writing. These findings align with Dörnyei and Ushida (2011), which indicates that learners tend to be more motivated when driven by intrinsic factors. Conversely, sustained exposure to externally imposed requirements may result in a decrease in motivational levels. This again underscores the importance of fostering learner autonomy, making learning activities more engaging, and providing targeted support in areas learners find particularly difficult, such as spelling.

Perceived value of EFL writing

The participants' responses to the second question exploring their perception of the importance of writing in English, indicate a strongly positive consensus among eighth-graders. An overwhelming majority of them (88%) regarded English writing as either important or very important, suggesting that learners generally recognize the value of developing writing skills

in English, even at this relatively early stage of language learning. Notably, only one student explicitly stated that writing in English was not important at all, while five respondents expressed neutral or ambivalent views. These findings suggest that, regardless of varying enjoyment and motivation levels, most learners acknowledge the practical value of EFL writing. Considering their explanations provided in responses to sub question 2b in relation to general motivation levels (as classified in Question 1a), it becomes evident that the vast majority of highly motivated eighth-graders recognized the importance of writing in English primarily due to its role as the dominant language of global communication. They emphasized that English was essential for interacting with people from other countries, referring to English as a “global,” “international,” and “main” language. One learner even stated that English has become the “basic language in today’s world”. Several learners reported that writing in English was important due to its pervasive presence in various media that support written communication, as well as its relevance for international travel and pursuing studies abroad (Examples 12-16).

Example 12: In many situations, we have to write in English.

Example 13: Nowadays, it’s not enough to just speak English—it’s also important to write messages, texts, songs, and more.

Example 14: English is used all over the world, and we can travel anywhere.

Example 15: Today, most things are in English, and there will be even more in the future.

Example 16: ...because we can go study abroad.

A particularly illustrative example of highly motivated eighth-graders’ perception of the importance of writing in English, within the context of its global ubiquity, is the following: “At some point, everyone will have to write something in English.” The moderately motivated learners generally shared the opinion of the highly motivated participants that writing in English was important primarily because it is lingua franca and is used in many situations, most often for texting or writing emails. They also believed that writing in English was important for the future. Low-motivated eighth-graders also recognized the practical importance of writing in English, noting that English is used worldwide and is necessary for communicating with foreigners. They also emphasized the importance of English writing due to the fact that “most applications and social media are in English.” Learners who expressed negative or neutral opinions about the importance of writing in English (such as the one mentioned above, which claims that writing in English is not important at all) generally believed that writing skills in English were less important than speaking skills and that “people can succeed in life even if they don’t like or don’t know how to write in English.” The results indicate a nuanced relationship between learners’ motivational levels and their perceptions of the importance of EFL writing. Regardless of their motivation level, eighth-graders, especially those with lower motivation, acknowledge the practical, real-world value of writing in English (in digital communication and for interacting with speakers of other languages). This indicates that even less motivated learners are aware of English’s global utility, i.e., the instrumental value of English writing, reflecting the influence of widespread technology use. The finding that the

highly and moderately motivated participants, who were predominantly intrinsically motivated, associate EFL writing also with broader, future-oriented goals such as international travel and studying abroad indicates a more comprehensive and future-oriented understanding of language proficiency. This aligns with Wallace and Leong (2020), who report that even at a young age, EFL learners may perceive English primarily as a tool for achieving external goals rather than as a means of personal growth or self-development.

Individual preferences in EFL writing

Table 3
Individual EFL writing preferences (Multiple responses allowed)

Type of Writing	Number of Learners	Percentage (%)
Text messages on mobile phones	32	64%
Compositions	12	24%
Emails	2	4%
Video comments	1	2%
Song writing	1	2%
Grammar exercises	2	4%
Writing related to digital games	1	2%
Homework assignments	2	4%

*Percentages represent the proportion of respondents from the sample (N = 50) who selected each option. Because multiple responses were permitted, the total may exceed 100%.

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the most popular form of writing among eighth-graders is text messaging on mobile phones, selected by as many as 64% of the respondents. This high percentage suggests that eighth-graders perceive everyday, informal communication as the most natural and engaging way to write in English. Their explanations support this interpretation: “[texting on a mobile phone] allows me to meet new people and practice English with others; I can express my opinions; it's fun because I communicate with people who don't speak Croatian and who have different experiences; because it's the easiest and no one can punish me; because it's interesting; because I feel less pressure to be correct, so I'm more relaxed; because I can write about things I care about; I don't have to worry about writing rules; because I can use all kinds of abbreviations....” Similarly, although compositions were significantly less preferred, the participants appreciated them for allowing greater creativity and self-expression, reflecting eighth-graders' intrinsic motivation. These findings, we believe, highlight the importance of incorporating authentic and learner-relevant forms of writing into English language instruction in order to enhance engagement and motivation.

Attitudes toward writing compositions in English

As already stated, writing compositions and essays in English is often seen as one of the most difficult tasks for learners, mainly due to low motivation and interest. In Croatia, writing compositions and essays are very important components in assessing learners' language performance. The essay is also one of the mandatory components of the high school leaving exam, which is a prerequisite for university admission. The fourth questionnaire item asked

about the participants' attitudes toward writing compositions in English. Table 4 presents percentage distribution of their responses according to the 5-point Likert scale (1 – I don't like it at all, 2 – I don't like it, 3 – I neither like it nor dislike it, 4 – I like it, 5 – I really like it).

Table 4
Eighth-graders' attitudes toward writing compositions in English

Scale	Total Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
1	12	24%
2	9	18%
3	11	22%
4	15	30%
5	3	6%

The data presented above indicate that, within the overall sample, 24% of eighth-graders reported a strong dislike for writing compositions in English, while only 6% expressed a highly positive attitude. In total, 42% of the participants demonstrated a negative attitude (ratings of 1 and 2), whereas 36% indicated a positive attitude (ratings of 4 and 5). The weighted mean score on a five-point scale was 2.76, falling below the neutral midpoint of 3.00. These results corroborate earlier findings that learners, on average, exhibit relatively low attitudes toward writing compositions in English (e.g., Nasser, 2019; Sasmita & Setyowati, 2021).

Table 5
Attitudes toward writing EFL compositions by motivation levels

Scale	High Motivation	%	Moderate Motivation	%	Low Motivation	%
1	3	6%	0	0%	9	18%
2	2	4%	5	10%	2	4%
3	8	16%	3	6%	0	0%
4	9	18%	6	12%	0	0%
5	3	6%	0	0%	0	0%

Overall, the data listed in Table 5 demonstrate a positive association between students' motivation levels and their attitudes toward writing compositions in English. Higher motivation is associated with more positive attitudes toward this writing activity, while lower motivation corresponds to more negative attitudes. Nevertheless, when analysed separately, the results reveal variation in the participants' attitudes towards this specific writing skill. Within the group of learners highly motivated for EFL writing, a total of 13 out of 25 learners (slightly more than half) expressed either neutral or negative attitudes toward writing compositions in English. Based on the responses of these participants (sub-question 4b), it is evident that most of them are negatively affected by the following factors: insufficient time allocated to practicing composition writing, uninteresting topics, word count limitations, and stress and anxiety caused by time constraints and grading. Previous research has also recognized learners' discomfort when writing in English as a result of being evaluated by their teachers (Hamp-Lyon & Heasly, 2006). Given the challenges EFL learners face in composing coherent texts, these findings suggest the need for increased, tailored support, more engaging or creative opportunities that foster self-expression without the pressure of assessment, including topics aligned with learners' interests.

Additional practice in EFL writing

The fifth questionnaire item attempted to determine whether eighth-grade learners write in English at home, thereby assessing the extent to which they put additional effort into practicing English writing outside the formal EFL classroom. The respondents were asked to indicate, on a four-point scale (1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – often, and 4 – very often), how frequently they write in English at home in their free time (excluding homework assignments). A total of 13 respondents indicated that they never wrote in English at home, while 20 reported doing so rarely. It was reported by nine learners that they often wrote in English at home, and 8 reported doing so very often. These results show that 33 eighth-graders, representing 66% of the total sample, engaged in writing in English at home either never or only rarely, indicating a relatively low level of additional EFL writing practice. This suggests that eighth-grade learners invest relatively limited effort in developing their English writing skills outside the formal educational setting. The analysis of the responses according to motivation levels is presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Frequency of EFL writing at home by motivation levels

Writing Frequency at Home	Highly Motivated Learners	Moderately Motivated Learners	Low-Motivated Learners
Never	4	3	6
Rarely	8	8	4
Often	6	2	1
Very often	7	1	0

The above results indicate that higher motivation for EFL writing seems to be positively associated with a higher frequency of additional writing in English at home. Among highly motivated eighth-graders, the majority reported engaging in writing activities either *often* ($N = 6$) or *very often* ($N = 7$), totalling 13 out of 25 learners (52%). Only four participants in this group reported *never* writing in English at home, suggesting that high motivation correlates with a stronger inclination to practice EFL writing in out-of-school environment. In contrast, the moderately motivated group exhibited a more varied pattern. While eight respondents also reported writing in English at home *rarely*, only three *never* wrote, and just one wrote *very often*. The relatively low number of eighth-graders who wrote in English *often* (2) or *very often* (1) may indicate that while moderate motivation supports occasional engagement, it may not be sufficient to sustain regular or intensive additional EFL writing practice. The results related to the low motivated students reflect the strong connection between low motivation and limited or non-existent additional EFL writing practice outside the classroom. These results are not surprising, as research indicates that the lower the motivation of students, the less effort they will invest in learning (Noels et al., 1999; Wallace & Leong, 2020). Additionally, Hedge (2005) points out that writing alone is not sufficiently motivating for English learners to engage in regular practice. Responses to the corresponding sub-question aimed at identifying types of writing that the eighth-graders do in English at home seem to be in line with their general preferences in EFL writing. The majority of the participants who *often* or *very often* wrote in English at home reported that they mainly wrote messages on their mobile

phones (as did also the respondents who *rarely* wrote at home), their own comments on online portals and YouTube, emails, and that they wrote in English while browsing websites. This illustrates the growing integration of English into YLLs' everyday lives, highlighting its significant social role as a means of global communication. The results also suggest that digital platforms and tools are key spaces where primary school learners practice writing in English outside formal EFL instruction settings.

Parental support

The final questionnaire item was designed to address the second research question, which explored the relationship between eighth graders' EFL writing motivation and the support they received from their parents, specifically, whether their parents encouraged them to engage in EFL writing activities at home. Within the overall sample, 16 out of 50 respondents (32%) reported receiving such parental encouragement, whereas 34 learners (68%) indicated that their parents did not motivate them to write in English at home. This suggests that, overall, parental involvement in fostering EFL writing skills at home is relatively limited. The results of a further analysis of the participants' responses in relation to their levels of motivation are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Parental support for EFL writing at home by YLLs' motivation level

Motivation Level	Parents Encourage Writing	Parents Do Not Encourage Writing	Total
High motivation	9	16	25
Medium motivation	3	11	14
Low motivation	4	7	11

The above data reveal that parent support for EFL writing at home varies across different levels of learner motivation, though not in an expected pattern. More specifically, among learners with low motivation, four out of 11 students (36%) indicated receiving parental encouragement, matching the proportion observed in the high motivation group. These findings suggest that parent support is not strongly or consistently associated with higher levels of YLLs' motivation for EFL writing. Based on previous research, primary school children's accomplishments, enthusiasm and interest in EFL learning are positively correlated to their parents' engagement in the children's language development (Luo & Wei, 2023). Findings from this study seem to imply a more complex relationship. The equal proportion of parental encouragement among both highly and low-motivated learners may suggest that home support does not necessarily lead to a corresponding increase in motivation for writing or that parents of low-motivation learners may be making greater efforts to support them. Most parents in the study may view writing as less important than other skills their children need to develop when learning English. On the other hand, they may recognize that writing is both an important and demanding language skill, and therefore choose not to burden their children with additional writing tasks at home, assuming that school provides sufficient practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study at hand provide insight into primary school children's (Grade 8) motivation for EFL writing. The results suggest that eighth-graders generally exhibit a positive motivational profile toward writing in English. They appear to be predominantly intrinsically motivated, driven by enjoyment, perceived self-competence, and the relative ease of writing. In addition, the YLLs from this study appear to be extrinsically motivated, recognizing English as valuable for future educational and career opportunities, global communication, and participation in online communities. Teacher influence also appears to positively shape YLLs' motivation for EFL writing. The less motivated learners surveyed in the current study view EFL writing as difficult and imposed, with confusion over spelling and a general lack of interest, indicating that emotional and psychological factors significantly shape their motivation for writing in English. Another important finding is that even at this relatively early stage of EFL learning and regardless of their motivation level, the eighth-graders recognize the practical relevance of EFL writing in contemporary communication contexts as well as the vital role of English as *lingua franca*. This is further supported by their preferences in EFL writing, with texting on mobile phones being their favourite form of writing. Further findings indicate a positive correlation between YLLs' motivation for EFL writing and their attitudes toward writing compositions in English, although the participants generally exhibit relatively low attitudes in this regard. Insufficient time allocated to practicing composition writing, uninteresting topics, word count limitations, and stress and anxiety caused by time constraints and grading have been identified as factors negatively affecting the stated attitudes. The results also indicate that the eighth-graders engage in relatively little additional EFL writing practice at home, suggesting they invest limited effort in developing EFL writing skills outside the formal educational setting. Finally, the findings indicate a relatively limited level of parental support in fostering EFL writing skills at home, suggesting that parent involvement is not consistently associated with higher levels of the YLLs' motivation for EFL writing.

The findings listed above yield several pedagogical implications for various stakeholders involved in the process of EFL teaching at an early school age. For teachers, it is essential to create a supportive environment that fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for EFL writing. This can be achieved by designing engaging tasks that align with learners' personal interests and are perceived by YLLs as enjoyable and relevant, such as writing in authentic, real-life contexts (e.g., texting in English). Teachers should also adjust writing tasks to reduce stress and time pressure, which can negatively impact motivation. It is equally important to ensure that the grading framework for learners' writings is supportive and sufficiently flexible to foster learner creativity and autonomy. Providing emotional support and constructive feedback is crucial for primary school children who find EFL writing challenging, as it helps boost their confidence. Additionally, teachers should emphasize the practical value of writing in English, linking writing tasks to global communication and online participation. Such instruction may be particularly effective for engaging less motivated learners, while approaches that emphasize the long-term academic and professional value of writing may resonate more with learners who are already highly motivated for writing in English. With regard to policymakers, they have a crucial role in ensuring that writing is meaningfully integrated into curricula, supporting teacher professional development, and advocating for inclusive teaching approaches that

address the diverse needs of YLLs in the process of developing EFL writing skills. Similarly, curriculum and EFL teaching material developers should provide age-appropriate, engaging content that incorporates interactive writing activities and fosters peer collaboration to strengthen learner motivation. Finally, parents should create a positive home environment and provide emotional encouragement to their children in the process of developing writing skills in English.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size restricts the ability to generalize the findings. Although the participants, aged 13–14, are capable of reflecting on their own experiences, their open-ended responses may still lack depth due to developing self-awareness and metacognitive skills. Moreover, their responses may have been influenced by a desire to align with perceived expectations or social norms, potentially introducing bias into the data. Finally, the study relied solely on a questionnaire, which, despite offering both quantitative and qualitative data, may have limited the depth of the findings without support from other methods like interviews or classroom observations. Future research should involve a larger and more varied sample to improve the generalizability of the results. Recruiting participants from multiple schools, regions, or educational settings could provide a broader perspective. Including observational data may offer deeper insights into learners' engagement with EFL writing activities within authentic classroom environments. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal research could shed light on how EFL writing motivation develops across grade levels, revealing key factors that contribute to shifts in motivation over time. Concerning the findings indicating a positive relationship between YLLs' motivation and the use of digital technology in English writing, future research could examine the pedagogical potential of digital tools, such as writing applications, online platforms, and social media, in English language instruction. Such studies could provide insights into how the integration of these tools influences learners' motivation to engage in writing tasks in English. Given that gender is recognized as an important factor influencing EFL writing motivation (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020), it would be beneficial for future research to examine the correlations between gender and motivation for writing in English among primary school children. This should include an analysis of various intrinsic and extrinsic motivational components, as well as different levels of language proficiency. Such research can contribute to a deeper understanding of writing motivation and support the development of more effective educational strategies and instructional interventions aimed at improving EFL writing skills among primary school children.

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Appendix

Sample coding tree for open-ended question on EFL writing enjoyment

Theme	Code	Sub-code	Example Quote
Perceived Ease of Writing	Writing feels easy	Natural flow	"I like writing in English very much because it is very easy and natural."
	Easier than L1	Croatian harder than English	"I prefer writing in English because I make more mistakes in Croatian..."
Self-Expression	Easier self-expression	Vocabulary/phrasing comes easily	"It's easier for me to express myself in English..."
	Emotional expression	Emotions easier to convey	"I find it easier to express my emotions in English."
Positive Emotional Response	Joy and pride	Achievement in a foreign language	"It brings me joy and pride knowing that I can write in another language."
	Enjoyment	Writing experience is pleasant	"It's a great experience while I write."
Language Identity	English as second language identity	Feels like a second mother tongue	"English is like a second mother tongue to me..."