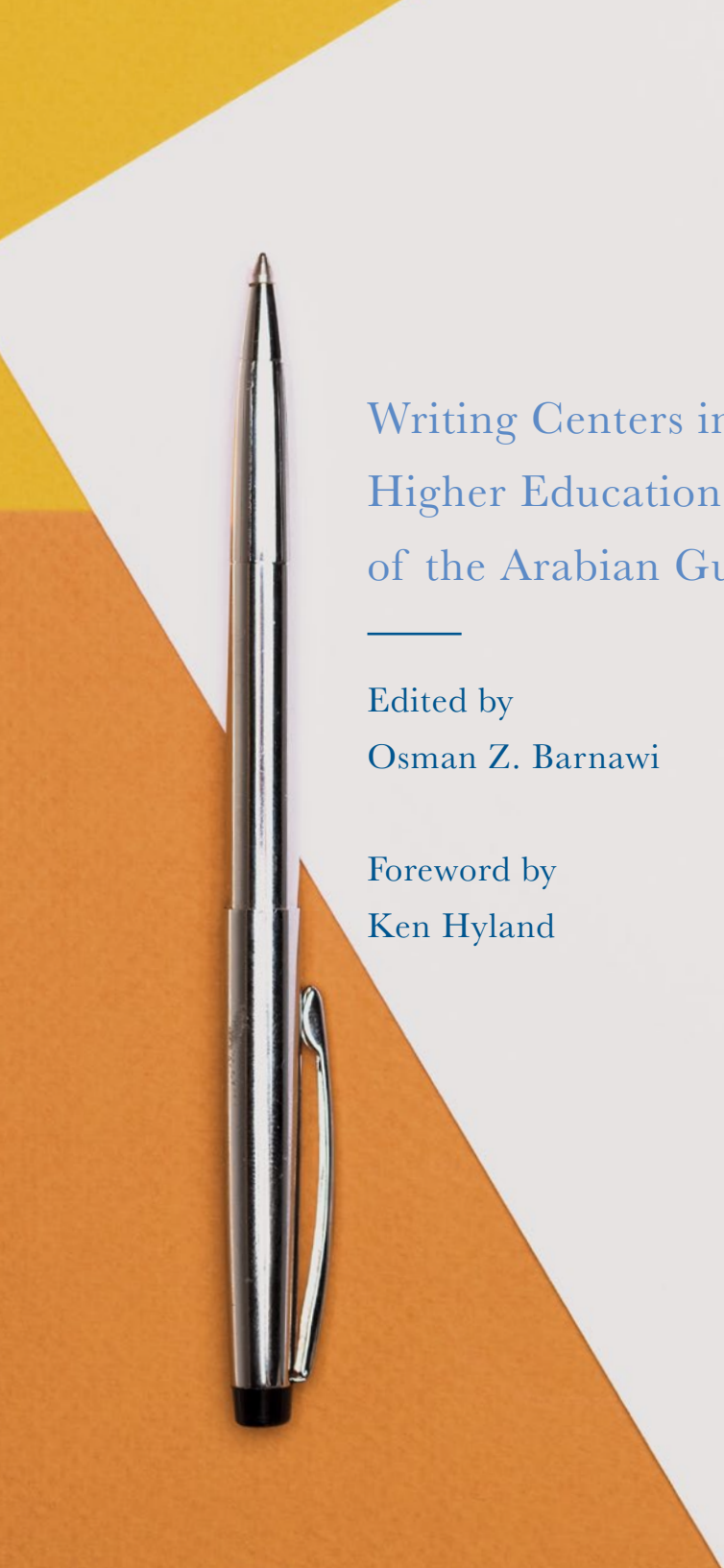

Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape of the Arabian Gulf

Edited by
Osman Z. Barnawi

Foreword by
Ken Hyland

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Editor
Osman Z. Barnawi
Yanbu English Language Institute
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes
Yanbu Industrial City, Saudi Arabia

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To my father, mother, brothers, sisters and son—Jawad

Foreword

Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape of the Arabian Gulf represents a major step forward in higher education writing in the Gulf. It is the logical outcome of the enthusiastic embracing of the writing centre idea among HE institutions in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and elsewhere who have seen the possibilities for pedagogic change and for language learning in these writing venues.

Writing centres are student-centred and learning-oriented spaces, which, compared to many other aspects of higher education, offer excellent conditions for facilitating learning, peer learning and life-long learning. Originating in the USA to support first-language undergraduates, writing centres have typically provided a place where students can get advice on their assignments ranging from argumentation to punctuation. More recently, they have become popular in Europe and, now, the Middle East, expanding beyond tutorials on the process and mechanics of writing to support curricula in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes. Two key features of writing centres are positioning of the writing tutor and the focus on individual writers. Here, the tutor is a facilitator and mentor, eliciting the students' ideas and helping them to scaffold their writing, rather than as someone who will grade their assignment. Here also is a space where students can get individual attention in a safe haven, away from the potential distractions and potential embarrassments of watching classmates. A central advantage, however, is the fact that students can bring disciplinary writing to the centre, with assignments set in subject classes rather than those

given by their English teacher. For many students, this is the only help they are likely to get on their engineering assignment or business report.

It is also important to note, and the chapters in this volume testify to this, that writing centre development is dynamic and responsive, and with increasing globalization, they have had to respond to greater language variation among the students who turn to them. Clients with different proficiencies in English, from different disciplines, and sometimes with different language backgrounds turn to these centres often as a last resort, and expect to get help. For many students, the English they learn in their formal classes is insufficient and the writing centre is their main source of writing support in a crowded curriculum.

The chapters in this book contribute substantially to our knowledge of writing centres and the impact they can have in a region where the perceived need for English is growing rapidly, but which still struggles with the socio-cultural and political issues surrounding the language and writing centres in particular. The issues raised by this book are important and worth discussing: What is the status of the writing centre? What skills and training do tutors need? What collaboration can be achieved among them? What roles should technology play in them? What is clear, however, is that the writing centre idea has great appeal and potential, and that it has firmly taken hold among the universities of the Arabian Gulf.

Ken Hyland
Professor of Applied Linguistics
Director of the Centre for Applied English Studies
University of Hong Kong
Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong

Preface

The Arabian oil-rich Gulf countries—Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait—play an influential role in today's global socio-political, cultural and economic environments. There are now 'New' high increases in the number of Western educational institutions as well as international corporate agencies appearing in these strategic geographical areas of the Islamic world. At the same time, there is a 'New' emerging desire for the Englishization, internationalization, privatization and mallification of education, and English medium of instruction programmes at all levels across the Arabian Gulf countries. Under these neoliberal discourses of a free market economy, the sale and consumption of digital, written and/or multimodal texts are guided by the market values of those written products being exchanged among the community, affiliations, partners, actors, administrative bodies, stakeholders and consumers in the Arabian Gulf region and beyond.

Since the establishment of MENAWCA—Middle East and North African Writing Centers Alliance—in 2007–2008 (as a regional affiliate of the International Writing Centers Association, IWCA), the number of writing centres (WCs) inside higher education (HE) institutions in the Arabian oil-rich Gulf countries—Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait—has started to increase dramatically. Although issues surrounding English as a foreign language (EFL) writing and its cultural politics in the Arab world have long been controversial, owing to the inclination towards oral literacy of the Arab society, there are now symposiums, conferences, forums and several academic events related to WCs in Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and

Bahrain. These events are sponsored by local universities, government bodies, organizations and international associations.

Throughout the course of these events, tutors, students, WC administrators, writing programme directors and coordinators, along with their Western counterparts (i.e., from the IWCA), have been discussing and negotiating various pedagogical, ideological, socio-cultural and political issues related to WCs in the Arab world, including encouraging students to use WCs, sustaining WCs in the region, strategies for second language writing, learners writing identities, writing across the curriculum, writing programme administrations, writing labs and writing studios. While all this is happening, however, there are still some serious under-explored questions: On what basis did stakeholders establish their own WCs across the Gulf region? What informed the design of those centres in each country? What roles do WCs play within/between HE institutions in the region? What types of training and professional development did tutors, WC directors, coordinators and administrators receive before working in their respective centres? How and in what ways has the presence of MENAWCA, in collaboration with the International Writing Centers Association, restricted, shaped (reshaped) and/or facilitated the literacy of the local discourse community? How do other stakeholders (e.g., employers, community, students, engineering and business faculty members) perceive WC tutors, directors, administrators and coordinators in the Arab world? How do WC tutors, directors, administrators and coordinators perceive themselves within their own institutes? In the era of a scarcity of resources and uncertainties in global HE settings, what sorts of technical discourse do WCs employ in each country to sustain their status? What sorts of ideological, political, cultural and institutional challenges do WCs face in the Gulf region in the neoliberal globalized era? What are the commonalities and similarities being manifested within/between HE institutions in the Gulf region? This collection of thought-provoking chapters addresses and critiques cultural politics of WCs in the Arabian Gulf region.

This book is divided into three parts. Conceptually, understanding the historical foundation of WC(s) in a particular discourse community is a prerequisite for obtaining an accurate reading of its present state. In Part I, 'Historical Review of Writing Centre(s) Across the Gulf Countries', contributors offer critical historical accounts of WCs in the six Gulf countries—it is a call to know the past in order to read the present and predict the future. In Part II, 'Writing Centre(s) on the Ground', authors provide empirical research and/or pedagogical practices that vividly capture the

on-the-ground realities faced and experienced by different stakeholders, including students, tutors, WC coordinators, directors and the society at large. In Part III, 'Comparative Investigations of Writing Centres in the Arabian Gulf Countries', the contributor, building on the previous sections, discusses what sort of commonalities and differences the current trend of WCs is producing within/between the Arabian Gulf countries. He also discusses the future of WCs in the Arabian Gulf countries as well as major challenges centred on the cultural politics of EFL writing under the neoliberal economy.

To this end, the aim of this book is to paint a comprehensive picture of the inner workings of WCs across the Arabian oil-rich Gulf countries and at the same time to expand on some of the global implications for how the WCs are placed within the Gulf countries. It is also intended to serve as a primary reference for both novice and experienced actors in the region and beyond. It aims to draw out conclusions for the region without making generalizations.

Yanbu English Language Institute
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes
Yanbu Industrial City, Saudi Arabia

Osman Z. Barnawi

About the Editor

Dr. Osman Z. Barnawi is Associate Professor of Composition and TESOL. He is the former managing director of Yanbu English Language Institute at the Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. He is now the managing director of Yanbu Technical Institute at the Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes.

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables

PART I

Historical Review of Writing Centre(s) Across the Gulf Countries

CHAPTER 1

The Emergence of Writing Centres in the Saudi Higher Education Landscape: A Genealogical Investigation

Hamid Ali Khan Eusafzai

Introduction

Writing centres (WCs) are, generally, an integral part of student academic support services in educational institutions. Apart from the name "writing centre", other appellations like "writing labs", "writing studios", "writing places" and "writing rooms" have also been used. WCs, as a support for helping students with writing, represent a physical space, a concept and a practice (Harris, 1985). They have their genesis in North American educational institutions and the students' need for writing support in those institutions. As there is a trend in the flow of educational products and ideas from the developed countries to the rest of the world, the idea of WCs also proliferated out of North America and served as a prototype for establishing WCs in various countries across the globe. The Gulf region was no exception to this proliferation trend. WCs began to emerge in higher education (HE) institutions of the region with the dawn of the current century. Saudi Arabia, located in the region, was also affected by this trend, whereby

H.A.K. Eusafzai (✉)
University of Central Asia, Naryn, Kyrgyz Republic

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a number of WCs have been established in HE institutions of the country. However, any formal research documenting the history of the emergence of these centres in the kingdom does not exist. Therefore, this chapter is an attempt to bridge this gap and to capture the history of the emergence of WCs in Saudi Arabia. However, the focus of this attempt is not merely to present an account of the chronology of the emergence of WCs in the kingdom but to present the "specific situations" which contributed to the birth of these centres (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 6). The allied objective to this aim is to understand the very essence of the current state of WCs in the kingdom as an idea, as a space and as a practice. Foucauldian framework of genealogy has been used to achieve this aim and the allied objective. The chapter starts with a brief presentation of the origin of WCs, followed by an overview of the WCs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Then, a brief rationale for the current study is stated. Next, the methodological approach of this research is explained, followed by a findings and discussion section. The chapter culminates in a conclusive section.

KSA and WCs in the Kingdom

A search for WCs on the expanding horizon of the Saudi higher education institutions (SHEIs) results in very few centres. Besides this, the Middle-East and North Africa Writing Centres Association (MENAWCA), an affiliate of the International Writing Centres Association (IWCA), has only five members from Saudi Arabia on its website (Raforth, 2012). Four of these members have fully established and functional WCs. Two of these centres are situated in institutions in the capital city of Riyadh and the other two are in institutions located in the cities of Jeddah and Yanbu Al-Sinaiyah on the western coast of the country. A few other SHEIs provide services similar to WCs, but such services are on a micro scale and performed as general and broader students' academic support services rather than through independent purpose-established WCs. Table 1.1 presents a list of these WCs and their details.

Writing Studio at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University

Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) has the prestige of being the largest women-only university in the kingdom as well as in the world. It is situated in the capital, Riyadh. Established and inaugurated in 2006 and 2007, respectively, the university hosts a total number of 60,000 students in its main campus. The university also has the

Table 1.1 List of WCs in the KSA

S. No.	*Name of the writing centre (WC)*	*Host institution*	*Location*	*Date established*
WC 1	Writing Studio	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Riyadh	2011
WC 2	The Centre for Writing in English	King Saud University	Riyadh	2012
WC 3	Writing Centre	King Abdulaziz University	Jeddah	2012
WC 4	Writing Centre	Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes	Yanbu Al-Sinaiyah	2014

prestige of establishing the first WC in the kingdom. The WC at PNU started working in 2011.

WC at King Saud University

King Saud University is situated in Riyadh. It was established in 1957 as the very first public university of the kingdom. The university has 50,000 students enrolled at all levels of university study (from university foundation year to PhD). However, compared with the long history of the university, the WC at the university is a recent phenomenon. It was established in 2012. The centre provides one-to-one academic writing improvement consultancy to students as well as to faculty.

WC at King Abdulaziz University

King Abdulaziz University is located in Jeddah. Jeddah is the largest Red Sea port of Saudi Arabia. The university was established in 1967. A total number of 82,000 students are enrolled in the university (university website). The WC at the university was established in the academic year 2012 (MENAWCA newsletter 2012). The university hosted WCs for both English and Arabic language. However, they were closed within two years of their inception due to funding reasons.

WC at the Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes

The Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes (RCYCI) has two undergraduate colleges and two institutes located across five campuses. These colleges and institutes are situated in Yanbu Al-Sinaiyah, which is an

industrial city situated on the Red Sea coast of the kingdom. The WC at the RCYCI was established in 2014. The centre provides services aiming at helping students, faculty and the community to improve their writing skills. The services are provided through tutorial sessions. English-language teachers at the RCYCI dedicate some hours to work in the centre as tutors. Senior students also volunteer to provide peer tutoring to their fellow students.

Rationale for the Current Chapter

Whereas there is a substantial body of historical account of WCs in the North American context, any account tracing and recording the emergence of WCs in the Saudi context is lacking. Concepts, institutions and practices do not emerge suddenly and without any reason. They have a trail of social, economic and political reasons and events leading to their genesis and evolution. To take stock of the present and to set directions for the future, constructing and recording history is necessary. The same applies to the WCs in the KSA. There is a need to take stock of the present and then move backwards to construct and record a history of the WCs in order to determine future directions. While doing so, it is also necessary to understand the WCs in Saudi Arabia in their totality. This will not only initiate and develop a "scholarship" of the WCs in the kingdom but also lead to legitimizing and defining the role of the WCs within the spectrum of SHEIs (Murphy & Law, 1995).

The current chapter is an endeavour to achieve the aforementioned objectives. The focal points of this whole attempt are to

- construct a history of the WCs in the kingdom by determining situations and events leading to the emergence of these WCs;
- explore how the WCs are presented and represented in the spectrum of SHEIs;
- explore the nature of the concept and practice as they exist currently; and
- determine the future directions of the WCs.

To achieve these ends, genealogy was used as a research framework. The next section presents the details of the framework.

Genealogy as a Research Framework

Genealogy has been defined as "history of the present" (Foucault, 1977). However, the word "history", in essential Foucauldian epistemology, does not imply history that we are traditionally familiar with. It is not history in the traditional sense. Traditional history is sequential. As such, it aims at capturing, recording and presenting the exact moments of the happening or a timeline of the events leading to the present. However, in genealogy, the starting point is the present. Genealogy, as an historical account, lacks chronological order and historians' itinerary in time is backwards rather than starting in the past and descending to the present. Historians, working within the parameters of the Foucauldian epistemology of genealogy, try to understand the past from the focal lens of the present. The present becomes the reference point for tracing and exploring the past. The dilemmas and questions emerging about the present trigger this exploration. The difference between genealogy and traditional history lies in the very objectives of the two types of histories. Genealogy essentially has a critical objective:

> Genealogy's aim is to trace the struggles, displacements and processes of repurposing out of which contemporary practice emerged, and to show the historical conditions of existence upon which the present day practices depend. (Garland, 2014, p. 373)

The implication, in the above quote, is that genealogy is not a history of the events in the very historical sense. Rather, it is concerned with an interaction and friction of the "various systems of subjection" (Garland, 2014) from which the present originates. McPhail (2001) defines these systems of subjection simply as "power plays" which structure meanings and practices, and give them their present shape (Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000). Pullman (2013) expresses the same opinion. She names these systems or power plays as "discourses" and characterizes genealogy as an "analysis" of "how a subject or object is discussed or represented, how it is produced, altered, or rejected" (p. 175). Thus, having dismissed the traditional sense of history and having established that genealogy is concerned with interaction and friction of systems leading to the development of a discourse, we can say that genealogy is travelling back from the present into the past and examining, with a critical lens, the interplay of various

apparently disconnected and unrelated "procedures, practices, apparatuses, and institutions involved" in the genesis of a current practice, knowledge or institutions which have evolved into an established and acceptable discourse (Pullman, 2013). Foucault (1991) defines genealogy as "an analysis of where things come from" (p. 83).

As a research method, genealogy mainly focuses on archives of documents and texts. As in the words of Foucault (1991), "genealogy is grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (p. 369). However, despite this emphasis on documentary analysis by Foucault, the exponents of genealogy are quite flexible when it comes to the methodological application of the approach. For example, Tamboukou (2003) opines that genealogy lacks any absolute methodological archetype. A similar position is adopted by Meadmore, Hatcher and Mcwilliam (2000) when they say that genealogy as a method has "no blueprint". Anaïs (2013) affirms the two positions by saying that Foucault does not indicate any specific mechanism of analysing these archival sources.

The choice of genealogy as a framework for this chapter was necessitated by a number of reasons. The first reason is the aim of the chapter. The chapter focuses on presenting a history of WCs in the kingdom through building a perspective of specific situations, rather than through presenting a chronological evolution. The aim is not to start in the past and move to the present (thus building a timeline for the emergence of WCs in the Saudi context). Rather, it is to move backwards from the present and see how the centres appeared in the kingdom. Here, the point can be raised that this endeavour is simply a case of determining the factors responsible for the emergence of WCs in the kingdom. The rebuttal to the point is that WCs, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, are more than students' writing support mechanism. They, as explicated by Harris (1985), are a concept, a theory and a practice. As such, the emergence of WCs in Saudi Arabia is the emergence of an institution, a discourse and a practice. To fully understand the totality of WCs as an institution, as a discourse and as a practice, it is important to understand the "processes, procedures and apparatuses" (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 6) which led to this emergence. Genealogy helps in unearthing these, and this gives us another reason for adopting it. Superficially, the aim can be construed as determining the factors responsible for establishing WCs in the kingdom; nevertheless, I am interested in discovering

Table 1.2 Interviewees' details

Interviewee pseudonym	*Position*	*WC of affiliation*
Ayesha	Director	WC 2
Waleed	Ex-Director	WC 4
Osama	Tutor	WC 4
Reham	Tutor	WC 1
Ahmed	Ex-Director	WC 3

what has been termed as "tectonic interplay" (Anaïs, 2013, p. 130) of various powers which gave birth to WCs. Genealogy, with its critical stance, facilitates this discovery.

To achieve the aim of this chapter, data was collected from various archival sources. These sources were mainly WCs' manuals, websites, mission statements and newsletters. However, data was not limited to the documentary sources only. Interviews with WCs' directors and tutors also formed an important source of data owing to the belief that the spoken word, if recorded and preserved, also takes the quintessential nature of an oral document or archive. Interpretive analysis of data helped understand the current status and situation of WCs in the kingdom and also determine the specific situations and factors figuring prominently in the establishment of WCs. The analysis started from the present and moved backwards in time. As genealogy is the history of the present, the first concern was to explore the present. This necessarily entailed exploring the current situation of WCs in Saudi Arabia. The dual objectives of exploring the present were to explore WCs as spaces and services allocated in universities as part of a students' support system and to discover how they are understood as a concept and as a practice. After establishing the present situation of WCs as the outset of the genealogical history, the second and the main focus of data interpretation and analysis was to explore how WCs emerged in the kingdom. The rest of the chapter presents details of the findings (Table 1.2).

Findings and Discussions

The "Present" of WCs in the Kingdom

The interview data and documentary sources have been analysed to assess the way the studied WCs are presented and represented, the role defined for them, and the kind of attitudes evolving and the practices developing.

Data revealed that all these WCs have certain commonalities in terms of the discourse used for representing them, the practice in vogue in them, their role and the kind of attitude that has been developing towards them.

The first commonality is the origin of the idea of WCs. It appeared that the idea of establishing WCs in the KSA was inspired by WCs in the USA. Talking about the idea of the establishment of WC 2, Ayesha said:

> When I came from America, I benefited a lot from the writing centre on my campus. I wanted to establish something of the same here in the English language centre as another service for help[ing] students to bring their writing assignments, papers before submitting them to their teacher. (Excerpt 1)

The situation was not different in the case of WC 3. The consultant for the entire plan of setting up the centre was hired from the USA (Raforth, 2012). The founding director for WC 1 also has an American origin, whereas the founding director of WC 4 has been a student in a research degree programme in an American university. Thus, it stands confirmed that the American model of WCs served as a prototype for the WCs in the kingdom. The expertise and the concept have been imported either through consultants or through students returning, after having studied in American universities, and now serving in leadership positions in SHEIs.

The second commonality among these WCs is the tutoring model or the pedagogical approach practised there. In tutoring manuals, mission and objectives statements, and websites, a repetition of certain words exists which confirms provided a lead to the pedagogical approach prevailing in all these centres. These words are “consultancy”, “tutors”, “tutoring”, “one-to-one”, “review”, “feedback”, “editing” and “process”. All these words evince a model of tutoring which has been termed as non-directive collaborative approach (Bruffee, 1984) and which is the hallmark of one-to-one tutoring sessions of WCs in American educational institutions (Harris, 1988). The main feature of the approach is leading the learner through an implicit process of discovery and reflection. It is hoped that this process of discovery and reflection will enable the tutee to see the problems with her or his written work and also find ways of eliminating them without losing the ownership of the work. The underlying philosophy of the approach is “to produce better writers, not better writing” (North, 1984). Thus, what appears here is that not only the concept and the space have been replicated, but also the pedagogical approach of the

prototype has been appropriated. This is also confirmed by the following quote from a newsletter report depicting certain features of WC 2:

> Part of the ethos of the CWE is to focus on the writer and not the written piece. This ethos deeply informs the interactions between writers and their consultants, who utilize one-on-one interaction to help writing evolve and improve in a more holistic sense. … A key part of this is helping writers identify their own errors, from recognizing a misplaced comma to realizing gaps in an outline of a literature review. (Elshaikh, 2015, p. 4)

The appropriation of the idea and the pedagogical model from North America, and the latter's replication in the KSA can be attributed to the success and effectiveness of WCs in the North American context and also because those importing the idea benefitted from WCs themselves (Chnag, 2013).

However, alongside this replication of the American model also exists the realization of the local need for establishing WCs in the kingdom, as is evident from the interview excerpt of Waleed. He said:

> No value is given to writing in Saudi Arabia, there is no support for writing, writing has no value in higher education, this will affect the literacy of the coming generations, the writing centre will be a place where students will be able to understand what is writing, they can practice writing, they can experience writing. (Excerpt 2)

The excerpt is representative of the kind of expectations that people have of these WCs. WCs are linked to literacy development in the kingdom. They are expected to be what Harris (1988) sums up as

> places where students are encouraged to try out and to experiment. Removed from the evaluative setting of a classroom, writers are free to engage in trial runs of ideas and approaches, to fail and move on to another attempt, and to receive encouragement for their efforts.

Providing such a space to students in the kingdom is of dire necessity, as, traditionally and culturally, Arabs are rooted in oracy rather than in literacy. WCs can be instrumental in bridging this gap and underscoring the need for developing writing skills. However, using the space in such a way as described by Harris (ibid.) cannot be done without developing awareness and the requisite attitude towards WCs. What is the present

attitude towards WCs in institutes where they have been established? The following is a representative excerpt from an interview with Osama, a tutor at WC 4, which provides us an insight:

> Students do not know the worth of the writing centres and teachers on the courses are not different. Teachers think we are here to relieve their burden of checking the work of their students. Students think that we are there to rewrite the whole thing for them. Then there is no link between us and what is going on in the classroom. We are just a place … many come and ask us what we do … why not teach rather than sit there and wait for students who do not visit the place very frequently. … Then what I do other tutors do not do the same way, everyone has his own way of doing things in this place. (Excerpt 3)

The excerpt is symptomatic of the fact that, despite being established as a site and a service, there is a lack of awareness about the role of the centres among tutors, users and teachers. Further, it appears that all tutors have different realizations of their role as tutors. The lack of a uniform understanding, of the role of WCs, means a lack of uniformity in the tutoring practices of these tutors. This implies that while the WCs have tried to import and appropriate the North American model of WC pedagogy, perhaps, they could not impart this model to their tutors or have been able to develop an indigenous model of WC tutoring more in sync with the local needs and students. It appears that these WCs are perceived as mere add-ons to the overall academic support services provided in universities rather than accorded the status of an institution in itself. The closure of WC 3 due to funding reasons can be quoted as a proof of this lack of institutionalized status.

The Past of the WCs

In the preceding subsection, I tried to capture the present totality of the centres. This included the discourse used to present them, the practice and the pedagogy that prevail there, the role they are expected to play and the attitude they invoke. Outlining this "present" has been necessary, since, in genealogy, the "present" serves as the outset for the itinerary into the past. In this section, I shall attempt to present an account of the past of the centres in the kingdom, which is also the main aim of the chapter. The focus of the attempt, as stated earlier, will be to determine those "specific

situations" (Tamboukou, 2003) which led to the emergence of WCs in the KSA.

Though WCs appeared in the kingdom between 2011 and 2014, data analysis, nevertheless, revealed that it was the specific situations in the first decade of the twenty-first century which led to this appearance. Most of these situations are rooted in the economic and educational circumstances of the country. To find these situations, data from the interviews with WCs' directors and tutors was used as a lead for the analysis of archives and documents. This analysis revealed that the situations leading to the emergence of the centres are intertwined. For the purpose and convenience of organization and presentation, first, I shall introduce those delineative excerpts from the interviews which provided cues to the discovery of the "specific situations". Then, these will be followed by a detailed account of the situations responsible for the appearance of the centres. Together, these will help construct the genealogical history of WCs in the kingdom.

Excerpt 4

Reham thought that the emerging status of the English language and students' low proficiency in writing skills in English led to the emergence of WCs:

> Saudi society is becoming bilingual, at least in the universities and higher education. English has become very important. It is the core subject in the prep year and then also teachers are required to teach everything in this language. Any student not performing in English cannot be successful. They can't write in English. Very poor. This was the thought when we all decided to bring in a writing centre here. They needed to be told how to write well in English. Then English is our link with the rest of the world, the internet, the knowledge.

Excerpt 5

Waleed thought that writing is becoming pervasive in society:

> Society is changing. Everybody needs to write now. Engineers, businessmen, not just people in academics, everybody. This we need to teach here in colleges and universities when they are studying with us. We need to have writing centres.

Excerpt 6

Ahmed had reasons related to students' language proficiency and mobility:

> When I went to the US for study, my writing was not very good. The centre there gave me a lot of hope. When I came back, I thought why don't we have it here also. We can save time for students if they go there prepared. We can save money and they do not have to study English there before studying their major. Then a lot of foreign institutions are coming to Saudi Arabia. They will use English in classes and writing is important part of these classes. Writing centres can also contribute to preparing students for these foreign institutions in the kingdom.

The excerpts have some important cues, and when interpreted and read alongside archival sources, a history of WCs can be traced. Though a genealogical history is essentially a backward journey in time, for the convenience of the readers, it is presented in a sequential way. The tectonic shift in events (Anaïs, 2013) started in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The decade can be termed as a decade of transition towards knowledge-based economy in the kingdom. Though the developed world made a shift to knowledge-based economy in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the trend started in the kingdom around 1995 (Nour, 2014). The essential characteristic of a knowledge-based economy is that "knowledge [becomes] the key economic resource and the dominant … source of competitive advantage" (Drucker, 1998). Such economies depend on knowledge-driven economic activities, both in the production and in the service sector, and therefore, the production, distribution and exchange of knowledge becomes the main goal of all these activities. In the kingdom, the initial years of transition towards a knowledge-based economy were characterized by a slow pace. However, the transition gained tremendous momentum in the first decade of the current century (Nour, 2014). The main and logical beneficiary of this momentum was the HE sector.

Intertwined with this massification of HE was the phenomenon of internationalization. The trend of internationalization was rampant across the globe (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and the SHEIs could not remain impervious to this trend, as the whole point of investment in the HE by the Saudi government was "developing globally-competitive,

local, institutions of higher education" (Koch, 2014, p. 48). To achieve this objective, embracing internationalization was inevitable for the KSA.

Having constructed this historical perspective of knowledge-based economy, massification and internationalization and its complementary aspects of King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Colleges of Excellence (CoE), it is at this stage that we can understand the cues present in the stakeholders' interviews. In Excerpt 4, the interviewee refers to the importance of English in SHEIs generally and in the prep year particularly. This can be interpreted and linked to the implementation of EMI. Then, since a large number of students are joining SHEIs as a result of massification and being immersed in EMI, the larger effect of this on society is bilingualism. English is becoming entrenched in society alongside Arabic. Excerpt 5 can be interpreted as a cue to knowledge-based society, whereas Excerpt 6 can be interpreted as a cue to KASP and CoE.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the specific situations which led to the emergence of WCs in the kingdom are the transition of the kingdom towards a knowledge-based economy, massification and internationalization of education. The three Saudi-specific aspects of internationalization (namely, KASP, EMI and CoE) contributed to the establishment of these WCs. All this happened in a time frame starting from 1995 and culminating in the establishment of the first WC in 2011. However, the whole development leading to the emergence of WCs in the KSA has certain obvious implications. Taken in totality, all these specific situations are the outfalls of globalization (Mok, 2007). Kubota defines globalization as "human contact across cultural boundaries as well as speedy exchange of commodities and information" necessarily "from the centre to the periphery" (Kubota, 2002, p. 13). The centre implies the developed nations and the periphery refers to the developing nations, and the exchange is based on the premise that "everything exported from the developed to developing countries is advanced" (Pennycook, 1989, p. 611). In the field of education, the trend of globalization resulted in "several governments, particularly in Asia and Africa, making the mistake of advocating the adoption of center-produced 'best practices' whether they are appropriate to local conditions or not" (Kumaravadivelu, 2013, p. 318). Considered from this dimension, globalization has been perceived as a form of colonization (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001), the essential aim of which is to implement

an Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-American paradigm in the world (Mok, 2007). Kubota (2002) equates globalization with Americanization, which aims at the transplantation of American ideology, way of living and thinking. Analysed within this framework, the emergence of WCs can be construed as an outfall of globalization, which has been making inroads in SHEIs through knowledge-based economy, internationalization, massification and EMI. WCs have been a one-dimensional exchange of knowledge and academic products between the developed America and the developing SHEIs, imported into the kingdom under the influence of Americanization.

Nevertheless, now when WCs are there on the SHEIs' horizon, there is a need to realize that knowledge products which are "manufactured and marketed as usable in all learning/teaching context cannot be useful to any learning/teaching context" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 544). For integrating WCs into SHEIs and according them an institutionalized status, there is a need to de-Americanize them through a process of "Saudification" (Onsman, 2011). This can be achieved through creating a zone of contact between the imported model and the Saudification process. The zone of contact (Pratt, 1991) should be the local exigencies, the writing needs of the Saudi users, local students' and tutors' attitude, the available local expertise and the overall milieu of SHEIs. It is hoped that once the imported model "meet[s], clash[es] and grapple[s]" (ibid., p. 34) with these local elements, the result will be the indigenization of the concept and praxis of WCs and their institutionalization within SHEIs (Fig. 1.1).

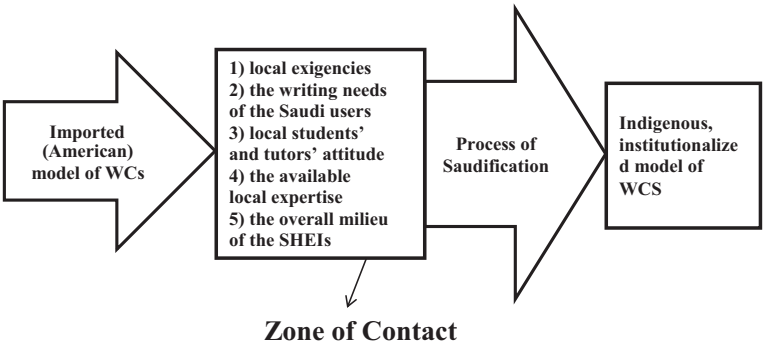

Fig. 1.1 Indigenization process of WCs in the KSA

Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt to construct a genealogical history of WCs in the KSA. The focus was to discover the circumstances leading to the emergence of WCs in the kingdom. The chapter started with an overview of the origin of WCs, followed by details of the WCs that have been established in the country so far. Then, an account of the present of these WCs was given. Using this present as an outset, the chapter then moved to its main focus, which was moving backwards in time and tracing the shifts in the economic and educational situation of the country which resulted in the establishment of the centres in the kingdom. The significance of this history building lies in the fact that, instead of giving a mere chronological account or a timeline, it helped in understanding how and why the centres emerged. This understanding can contribute to reassigning a context-relevant role to these and new WCs in the kingdom, adopting a local writing pedagogy which is more appropriate to the needs of Saudi students.

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Hamid Ali Khan Eusafzai is a Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) practitioner. He is also a doctoral student at the University of Exeter, UK. He has nearly two decades of English-language teaching experience. Previously, he has taught in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Currently, he is an English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty member at the University of Central Asia in Kyrgyz Republic. Eusafzai's research interests include individual differences, teachers' development, internationalization of higher education, English as a medium of instruction and post-method pedagogy.

CHAPTER 2

A Critical Rereading of the History of Writing Centers in the UAE

Aymen Elsheikh and Jessica Mascaro

Introduction

Since their inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s, writing centers (WCs) have been growing both in quantity and in quality. This growth is not only manifested in the establishment of thousands of WCs across different educational settings, but also evident in the establishment of professional bodies, such as the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). Although WCs enjoy a relatively long history in Western contexts, it is not until fairly recently that the Gulf Council Cooperation (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) have started to adopt the idea. In addition, while there is some research on the functionality of WCs in the GCC countries (Murshidi & Abd, *Higher Education Studies*, 4(3): 58–63, 2014), our knowledge about their evolution in this region is still lacking. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to trace and critically

A. Elsheikh (✉)
Abu Dhabi University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

J. Mascaro
EtonHouse International School, Broadrick Road, Singapore, Singapore

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examine the short history of WCs in one of the GCC countries, namely the UAE.

The development of education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is due much in part to the discovery of oil. This led to a focus on developing the country, which in turn resulted in greater attention on education (Education in the UAE, 2016). The founding father of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, "considered education among the priorities of progress" and "was overly generous when it came to education related projects that aspired for the gradual improvement of education in order to prepare a new generation capable of contributing to the progress of the Nation" (Education in the UAE, 2016). Therefore, since the beginning of the country's history, education has been acknowledged as an essential stepping stone to the successful future of the UAE.

However, even though education was accepted as being of great importance, there was still substantial room for development. At the country's inception in 1971, the educational infrastructure, with a mere 74 schools, was still nascent (Mahani & Molki, 2011). Many cities and villages did not have access to it at all. In fact, fewer than 28,000 youths were enrolled in school at that time (Education in the UAE, 2016). In the beginning, public education was set up in order to allow free schooling to students at the following levels: Kindergarten (4–5 years old), Elementary (6–11 years old), Intermediate (12–14 years old), and Secondary (15–17 years old). Private schools eventually came onto the educational market and would ultimately account for nearly 40% of student enrolment (Education in the UAE, 2016).

It was not until 1977, with the establishment of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), that the UAE had a domestic university (Mahani & Molki, 2011). Before this time, many students had to leave the UAE to attend universities abroad (Education in the UAE, 2016). Today, the UAE Commission for Academic Achievement overseas has 73 higher education options for students; however, this number does not take into account those higher education institutions that reside in the Free Zones. These institutions are instead overseen by the Dubai Knowledge and Human Development Authority. About two-thirds of these universities in the UAE have been established since 2005, resulting in what some have called an "educational gold rush" (Mahani & Molki, 2011, p. 3). The government has encouraged this growth as a means to the country becoming an educational epicenter in the region. Indeed, today, the UAE is a "higher education hub" (Wilkins, 2010, p. 390) and

a particularly interesting example, both because of how quickly the international campuses were established and because it is the largest hub of this kind in the world (Wilkins, 2010).

Higher education in the UAE fulfills three purposes—instruction, research, and community service. Regardless of the university's status as a local university or one accredited by a foreign body, all universities in the UAE seek to maintain and enforce quality education (Soomro & Ahmad, 2012). Many writing centers (WCs) are established as a means to "add value" to a university or institution (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 6). It is therefore fitting that a number of universities in the UAE, in their efforts to provide quality services, have established WCs.

A basic Internet search has revealed six major WCs situated in six different universities. Two of these universities are local ones (one private and one public). The other four are private American universities (branch campuses). The universities are located in five different emirates (Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, and Sharjah). While it is not clear when the centers have been established, judging by the history of the universities, we anticipate that the centers have been in business for about 7–12 years. There are also some WCs which are located outside of the discourse of higher education and examining them is beyond the scope of this chapter. A major purpose of the establishment of WCs at these universities is to help students in the development of their English writing skills because the medium of instruction is English.

At least partially in response to low English literacy rates, the UAE deemed English the mode of instruction in Science, Information Technology (IT), Health and Physical Education, and Mathematics throughout many of the primary and secondary grades. In fact, 500 native English-speaking teachers were hired to replace local teachers throughout these years (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014).

While using English as a medium in classrooms was based on reliable English-language teaching methodologies—mainly Communicative Language Teaching and Content and Language Integrated Learning—many worry that this stress placed on learning the English language is actually putting local students at a disadvantage. Since students' English-language skills may be limited, their ability to understand and participate in coursework gets adversely affected (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014). This becomes a particular issue when students reach higher education and the subject knowledge and language required to talk about the topics become more and more complex. Indeed, "much has been written about the

struggles of emergent scholars faced with the double burden of remaining at the forefront of research in their own fields while trying to elevate the level of their English composition skills" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 9). This thus leads to university faculty often feeling that their students are grossly underprepared for the challenges and rigors of higher education (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014).

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to trace and critically examine the short history of WCs in one of the GCC countries, namely the UAE. The goal of the study is to understand the process and evolution of WCs in the UAE. In particular, this chapter attempts to uncover not only when WCs came into existence in the UAE but also the purposes they serve in the higher education system. The data for this study consists of written information from websites and manuals about the five major universities in the UAE that were found to house well-established WCs: one public, one private, and three American universities. In order to develop a rich understanding, elicit meaning, and create empirical knowledge about these WCs, the study employs document analysis as its guiding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It also uses precepts from postcolonial theory (Said, 1978) in order to uncover and question ideologies and discourses embedded in the work and establishment of WCs.

After delineating the theoretical framework guiding this study (postcolonial theory), we review relevant literature on WCs. We provide a brief overview of WCs in general and this gives us a framework for situating the WCs we report on in this study. In order to establish a context for a historical analysis of WCs in the UAE, our literature review includes a discussion of the challenges faced by WCs, WCs and English-language learners (ELLs), research on WCs, and research on WCs in the Middle East and the UAE. We then examine the four WCs, which are the focus of the study, by analyzing their processes and modes of operation. The chapter then ends with a conclusion and implications for WCs' pedagogy and organizational structure.

Postcolonial Theory

On its face, the term "postcolonial" may be understood to refer to the period after the departure of the colonizers—the British Empire and other colonial powers. It is, however, a theory that has been popularized by Edward Said (1978) to refer to and study the influences of colonization and imperialism on cultures and societies. Central to the theory are the

processes of *otherness* and *resistance*, among others. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007), "othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. It is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects" (p. 156). The term "resistance" describes how the colonized rejects the othering of the colonizer by developing different strategies for refuting and not accepting the categories and representations they are forced to fit into. In the context of the current study, othering can be seen in the way WCs in the UAE have been established following guidelines developed in the West, a process which can be viewed as producing subjects through socialization into a hegemonic discourse of higher education. Resistance will be seen in the various ways in which students rejected the normalizing discourses which do not fit their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Literature Review

Writing Centers: Some Background

While WCs (earlier called Writing Labs) have existed in the United States throughout the twentieth century, the idea originally surfaced as a *method*, as opposed to an actual physical *space*. Instructors would organize class in a way that transferred power, and responsibility, to students by having them complete their writing under teacher supervision. This was a significant departure from the previous method, where students listened to lectures about writing and then completed the writing outside of class, where errors could not immediately be addressed, and hence risked becoming internalized (Boquet, 1999).

In the 1950s, WCs began to occupy their own space (Boquet, 1999); however, it was not until the 1970s that WCs really started proliferating throughout the country (Harris, 2016). This was at least partially due to the literacy crisis and open admissions policies of the time. Many universities were "underprepared and underfunded" to accept and address the needs "of the nation's most diverse group ever of rising adults" (Carino, 1996, p. 32), who were "literally knocking down the doors to get in" (Carino, 1996, p. 33). WCs were often created to fix problems that were not always easily pinpointed, let alone addressed—"things like increasing enrollment, larger minority populations and declining … literacy skills" (Boquet, 1999, p. 472).

While there has been, and continues to be, some discrepancy between the mission of WCs and the perception of the public, WCs have continued to grow since their early days. Today, the number of WCs is expanding, not just in North America, but around the globe. WCs exist in a variety of settings and contexts. In general, they are usually aimed at secondary or university students and are often part of a learning center or larger program (Harris, 2016). While each center is unique, they all abide by the same key principles, as discussed below.

The most poignant feature of WCs is the one-to-one tutoring session. The type and qualification of the tutor may vary from center to center—it may be a peer tutor, a professional, a graduate student, or an instructor from the university or school (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This emphasis on one-to-one tutoring has an impact on virtually all other features of WCs. Indeed, it is the backbone of WCs (LaClare & Franz, 2013).

These tutoring sessions are usually done through appointments—15 minutes to 1 hour in length. Many centers also allow students to come in on a walk-in basis and be seen if there are no other conflicting appointments (Harris, 2016).

The tutorship offered in these centers is important in order to ensure that tutors can give ample focus and attention to individual needs (Tobin, 2010). Since all students (and, indeed, faculty) have their own personal struggles with writing, it makes sense that the most direct way to aid a writer is through individualized attention. Keeping the WC functioning on a tutor format can ensure that each visitor gets personalized help.

Another main feature of WCs is that they are non-evaluative (Harris, 2016). Tutors aim to coach and empower rather than evaluate and instruct. As Harris (2016) states, it is not the tutor's job "to lecture at them [writers] or repeat information available from the teacher or textbook. Instead, tutors collaborate with writers in ways that facilitate the process of writers finding their own answers". Therefore, one can see the strong emphasis that WCs wish to place on collaborative work, as opposed to teacher-directed learning.

Not only do tutors at WCs wish to collaborate and work together with visitors, but there is also a prominence placed on experimentation. It is meant to be a place where it is not only acceptable, but expected to attempt and fail and try again (Harris, 2016). In fact, this value is often represented in the various names that WCs use. "Names of various facilities, such as writing center, writing lab, writing place, or writing room, are

meant to encourage this view of the writing center as an informal, experimental, active place" (Harris, 2016).

WCs are also open. This may mean being open to the entire school—including students, faculty, and staff—as well as to the wider community (Tobin, 2010). It further means being open to writers of all proficiency levels (Harris, 2016). WCs seek to aid both those who consider themselves proficient and lower-level students. This openness also includes being open to ELLs.

Because tutors are freed from the strain of evaluation, they can use their time with the student to focus on the process of writing. This deliberately shifts the focus from the final writing product to the process that it involves (Tobin, 2010). WCs further acknowledge and encourage the view that writing is a social experience and writers are guided through any/all steps of the writing journey—planning, brainstorming, writing, adding, deleting, proofreading, and redrafting (Harris, 2016).

Finally, one characteristic that is largely beneficial in ensuring a WC's usefulness is its flexibility. WCs may change course from year to year or in response to new challenges and problems as they arise (Harris, 2016). This flexibility allows WCs to change with the needs of the students and with the needs of the time. This is partially evident in many WCs incorporating new technologies into their services, such as Online Writing Labs (Tobin, 2010).

Ultimately, WCs are places where anyone of any writing level can go and work collaboratively with a tutor in order to become a better writer. WCs seek to increase writer autonomy so that the writers can apply what they learn to their later writing processes. Indeed, one of the cardinal rules for WCs is that "the pen remain in the hand of the writer" (Harris, 2016).

Challenges WCs Face

Perhaps the biggest challenge that has followed WCs from their inception is their struggle to maintain a place within the university or academic sphere. When looking at the history of WCs and the general attitudes toward them, there seems to be a gap that emerges between their popularity and their perceived value. WCs continue to surface because there is such a high demand from students, and yet they remain quite firmly on the periphery of the educational framework, often surrounded by professors, students, and even the administration, which does not have a firm grasp of

what the center is truly for (Harris, 2016). Furthermore, because WCs are often situated in these outskirts, some scholars question how well they are able to prepare students for academic writing (McKay & Simpson, 2013).

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between how the faculty or staff on campus view a WC and how well that WC attracts students (McHarg, 2013). Therefore, it seems evident that those WCs that struggle to capture the support of the professors and staff at the university may struggle in their efforts to help the students on campus.

Perhaps because of their positions, WCs are also quite vulnerable during budget cuts (McHarg, 2013). It would seem reasonable that programs that are viewed as being in the outskirts of the main campus would be the first to have their budget or funding suspended. This further illustrates WCs' often-unsupported positions in the educational sphere.

Writing Centers and English-Language Learners

It may not be surprising that a large number of visitors to WCs are students who are learning English as an additional language, and WCs are often extremely beneficial to these students (McHarg, 2014). However, there are some concerns about ELLs' experiences with WCs and the challenges and needs these students have that may be different from those of native speakers. These issues are pertinent to the situation in the UAE because many students at the universities are ELLs or speak English as an additional language.

Moussu (2013) argues that one main challenge has its roots in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, where the focus of writing is most often grammar and form, as opposed to global issues. In these ESL classrooms, "the emphasis remains on accuracy, with little attention given to broader structural issues" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 12). This may program ESL students to equate grammar and form with good writing. Therefore, they may expect this type of feedback from a WC. However, as discussed, instead of focusing on the mechanics of language, WCs often concentrate on the content and organization of writing. They generally do not see themselves as a remedial venue there to simply fix the final product. With these two conflicting views, there is certainly room for misunderstanding and confusion when ELLs attend sessions at WCs.

To further complicate the issue, there may be a "cultural" gap at work, too (Moussu, 2013, p. 58). Many ELLs come from cultures where it is assumed that the teacher takes the reins by teaching and offering feedback

in an authoritative way. Therefore, the collaborative nature of WCs may not only be uncomfortable for students, but they may get confused by the tutor's roles and could view the tutor as avoiding their educational responsibilities (Moussu, 2013). Although the UAE is diverse, there are many students who come from cultural backgrounds that place a heightened importance on rote memorization and the authority of the teacher.

Additionally, there is an ongoing debate about which tutoring style is most appropriate for ELLs (McHarg, 2013). Typically, WCs tend to focus on "a very indirect, Socratic method of tutorial teaching" (McHarg, 2013, p. 24). However, it is important to note that this methodology has been developed around the native English speaker; therefore, it is understandable that there is an "ongoing conflict between ESL students' expectations and writing centers' theoretical foundations and current practices" (Moussu, 2013, p. 56).

Peer tutoring is another concept that may have unintended consequences in universities which have a high number of ELLs (McHarg, 2014). The use of peer tutors in these contexts often results in ELLs tutoring other ELLs. This has the potential to impact how the faculty view the helpfulness of WCs. Professors may be hesitant to recommend students to the WC because they are likely to be coached by peers who are also developing their English-language skills (McHarg, 2014). Far from being a hindrance, however, peer tutoring might be just the thing that ELLs need, as it would provide them with a tutor who is marginally better at English than they are. In these situations, the peer tutor may be seen as considerably more "approachable" and "more likely to inspire than intimidate" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 10).

Despite the challenges present when it comes to ELLs and WCs, one must remember the inherent flexibility and adaptability of WCs. This allows them to respond to new challenges as they arise. Indeed, the recent changes that WCs have made with regard to ELLs are promising steps, but there is ample room to grow when it comes to fully addressing ELLs' needs in WCs (Moussu, 2013).

As WCs in non-native English-speaking countries may eventually, and perhaps already, outnumber those in native English-speaking countries, "it is time to take a fresh look at writing centers and the work that they do" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 14). It may be time to reconsider the definition and mission of WCs, especially in these contexts, in order to better align them with the actual situation of how they are being used and the needs of the users (LaClare & Franz, 2013).

Overall, it is clear that "writing center professionals need to use appropriate instructional strategies that reflect their context" (McHarg, 2013, p. 24). One way of doing this is ensuring that WC staff be better prepared to deal with the grammar concerns of students (Moussu, 2013). This way, even though it is not their ideal focus, tutors are able to acknowledge and respond to students' expectations.

Writing Centers in the Middle East and UAE

Founded in 2007, the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA) is the regional affiliate of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), which includes the UAE (menawca.org). Even though the context of WCs in the Arabian Gulf states "warrants an in-depth analysis of how writing centers are situated in this unique environment of language learners and dynamic social and cultural changes" (McHarg, 2013, p. 17), there have been relatively few historical studies conducted in the region, and virtually none that focuses on WCs in the UAE specifically.

A few studies in the region focus on Qatar. While Qatar and the UAE are their own unique countries with their own challenges and contexts, there are several significant similarities between the two. Not only do both countries reside in the Arabian Peninsula, but both have diverse populations of locals and expatriate foreign workers. Both have seen a rapid influx of Western higher education centers developing in their countries, and both have used English as a medium of instruction. With this last point comes the challenge of having university students who seem ill-prepared for their education because of their lack of English-language skills. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that many pertinent findings in one country with regard to WCs may also be relevant to the other.

One study done by McHarg (2013) looked at the perceptions that the faculty at the American Design University–Qatar had about the WC on their campus. After conducting interviews, the researcher concluded that while there seemed to be relatively positive views of the WC, there did exist some indication that the relationship between the English faculty and the WC was lacking in both understanding and collaboration (McHarg, 2013). For example, some faculty members believed that the WC should do more to address grammar and other language mistakes, even though this directly contradicts the WC's goal of focusing on "higher order concerns" (McHarg, 2013, p. 38).

Another paper by McHarg (2014), focusing on Qatar, explored the lack of motivation of students in Qatar to visit WCs. It also discussed the issue of underprepared Qatari students entering universities because of set requirements by the state. Quite unlike many situations in North America, where university and WC faculty are overworked and struggle with acquiring resources, universities and WCs in Qatar have robust support, and, in comparison, teachers are generously paid, "perhaps the biggest challenge, then, is how to get these students into the writing center" (McHarg, 2014, p. 81). According to McHarg (2014), both students and faculty can become frustrated because the faculty are confronted with writing they deem unworthy of admittance to the university. Because of this, they often send their students to WCs in order to bring their writing up to par. The students, however, may have received high grades throughout high school for their work and become baffled as to why they are being sent to the center (McHarg, 2014). This situation may become further complicated if WC staff do not see themselves as remedial tutors, but instead as writing coaches, as discussed above.

In light of these challenges, McHarg (2014) strongly encourages true individualized tutoring sessions and consideration for each person's background. Because of the diversity present in the Gulf states, students often have a diverse range of first languages. This may lead to a different type of session than a tutor may have with a monolingual student. Ultimately, McHarg (2014) states that to rectify these challenges, *work* is required:

> Professors and tutors must work toward getting to know students. They must work toward getting to know and understand the English language in all of its complexity. They must work toward developing the skills of each student through motivational techniques that will accommodate that student's needs. Faculty must understand the role of the writing center as staff who support and guide writers—not as proofreaders, editors, and language repairmen. (McHarg, 2014, p. 83)

This paper (McHarg, 2014) serves as a salient reminder of the importance of individualized attention during the tutoring sessions. It also casts light on the immense importance of WCs and the potential they have to help bridge a gap between underprepared students and their future academic selves.

While these previously mentioned studies look at Qatar, we are able to locate one study that has been done on the UAE. This study focused on

the UAEU. The WC at UAEU, which was founded in 2004, mainly aims to help foundation students become better academic writers (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). Its aim was to gauge students' awareness of the services offered by the center.

After analyzing the findings of 50 questionnaires given to students, Murshidi and Abd (2014) found that most students (nearly two-thirds) visit the center at a friend's recommendation. About one-third (32%) do so at their instructor's recommendation or insistence. This could be evidence of instructors at the university also not being fully aware of the services offered, or the seemingly omnipresent challenge of WCs being viewed as on the periphery of the campus.

Another interesting find was that even though the director claimed that "the main goal of the writing center is to help students learn and improve their writing skills, not helping them in editing or writing their assignments" (Murshidi & Abd, 2014, p. 61), nearly 70% of students said they go to the center for either grammar (48%) or spelling (20%) help. While more than 70% of students acknowledged that the purpose of the WC was not to have the paper written for them, about the same percentage (76%) felt that the purpose was to have papers edited (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This, again, contradicts the supervisor's view of the WC.

When it came to the resources, 92% of students did not realize that the WC had online resources to help in addition to its tutoring services (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This shows that students tend to view the WC as a face-to-face, hands-on type of experience. This seems well in line with the general aim of WCs to be seen as an *active* experience, but it also shows that students are not well-educated about other opportunities they may have for differentiated help.

Overall, this study shows a clear gap between the perception of the supervisor of the WC and how the students view the center. It seems to imply that this WC struggles with some of the main issues facing WCs—being on the periphery of the educational sphere, a lack of knowledge or understanding from university faculty, and the expectation that it is a center for editing and proofreading. However, with that said, all students rated the tutoring services as either "excellent" or "good" (Murshidi & Abd, 2014, p. 61). This, combined with the fact that most students attend the center at the recommendation of their friends, shows that students are highly satisfied with the tutoring experience. Therefore, despite the above-mentioned issues, this WC is still able to address students' needs and expectations.

Method

The purpose of this study is to trace the historical development of WCs in the UAE. It also aims at critically examining this history through analyzing the processes and modes of operation of the WCs using precepts from postcolonial theory. In order to develop a rich understanding, elicit meaning, and create empirical knowledge about these WCs, the study employs document analysis as its guiding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Five WCs in universities across the UAE have been identified: New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), the American University of Sharjah, the American University of Ras al-Khaimah, UAEU, and Abu Dhabi University. The data for this study comes from the websites of the universities in addition to a leaflet from the NYUAD WC, shared with us by the Director of the center.

As discussed previously, there are eight key characteristics that should be present in any given WC. These characteristics include the use of tutors; focus on individual needs; appointments that range from 15 minutes to 1 hour; a non-evaluative coaching approach; flexibility; an experimental, active, informal environment; openness; and a focus on the process of writing. This chapter will look at four universities located in the UAE and establish how well these characteristics are met. Among the six WCs we have located in the UAE, the four centers listed below are the only ones that have some relevant information on their websites.

Findings

New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD)

This university's WC offers 45-minute appointments held as one-to-one tutoring sessions. These sessions are led by "seventeen professionally trained Global Academic Fellows" (NYUAD WC leaflet), who tailor the sessions "towards your writing, science writing and capstone projects, as well as your public and oral presentations". Not only does this show that the tutoring sessions focus on individual needs, but this also shows the flexibility and experimental nature of the center by incorporating oral and written communication in its services.

This flexible and adaptive nature is also illustrated by the fact that the WC employs a TESOL (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages) specialist for ELLs. This may be an effort to reconcile the dif-

ferent expectations that ELLs may have with regard to WCs and which types of mistakes are important to them.

According to the university's website, the WC is open to helping with any style of writing from any undergraduate student on the campus. The language of the NYUAD WC leaflet implies a coaching style of interaction between the student and the tutor by using words such as "engage", "support", and "help".

The focus on process is also clearly depicted through the NYUAD WC outreach literature by explicitly stating that "writing is an ongoing and recursive process" (NYUAD WC leaflet), and the WC encourages students to come at any phase of this process, whether it be "brainstorming or fine-tuning" (NYUAD website). In addition, it is clear that the WC abides by one of Harris' (2016) cardinal rules for WCs, that "the pen remains in the hand of the writer", by explicitly stating that students "be prepared to write. Bring something to write with and something to write on" (NYUAD WC leaflet).

After looking at the key characteristics of WCs and the information about the NYUAD's WC, it is clear that there has been substantial thought put into following these key characteristics. While it is not open to faculty or graduate students, the center is open to all undergraduate students; therefore, it has a selected, targeted audience, and it is open to students regardless of the curriculum of choice.

American University of Ras Al Khaimah

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah "offers inspiration, instruction, workshops and resources for students and faculty to improve their writing" (AURAK, 2016). The use of the word "inspiration" here implies that the center is process oriented and acknowledges that help may be needed from the very beginning of the process. In addition to these services, the WC also offers workshops or in-class presentations to students. This shows the flexibility of the center. This center is open to faculty and students, helping with a variety of different types of writing.

However, there are many unanswered questions judging by the information available on the website. It is not entirely clear who the tutors are or what the length of the appointments is. One can also not be sure about the methodology used during those sessions and whether they are non-evaluative or experimental, or address individual needs. Since the website states that the center offers "instruction", students may come expecting

more of a teacher-led experience rather than a coaching one. Therefore, more information is needed regarding this WC in order to determine whether or not it is fully in line with the key characteristics of WCs.

American University of Sharjah

The WC at the American University of Sharjah uses peer tutors and promises "individual instruction" in order to help "you to become a better, more independent writer". The WC states that it offers appointments that are 30 minutes long and students have the opportunity to book two back to back if they feel that more time is needed.

Furthermore, the center proves its collaborative, non-evaluative nature by stating that visitors and tutors strive to "work together". Not only this, but it offers "helpful handouts, writing resources on our website, and writing workshops", thereby proving its flexible nature and its relevance to the current needs of the visitors.

The university's website clearly states that the WC is open to all students. Not only is the center open to a variety of students, but it offers students the opportunity to seek help on virtually any type of writing, from academic writing to creative writing to personal documents.

This WC offers help throughout the writing process, including "thesis development, organization, outlining, paragraphing, sentence structure, wording, vocabulary and mechanics". However, by highlighting that students can "review grammar, punctuation and mechanics in the context of their writing" or can "work on a draft", it is slightly questionable how experimental and active the sessions are. Are tutors simply describing the language features? Are they encouraging students to try and fail and try again with the language that comes up? Perhaps these areas have attracted attention in the WC because of its population of ELLs. In that case, this could be another example of the center's flexibility and its willingness to adapt to the students' needs. With these features in mind, it is clear that this university's WC abides by most, if not all, of the key characteristics of WCs.

United Arab Emirates University

Established in 2004, the UAEU WC's mission is to help foundation students become better academic writers (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). The WC is open to both faculty and foundation students. The sessions are run by

tutors who are teachers from Arabic, English, or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) department. Sessions could also be run by students across a variety of disciplines (Murshidi & Abd, 2014).

In addition to the services offered by the tutors, the center also offers writing workshops, practice materials for all foundation courses, and practice materials for the IELTS writing exam. This shows the flexible nature of the center in that it is able to adapt and respond to the students' needs that are specific to the university. An even clearer example of the center's flexibility, though, is evident in the fact that tutoring sessions can be held in English or Arabic. This addresses the issue of students being left behind in other areas (like writing) because of their English level.

While we can be fairly certain that this WC is open, flexible, and run by tutors, there are many questions not addressed on the website. Does the center focus on the process of writing? Is there special attention placed on individual needs? Are appointments necessary? If so, how long do the sessions run? Do they encourage active experimentation from the visitors? And is the process of writing put before the final product?

Abu Dhabi University

Abu Dhabi University has a WC which is staffed by two full-time tutors and other part-time mentors. This makes it apparent that the center adheres to the tutoring framework, and the use of words like "help" and "provide support" reveals the emphasis on collaboration during these sessions. However, it is not clear what the difference between a tutor and a mentor is. Is it their qualifications? Or perhaps it is the roles that they play in the writing process? Similarly, the WC's website clearly states that visitors can walk in or make appointments, but a reader is unsure of how long these appointments are.

When it comes to addressing individual needs, the information on the website does not explicitly state this focus. However, one of the center's aims is to help "all abilities". Furthermore, it strives to have students "explore" the process of writing and make "appropriate choices". It is reasonable to assume that the journey to reaching those aims results in highly individualized tutoring sessions.

The flexibility of this center is evident in it offering help in both English and Arabic, as well as additional English-language resources for those wanting to improve their language skills. The center also provides a variety of workshops on "different aspects of language learning". Moreover, the

WC is also open, aiming to be seen as "a resource for writers of all abilities" which offers help with both academic and creative writing. However, it is not clear if the center is open to faculty, in addition to students.

Since the primary aim is "to help students to become better writers by offering help in every stage of the writing process", the center obviously values the process of writing over the product. It states, "we will not proof read or edit papers, but we will help the students learn how to find and correct errors in punctuation, usage and grammar". This is again an example of how WCs in the UAE de-emphasize the proofreading stage, yet make adjustments in order to fulfill the needs of their visitors.

Finally, the center proves to be experimental and active by stating that it strives to "help students in making appropriate choices". This shows that the tutors and mentors avoid teacher-driven sessions and instead are facilitating an active approach to the process, where visitors are encouraged to make their own decisions. Additionally, they want students to "explore the writing process", making evident the experimental, hands-on approach that they take.

Overall, this WC shows a strong commitment to the main principles of WCs and seems to actively consider the needs of its visitors based on the information provided on the university's website.

Conclusion

This chapter presented data from four different WCs in the UAE. The most salient finding of the study is the nascent nature of WCs due to the relatively short history of higher education in the country. Although the UAE is an Arab country, it is found that the WCs under study adhered to and followed guidelines established by the IWCA, which in turn are based on a Western model of education. While this model might be successful in the case of students and faculty from Western cultures, it seems to have the potential of disenfranchising, or *Othering*, to use Said's (1978) term, those from Arab and other eastern cultural backgrounds.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a historical review, but this history cannot be fully examined without considering the practical implications of WCs on the ground. It is anticipated that WCs in their current form will suffer the consequences of *resistance* from those who do not see their *linguacultural* backgrounds and modes of learning represented and fully integrated in the centers. The dearth of studies conducted on WCs in the Gulf region also points to this conclusion. McHarg's (2014) study

shows the reluctance of students to join WCs and their view of them centered around providing quick fixes to their writing problems. This probably stems from students' preferred modes of learning as well as their lack of motivation to invest time and effort in writing in a language that they might view as being imposed on them.

Overall, the history of WCs in the UAE is not a very long one. In order for WCs to be more beneficial, the sociocultural, historical, and linguistic backgrounds of those involved should be taken into consideration. This will not only ensure the smooth running of the centers but also help in maintaining them for future generations. Another programmatic consideration is to provide services for faculty members, especially those who are not specialized in writing or language teaching.

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Aymen Elsheikh holds a Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education from Indiana University and an M.S. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Southern New Hampshire University. He is an adjunct faculty at Abu Dhabi University and the University of Missouri.

Jessica Mascaro received her Master of Education in Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum, with an emphasis in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (M.Ed.) from the University of Missouri. She lives in Singapore and works as an Intensive English as an Additional Language teacher at EtonHouse International School, Broadrick Road.

CHAPTER 3

Writing Centers in Higher Education Institutions in Qatar: A Critical Review

Julian Williams, Abdelhamid Ahmed, and Waheed Adeyimika Bamigbade

Introduction

Research studies have indicated that English-language proficiency is an important factor in academic performance in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Al-Buainain, Hassan, & Madani, 2011; Khalifa, Nasser, Ikhlef, Walker, & Amali, 2016; Lee & Bradley, 2001; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In addition, they have emphasized the need for an acceptable level of competence in English, and as a crucial criterion for admission to English-medium universities and academic excellence, inside and outside the region

J. Williams (✉)
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

A. Ahmed
Core Curriculum Program, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

W.A. Bamigbade
Yanbu English Language Institute, Royal Commission, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

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(ibid.). In reference to the Qatari context, Qatari students find English language a big hurdle to cross, as reported by Golkowska (2013); thus:

> [m]any Qatari students are not used to interrogating texts and are not familiar with the Western convention of writing with the audience in mind. More often than not, their educational experience with reading prior to entering college is limited to answering multiple-choice questions or discovering the "right answer" to the question. … Many never read fiction or practice active reading while others are exposed to linguistically or culturally inaccessible materials they find irrelevant. Not surprising, they seldom become strategic readers or find motivation to develop the habit of reading extensively. (p. 340)

Research has shown that acquiring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing seems to be challenging (Zheng, 1999), especially composing a coherent piece of writing in one's second language (Nunan, 1999). Other researchers have added that EFL writing becomes even more challenging when the rhetorical conventions of the second/foreign language differ entirely (Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Leki, 1991). Mohamed and Omer (2000) confirmed that the rhetorical conventions in English and Arabic are entirely different, resulting in different usage of cohesive devices. A number of research studies have revealed that EFL writing is difficult for many Arab students in different Arab countries: Egypt (Ahmed, 2016), Morocco (Abouabdelkader & Bouziane, 2016), Oman (Al Zadjali, 2016), Palestine (Hammad, 2016), Tunisia (Knouzi, 2016), United Arab Emirates (Sperrazza & Raddawi, 2016), Yemen (Muthanna, 2016) and Qatar (Al-Buainain, 2009).

Several other research studies have also highlighted the various other linguistic challenges faced by Qatari students in their EFL writing courses, from grammar to comprehension, and from composition to mother tongue interference (Alsadi, 2016; Al-Buainain, 2009; Al-Khatib, 2001). However, it is not only a story of travails, but also of triumphs, as other studies (e.g., Al-Thani, Abdelmoneim, Cherif, Moukarzel, & Daoud, 2009) report "evidence that students make progress in English and critical thinking during their QU educational careers".

All these English writing difficulties continue to form the bases for the emergence of a strong writing teaching program for Qatari students in Qatari higher education institutions. Thaiss (2012) justifies establishing a

writing program in which EFL writing is taught and developed to increase transnationality of most education and to fulfill students' and staff's desires to become literate in an international research community or achieve career success in a knowledge-based economy.

Historical Perspective of Writing Centers Worldwide

The presence of WCs in the Gulf Arab states was noticed in the early part of the twenty-first century; however, WCs have contributed greatly toward higher education in North America throughout the twentieth century. Discrepancy exists among researchers as to the function of WCs in that era within the university, since tertiary education in itself was not always accessible to the average citizen as it is at present. Questions such as "Was the WC a meeting place for professional writers?", "Was it a method used by colleges as an alternative to classroom writing" or "Was it a student-centered arrangement among students for English language writing remediation?" were not yet chronologically resolved.

However, research shows that by the mid-twentieth century, WCs within the university provided academic writing support to underprepared native English speakers. This era witnessed the intervention by US Congress in the enactment of civil rights statutes prohibiting discrimination in educational programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. For example, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the bases of race, color, gender, creed and national origin (U.S. Department of Education, January 1999), and as a result, paved the way for the Open Admissions Policy in tertiary education. Admissions to university became unselective and non-competitive; thus, modifying the admission process: students are now admitted to college with the minimum of a high school diploma or a General Education Development/ General Education Diploma (GED) certificate. With this massive influx of students from this new liberalization trend, WCs played a strategic role in offering tutorial assistance in basic English writing in colleges adopting the policy. Simultaneously, WCs also provided remediation English-language services for non-English-speaking immigrants in the tertiary institutions of major cities in the United States.

Currently, WCs are mainstream, serving the grammar-deficient native Arabic speaker, the unprepared ESL immigrant student and the college

student whose government has adopted the growing trend of English-medium tertiary institutions as a national goal. Qatar falls into this latter category, focusing on developing a nuanced understanding of WCs among the ten different higher education institutions in Qatar. In so doing, this chapter first presents a historical account of English-language teaching and learning in the context of Qatar's tertiary institutions while providing a critical overview of salient issues bordering on linguistic superdiversity and the anxiety about English as a globalizing agent. It explains the emergence of WCs in Qatar's higher education landscape, their mission, visions, goals and objectives, and suggestions for future directions.

Qatar's Higher Education Development

The establishment and development of Qatar University (QU) and the founding of Education City are two institutional developments within Qatar's national agenda which have dominated English-language teaching and learning in higher education in this young country (Karkouti, 2016).

English is not the official language of Qatar, but it is used as a language of convenience to accommodate the many nationalities and ethnic groups that live and work in the region. English, therefore, plays an essential role in Qatar's dependence on its petroleum trade, and the country has built significant trade partnerships with North America and Europe for their provision of technological and engineering expertise. These push forces explain Qatar's objective and accelerated its acceptance of the initiative for English-medium education at the K12 and tertiary levels.

On the other hand, Arabic, the official language of Qatar, is deeply connected to the prominence of Islam. As an Islamic nation with Arabic as its mother tongue, Qatar's national life and policies, as well as economic, political and socio-cultural practices, are based upon the Sharia law derived from the teachings of the Qur'an, itself an Arabic text; thus, the country has a duty to continually uphold the supremacy of Arabic language in its national life. Another pull factor that can undermine the status of English as a medium of instruction is the role of ELT publishers, with their instructional media, in the marketing of the ESL/EFL industry. Kumaravadivelu (2006) sheds some light on the existing relationship between English and the forces of globalization and imperialism thus:

> English, in its role as the global language, creates, reflects and spreads the import and the imagery of the global flows. The forces of globalization,

> empire and English are intricately interconnected. Operating at the intersection where the three meet, TESOL professionals, knowingly or unknowingly, play a role in the service of global corporations as well as imperial powers. (2006, p. 1)

In many cases, ELT publishers, although unintentionally, use content in the form of Eurocentric or Western discourses of language and culture that might conflict with Islamic norms. Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues this phenomenon further:

> While the world at large seems to be treating English as a vehicle for global communication, a sizable segment of the TESOL profession continues to be informed by an anachronistic anthropological belief in the inextricability of the language–culture connection. TESOL textbooks continue to use the English language as a cultural carrier. … Even textbooks on intercultural communication, with very few exceptions, still treat western cultural practices as the communicational norm for intercultural communication across the globe. (2006, p. 19)

Emergence of Writing Centers in Qatar

Since QU was the first and only national university in Qatar, it is fair to say that some form of writing support for students would have been established with the introduction of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) in 1977 and its English Language Programme. To date, there are 14 tertiary institutions in Qatar, but only ten of these have WCs. All the WCs are affiliated to the Middle East–North African Writing Center Alliance (MENAWCA), which was founded in 2007 as a network of WC directors, employees, tutors and others interested in supporting student writing in the Arab world. MENAWCA's parent organization is the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), based in the United States. Being formally affiliated to this professional body reflects the desire of Qatari WCs to achieve standardization within their goals and objectives and day-to-day operations.

To what extent do WCs fulfill their mandates? As molders, do they have the right clay to mold? McHarg (2014) paints a disconnected picture between "the brilliant performance" in English language of a newly admitted Qatari student and his/her unacceptable performance in class. As a result of weak writing performance, students are asked to seek writing support in the WC, whereby arises the confusion they and their writing

tutors tend to pass through while wondering what could be amiss (2014, p. 83). Again, the contractual agreement between Qatar Foundation and each of the branch campuses is that "institutions from abroad must not relax their standards or vary their curricula in any way. The admissions process and subsequent education in Qatar must directly mirror the processes in the home campuses" (McHarg, 2014, p. 78). Yet, Qatar Foundation has mandated them to admit a quota of the local Qatari students each year. However, in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, Qatar ranked 61 out of 65 participating countries and scored statistically significantly below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (OECD, 2010). Meanwhile, the results of national assessment tests show that only 8–15% of students in all grades meet standards in English (Supreme Education Council website, 2009). Therefore, in the midst of only a few Qatari students who are not underprepared, the result is "a new phenomenon of Open Admissions in the Middle East, where underprepared students dominate the system" (McHarg, 2014, p. 79).

Without a sound expressive writing skill, not only would comprehension be hampered, but dissemination would be a hindrance to successful academic activities as well. How then do we measure the quality of the Qatari students and graduates against the efforts and performance of the English WCs? Four language skills, distillable into productive and receptive skills, are key to academic success, and there is little miracle any higher education institution learner can perform without them.

Accordingly, it appears that there is an undue emphasis on the writing skill at the expense of the other language skills. Arguably, in a writing exercise or assignment, a writer must do a bit of the other skills. However, the focus will be on the writing task. Moreover, the moment he/she is done with the writing task, tendency is that he/she would most likely not check back on that piece anymore. The following questions emerge from this argument: How do our students cope after graduation, when no more WCs exist? How do they cope with English after school? Do they still use the WC if they proceed for postgraduate studies in or outside Qatar?

Finally, there is a need to continue to explore writing in English and pedagogy in the MENA context, and the reward for that is worth it:

> While these models are well-known to U.S. educated writing scholars and professors, the intricate "in-betweeness" these models occupy in a MENA context requires an abandonment of prior assumptions and are, perhaps, best viewed as constant negotiations. And, indeed, understood as such,

> these contexts offer rich opportunity for growth, knowledge, and innovation; emergent writing scholarship from these sites can only serve to open up new ways of assessing our pedagogies and practices. (Arnold, Nebel, & Ronesi, 2017, p. 6)

Review of Current Writing Centers in Qatar

This section briefly describes the WCs in the ten reviewed higher education institutions in Qatar. Table 3.1 lists the WCs in chronological order of establishment. In addition, Table 3.2 lists the writing support systems in Qatar's higher education institutions.

1. Texas A&M University at Qatar: Academic Success Center

The inaugural class of the Texas A&M University at Qatar took place on September 7, 2003, with 29 students, out of which 24 were Qatari, comprising 15 females and 9 males. The university, a predominantly engineering institution, opened its Academic Success Center (ASC) also in 2003, offering writing consultation as part of its student support services. According to its website, its mission and vision statement reads:

> The ASC was created in order to provide support for the academic success and deep learning of all Texas A&M University students at Qatar. To help achieve these goals, the ASC offers peer tutoring and expert consulting. The

Table 3.1 Writing centers in chronological order of establishment

Writing center	*Year of establishment*
Texas A&M University at Qatar: Writing Center	2003
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar) School of Arts: Writing Center	2004
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service: Office of Academic services	2005
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar: The Writing Center	2006
Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar: Academic Resource Center	2006
College of the North Atlantic, Qatar: The Advanced Writing Center	2008
Qatar University: English Writing Lab	2008
University of Calgary in Qatar: The Writing Center	2009
Northwestern University in Qatar: The Writing Center	2010
Community College of Qatar: Writing Center	2015

Table 3.2 Writing support systems in Qatar's higher education institutions

Institution	*Writing support system*
Texas A&M University at Qatar: Writing Center – Online appointment system on website, drop-in – FAQ service – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 9.00–17.00	Writing consultations by professional writing tutors and peer tutors
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar School of the Arts: Writing Center – Online appointment system on website, drop-in – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 9.00–17.00	One-on-one writing support by professional writing instructor or peer tutor
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service: Office of Academic Services – Online appointment system on website – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 9.00–17.00	Peer Student and Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Programs
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar: The Writing Center – Drop-in appointment – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 9.00–17.00	Peer Consultant Program
Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar: Academic Resource Center – Drop-in appointment – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 8.00–16.00	Tutorial support by professional staff and qualified students
College of the North Atlantic, Qatar (CNA-Q): The Advanced Writing Center – Online Appointment Calendar: – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 8.30–15.30	Mentoring sessions by CNA-Q teachers to individuals and small groups
Qatar University: English Writing Lab – Online appointment system on website, drop-in – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 7.30–14.30	Professional native-speaking writing specialists with advanced degrees and devoted peer tutors
University of Calgary in Qatar: The Writing Center – Online appointment system on website, drop-in – Hours of service: Sunday to Tuesday, 7.30–15.30; Wednesday and Thursday, 7.30–18.00	Group/Class workshops in academic writing by professional staff

(*continued*)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Institution	*Writing support system*
Northwestern University in Qatar: The Writing Center – Online appointment system on website, drop-in – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 8.00–16.00	Writing specialists providing one-on-one assistance
Community College of Qatar: Writing Center – Drop-in appointment – Hours of service: Sunday to Thursday, 9.00–16.00	Writing support by English language center staff

> ASC is committed to helping students build twenty-first century multi-literacies, including visual, digital, and communicative skills. Staff members of the ASC are trained to guide Aggie Engineers to practice a growth mindset—to move from being knowledge consumers to knowledge creators—as they tackle difficult concepts and struggle to apply their learning to solve complex problems. The ASC aims to provide a safe space for students to admit what they do not know in order to deepen their understanding and transfer their learning beyond their coursework, ideally translating academic success to their future success as engineers. (http://asc.qatar.tamu.edu/)

The center also provides online resources such as online writing lab for materials such as citation guide, grammar check and punctuation, while its website contains useful handouts and guides. Consultations at the ASC are conducted by professional peer writing tutors trained to give constructive feedback, with an emphasis on helping clients develop their writing skills over time, since writing is a skill needed across the curriculum of an engineering degree and vital to the workplace. Tutors help writers mainly through one-on-one interactions, but are also available to work with small groups, such as senior design teams and groups working on other collaborative writing projects. These interactions involve focused conversations about the writer's goals for the product, but with attention given mainly to the writer's process. The ASC has a fully functioning website which outlines the writing consultation process and carries a FAQ section to accommodate students' expectations of the Center. Students access the services of the Center through a web-based appointment scheduling system.

2. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Qatar School of the Arts: The Writing Center

The VCU Qatar Writing Center was established in 2004 with the following mission and vision:

> The VCU Qatar Writing Center offers one-on-one writing support for students in any discipline ranging from preliminary planning through all the steps of the writing process, including help in using English as a second language. Experienced writing tutors are available to help students develop ideas for papers, to teach organization of clear and concise thought and to aid in choosing a writing style to appeal to the intended audience. The mission of the VCU Qatar Writing Center is to help all VCU Qatar students use English to:
>
> - clarify their thinking,
> - organize their thoughts, and
> - convey their thoughts appropriately to an audience. (http://www.qatar.vcu.edu/writingcenter)

3. Georgetown University School of Foreign Service: Office of Academic Services

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service began operations in Qatar in 2005. The institution specializes in international affairs. The Office for Academic Services (OAS) manages support programs for all students. There are also the Peer Tutor, Peer Mentoring and the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Programs, which employ exceptional students to help other students with their academic writing assignments. Appointment is both online and through walk-in. There is no FAQ section on its website, which reads:

> The Office of Academic Services (OAS) … offers individual and group tutoring in academic reading and writing across the disciplines. … In addition, OAS leads a variety of workshops and programs throughout the year to help students develop their academic skills and aspire to excellence. The Writing Center is … the perfect place for all your writing and research needs. There are printing facilities and four computers for students to use. (https://qatar.sfs.georgetown.edu/programs/academic-services)

4. Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar: The Writing Center

Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar was founded in 2001. Its Writing Center utilizes a Peer Consultant Program to provide writing support for students, offering "flexible weekend and evening appointments by arrangement, in addition to regular walk-in hours at several campus locations". The Writing Center houses a Lending Library, which offers a growing collection of fiction, poetry, writing handbooks, dictionaries, style guides and vocabulary builders. The Writing Center Workshops Series also provides scheduled specialized seminars for small groups on various writing topics (http://qatar-weill.cornell.edu/writing-center/peerconsultation.html).

5. Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar: Academic Resource Center

The Academic Resource Center (ARC) was established in 2005. It provides academic support for students with academic difficulties or poor performance. Its mission statement is

> to assist students in developing the skills, strategies and behaviors they need to be confident, independent and active learners.

Its services include:

- Individual writing, math, science, statistics and programming tutoring
- Individually tailored English-language support
- Staff tutoring to help students in math, programming, writing, science and statistics
- Course assistants (CAs), who are undergraduate students who have already successfully taken the class they support and are trained in how to tutor others

However, services for English writing support target only students in the university's Foundation Year program (http://webext.qatar.cmu.edu/arc).

6. College of the North Atlantic, Qatar: The Advanced Writing Center

The College of the North Atlantic, Qatar (CNA-Q) opened in 2002. CNA-Q is a technical college offering diplomas in over 30 fields. Its Advanced Writing Center (AWC) provides individual or small-group mentoring sessions to discuss and assist students registered in diploma programs with their writing needs, such as projects, presentations and assignments. Appointments are normally for 90 minutes, initially made through the AWC Online Appointment Calendar. The AWC's webpage, which is not accessible to non-students, provides online access to writing resources such as grammar, sentence structure and so forth (https://cna.mywconline.com/).

7. University of Calgary in Qatar: The Writing Center

The University of Calgary established its branch in Qatar in 2007, focusing entirely on nursing education. The university's Writing Center commenced operations in 2008 and provides student writing support, including scheduling group/class workshops on many essential aspects of academic writing. It also offers an e-feedback review and comment service. Appointment is both online and through walk-in. The Writing Center provides supports in

- the writing process, from brainstorming to final revision
- academic writing
- understanding assignment requirements
- referencing (APA style)

The names, e-mails and phone numbers of the Center's writing specialists are available on their webpage (http://www.ucalgary.edu.qa/learning-commons/writing-centre/one-on-one).

8. Northwestern University in Qatar: The Writing Center

Northwestern University (NU) began degree programs in journalism and communication in Qatar in September 2008. Its Writing Center's specialists provide one-on-one assistance for students seeking help with their writing, including idea brainstorming, organization, research, citation, English grammar and punctuation. Appointment is both online and through walk-in (http://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/education/academic-services/writing-center.html).

9. Qatar University: English Writing Lab

QU names its writing center the English Writing Lab (EWL), as a part of the Student Learning Support Center at QU, which also has a functioning Arabic Writing Lab. The EWL employs professional writing specialists and peer tutors to attend to students' writing needs but "does not provide editing or proofreading services". Appointment is both online and through walk-in. The EWL attends to Foundation and post-Foundation students, and undergraduate students Sunday to Thursday, from 7.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. It organizes workshops every semester to highlight basic writing skills in English, such as sentence structure, thesis statements, citation methods, writing research papers or essays, and preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, particularly for Writing Tasks 1 and 2 (http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/services/writinglab/writing-labs.php).

10. Community College of Qatar: Writing Center

The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) was established in 2010 and its Writing Center was established within its English Language Center five years later in 2015. English-language teachers within the English Language Center provide English-language writing support. The Center's website is quite brief on its writing support program for its students (http://www.ccq.edu.qa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=208&Itemid=824).

English Writing Centers in Qatar's Higher Education Institutions: A Critical Review

The review of the above-mentioned WCs in Qatar's higher education institutions highlights some commonalities and differences. First, we will be shedding light on the aspects of similarities, such as the purpose of establishment and cost of services offered. The concept of a WC in Qatar is as new as the establishment of branch campuses of American/Western universities in Qatar. These branch universities were established with one aim in mind: to offer standardized and westernized higher education level to Qatari students in their home country. The first aspect of commonality among all WCs in the above-mentioned American/Western universities in Qatar is the similarities in their mission, vision and objectives that aimed to help undergraduate students in general and first-year students, in particular to assess their EFL writing needs, improve their EFL writing skills and develop

them to a competency level. The second aspect of commonality among all WCs in the different universities is that they offer their writing support services free of charge.

On the other hand, the reviewed WCs in Qatar's higher education institutions differ in some respects. First, despite unity in purpose of establishment, the WCs in Qatar's higher education institutions have different names—for example, the Academic Success Center (ASC) at Texas A&M University in Qatar, Office of Academic Services (OAS) at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, the Academic Resource Center (ARC) at Carnegie Mellon University, the Advanced Writing Center (AWC) at CNA-Q and English Writing Lab (EWL) at QU. However, WCs have been named the Writing Center at the following five universities: VCU in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, University of Calgary in Qatar, NU in Qatar and Community College of Qatar.

The second aspect of difference among the concerned WCs is the different venues for booking an appointment. Some of the WCs have an online booking system, such as EWL at QU, whereas other universities have a walk-in appointment system, such as University of Calgary in Qatar. Other WCs offer both walk-in and online booking of appointments, such as Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar and NU in Qatar.

Another difference among the concerned WCs lies in the services offered at each center. These services in the different WCs in these universities vary from one-on-one individual consultation and group tutoring to a variety of workshops and specialized seminars on some writing topics. For example, the WCs in Texas A&M University, VCU in Qatar, NU in Qatar, QU, University of Calgary in Qatar and Community College of Qatar offer individual writing consultations by peer tutors and small-group consultations. In addition, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar and CNA-Q provide small-group writing sessions. On the other hand, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar provides specialized seminars for small groups on various writing topics, whereas Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, CNA-Q and QU provide a variety of workshops to support students' writing. What really distinguishes University of Calgary in Qatar is the e-feedback review and comment service provided to students on prior arrangement.

One more difference among the reviewed WCs in the different universities in Qatar is the timing and hours of service. Most reviewed university services are available during working days at different timings. However,

Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar is unique, as it meets students' needs and is flexible enough to provide weekend and evening sessions on prior arrangement. Despite the different opening and closing hours of service, the ten WCs under review run for about 7–8 hours. For example, three WCs (i.e., at CNA-Q, QU and Community College of Qatar) run for seven hours. On the other hand, the remaining seven WCs run for eight hours.

Conclusion

WCs in Qatar enjoy a unique history, emerging from the forces of globalization, which conveniently fitted into Qatar's national agenda. With the establishment of Education City in Doha, WCs were introduced through the importation of branch campuses from select universities across the Western world. The adoption of English as a medium of instruction in QU has also shaped the dynamics of its Writing Center and challenged its creative ingenuity and capacity to offer excellent proactive services to students. The future of the English writing program in Qatar is bright, as it can further benefit from harnessing the resources of other language skills to help its growing student population.

This chapter critically reviewed the WCs in ten different higher education institutions in Qatar: eight are imported Western branch campuses in Qatar and two are public higher education institutions. The eight American/Western universities are Texas A&M University in Qatar, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Qatar School of the Arts, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, CNA-Q, University of Calgary in Qatar and NU in Qatar. The two public higher education institutions in Qatar are QU and Community College of Qatar.

The concerned WCs in Qatar's higher education institutions were critically reviewed in terms of their commonalities and differences. These reviewed centers proved similar in terms of their purpose of establishment and the free services. However, they were different in terms of naming, the timing and hours of service, the different venues for booking an appointment and the services offered at each center. The ten WCs are unique in their offered services and show a variety of flexible services aimed at enhancing students' English writing based on their needs and levels.

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Julian Williams is an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at Yanbu Industrial College in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. He has a Bachelor's degree in Communications from University of Washington, in Seattle, USA. Williams is from the Caribbean island of St. Lucia and has taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in South Korea and has presented in TESOL Arabia.

Abdelhamid Ahmed is a first-year seminar coordinatorof the Core Curriculum Program, Qatar University. He obtained his PhD in Education (TESOL/Applied Linguistics) from the University of Exeter, UK. He is experienced in teaching and researching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, as evident in his research publications. His areas of expertise include EFL writing problems, socio-cultural context, assessing writing, e-feedback, reflective journals, teacher training and teaching practicum. He is the coeditor of *Teaching EFL Writing in the 21st Century Arab World: Realities and Challenges.*

Waheed Adeyimika Bamigbade is a professor at the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is a visiting assistant professor at the Yanbu English Language Institute, Saudi Arabia. He is interested in the use and teaching of English as a second language, syntax, stylo-pragmatics, semiotics and cultural linguistics.

CHAPTER 4

The Evolution of Writing Centres in Bahrain: A Multipronged Analysis

Joel C. Meniado

Introduction

A writing centre is an integral part of learning support mechanisms offered in many higher education institutions (HEIs) in different parts of the world. It is a place frequently visited by students to avail help in exploring and enriching their ideas, to seek advice in improving their writing, and to find refuge in times of academic struggles and frustrations. It is a fertile ground where students do not only grow as effective and confident writers but also flourish as leaders capable of spawning new knowledge and enriching life skills. As a support unit of educational institutions, it serves as a site where students from different academic strata are empowered and nurtured. As an auxiliary to social, civic, economic, and socio-political dynamisms, it functions, to a certain extent, as a catalyst of social change and a vehicle for national development.

In Western countries, writing centres were put up for various reasons and were shaped by different challenges. Some writing centres originated to arrest the continuous decline of college students' English proficiency

J.C. Meniado (✉)
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

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(Harris, 1993; Kinkead, 1993; Lotto, 1993), while others existed to help the marginalised and cultural minorities (Okawa, 1993; Rodrigues & Kiefer, 1993). Some also evolved to uphold academic excellence in affirmation of the school's vision and mission (Mohr, 1993) or to support the existing institutional writing programme (Mullin & Momenee, 1993; Simon, 1993). Generally, writing centres were established to provide remediation and academic help to those with writing difficulties. Because of this notion, writing centres have been perceived as clinics or first-aid stations that students can visit to have their writing deficiencies treated (North, 1984). This misconception has been carried out until today that some university administrators, faculty members, and students still think of writing centres as "fix-it" shops or proofreading centres where writing errors are identified and corrected (North, 1984, p. 437). This has led, in some instances, to writing centres' misuse, confusion, and identity crisis.

In the Kingdom of Bahrain, writing centres also exist. In a small island nation with 13 domestic and international HEIs, two writing centres operate to provide help among young Bahraini EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Considering that writing centres mainly started in the United States and professionally proliferated in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the literacy crisis (Carino, 1995; Waller, 2002), it is interesting to know how the concept and the provision of a writing centre were introduced in the Kingdom. Were these brought by Western-educated expatriates teaching in Bahrain HEIs or imported by locals, who are heavily influenced by the Western educational system? On what grounds were writing centres established in the Kingdom? Mainly aimed at understanding the premises and exploring the forces behind the emergence of writing centres in Bahrain, this study specifically tried to find out the factors that influenced their establishment, and traced their origin and development.

Tracing the foundations of writing centres can straighten the curve that caused misconceptions through the years. It can help stakeholders understand the very tenets of a writing centre, so they can appreciate and use it judiciously. If the *raison d'être* of a writing centre is well clarified, misconceptions and misuse are avoided and the very purpose of the centre is well served, hence this study. Unlike other investigations conducted along this line of enquiry, this study combined historical, critical, and comparative analyses in order to draw a wider and deeper understanding of the motivation behind the emergence of writing centres in Bahrain. The findings and insights of this study could be used not only to understand the past but

also to design a unique model of a writing centre that very well fits into the context of Bahrain.

Literature Review

Bahrain in Perspective

The Kingdom of Bahrain, a cosmopolitan country, has emerged as one of the most important financial and commercial hubs in the Gulf region (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2016a). Strategically located, it attracts trade and commerce from different parts of the world. To exploit benefits from this geographical advantage, the Kingdom established relevant and responsive training and education programmes to enhance the skills and talents of its local people (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2016b). As a result, new higher education and training institutions have been established to respond to this pressing need.

Currently, the country has local and international schools, colleges, and universities. The growing number of diverse migrants, the internationalisation of education policies and programmes, and the rising challenges of economic reforms imply, in a language educator's perspective, an increasing demand for communicatively competent and linguistically proficient workforce, hence the importance of providing facilities, resources, and services that develop English communication skills of Bahrainis. A facility like a writing centre established in an educational institution can be a helpful resource and service for this purpose.

Writing Centre

Writing centres, sometimes called as writing labs, writing studios, writing places, or writing rooms, are typically part of a writing programme, language centre, or learning institution where students are guided to become better writers through an informal, free yet serious process with the help of tutors (Harris, 1985; International Writing Centre Association [IWCA], 2016; Kelly, 1980). It is a place where students' writing difficulties are diagnosed and remediated (Moore, 1950). While writing centres may be different depending on the institutional contexts where they belong, they share common elements—writing *tutors* or coaches who diagnose students' individual writing *needs* and try to address them through a *collaborative process* with the students in a *one-to-one setting* (Harris, 1988).

Writing centres are dynamic entities. They evolve along with the changing times. They grow, expand, and redefine their roles according to the changing needs and demands of their stakeholders. Dynamic as they are, they must always carry the basic elements and principles to make them relevant, effective, and ideal. According to Harris (1985), an ideal writing centre should function as a lab where the writing tutor serves as a physician or diagnostician and where the patient (student) does hands-on, try-out work. Harris (1985) further contends that an ideal writing centre/lab should function as a workshop, a research space, a friendly support place for students, a convenient and resource-rich facility with a clear role and identity in the institution. Lastly, an ideal writing centre has clear-cut policies and procedures, guided by pedagogical principles that uphold individual uniqueness nurtured in a dialogic collaborative process (Harris, 1985).

History of Writing Centres

Writing centres, though proliferated in the 1970s to address the literacy crisis brought by open admissions movement in the United States, trace back their early origin as a laboratory method used in classrooms in the early 1900s (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995, 1996). In the 1930s and 1940s, then called writing labs or clinics, they were established to provide remedial and additional writing instruction to students (Chang, 2013) and help weaker students with their learning difficulties by enhancing their writing and critical thinking skills (Murphy, 1991).

Before being recognised as places where writers are developed and nurtured, as they are known today, writing centres (labs) were then considered as an instructional method, called a laboratory method or conferencing method, used in composition classrooms (Carino, 1995; Waller, 2002). As a method, writing centres/labs offered procedural intervention in the student writing process in the form of individual help from the instructor and the peer editing group (Carino, 1995). In 1910, the method was adopted by many teachers and became widespread throughout the United States. In the 1930s, there was a realisation that writing labs were not more than a classroom approach; hence, they became additions (not only as an extension) to classroom or separate facilities offering help to any student of any level through one-to-one instruction (Carino, 1995).

In the 1940s, standalone writing labs were a distinct part of a college or university (Carino, 1995). With the emergence of Armed Forces English,

the number of writing labs increased. The military programme aimed at preparing officers for World War II. After the war, the programme emerged with a communications emphasis, where writing labs became an integral part of the pedagogy, integrating writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills. Later, the communications programmes shifted the emphasis to social development and affective domain, which eventually changed the programmes and pedagogies offered by writing labs (Carino, 1995).

In 1950, writing centres, though they were already recognised as entities working with writing programmes, struggled for identity and respectability (Carino, 1995). There were questions on what kind of place a writing centre should be, who it should serve, what services it should provide, and what kind of people should work in it. There was a debate on writing centres as labs or clinics. In other words, there was a move for conceptualisation and rationalisation to lay a strong foundation for a writing centre. It was not until late 1960s and 1970s that writing centres started to spread out across the United States, along with the advent of open admission initiatives (Carino, 1995). This period marked "professionalised" beginnings that have influenced cultures of modern writing centres today.

Reasons for the Founding of Writing Centres

Based on the historical antecedents of writing centres discussed above, it can be construed that they emerged for several reasons. It is apparent that writing centres were shaped by different factors, which were pedagogical, political, social, and economic in nature. As presented above, writing centres evolved as "outgrowths of the classroom, sites for remediation and/or proficiency work, support for writing across the curriculum programmes, or as haven for writers of all kinds" (Waller, 2002).

At the start, writing centres (known as labs) were founded to extend and enhance classroom learning experiences of students in terms of writing. As an instructional method rather than a site, writing centres, then, provided students with intensive opportunities to practise writing and revising. Later, in the 1940s up to 1970s, writing centres were established to remediate writing problems of weak students. Due to political, social, educational, and economic events, such as World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, open admissions initiatives, and the literacy crisis, many incoming college students were considered weak and underprepared; hence, writing centres were used to remedy the problem. After those

years, writing centres became skills centres designed to help improve English proficiency of students. They became a place for tutoring services aimed at improving writing proficiency skills vis-à-vis university standards. Decades after until the 1990s, writing centres, along with their formerly held roles, were transformed to support and even to coordinate writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) or writing-in-the-discipline (WID) programmes with the hope of developing and encouraging individual thinkers and writers.

The above-mentioned reasons of writing centres' existence were evident in many renowned universities. For example, in Purdue University, a writing lab was established in 1975 to address the declining writing skills of incoming freshmen (Harris, 1993). Similar reason was for Utah State University, which experienced declining writing skills due to the absence of a more traditional writing programme (Kinkead, 1993). Lehigh University in Pennsylvania also established its writing centre in 1978 initially to help relatively weak students meet the rigours of academic standards (Lotto, 1993).

In the case of Medgar Evers College, its writing centre was established to reinforce the skills students learn in their writing courses (Greene, 1993). Similarly, the University of Southern California also conceived its writing lab initially as a concentrated place for students to work on their writing skills and subskills (Clark, 1993). Later, when its writing lab was changed into a writing centre, the emphasis changed to conversation/communication rather than drill and practice.

The University of Toledo in Ohio and Harvard University built their writing centres to provide support service to their WAC programme and Expository Writing Program, respectively (Mullin & Momenee, 1993; Simon, 1993). The Johnson County Community College in Kansas City, on the other hand, established its writing centre in pursuit of its mission—to achieve academic excellence, including writing proficiency (Mohr, 1993).

While other colleges and universities opened their writing centres due to pedagogical, social, and economic reasons, the opening of the University of Washington's writing centre was socio-political in nature. The Educational Opportunity Program Writing Centre at the University of Washington evolved as an equaliser and mediator, addressing the writing and linguistic issues of less-than-well-educated minority students (Okawa, 1993). Dealing with multiethnically diverse student population confronted with socio-political issues (civil rights activism), the centre highlighted "nurturing" as its central philosophy in its operations. It provided

the Multicultural Tutoring Writing Program to serve students of colour and other economically disadvantaged students.

Following the case of the University of Washington, the Colorado State University also established its writing centre in 1979 to serve the seriously underprepared students, particularly from cultural minorities (Rodrigues & Kiefer, 1993). However, unlike all other colleges and universities, the university introduced a new model by leveraging its computing and networking resources to establish a modern electronic-based writing centre in addition to its conventional writing centre to provide individualised tutorial support to students in basic writing and freshman English. The birth of the university's conventional and non-conventional writing centres was the outgrowth of a statewide policy stopping it to offer credit-based basic writing programme, the improved attitude towards writing throughout the campus, and the shifts in computing throughout the university.

Method

Since the purpose of this study was to identify the premises and explore the historical forces behind the emergence of writing centres in Bahrain, the comparative historical analysis method was used. According to Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), comparative historical analysis explains and identifies the causes of major outcomes of interest within delimited historical contexts. It also analyses "historical sequences and take[s] seriously the unfolding of processes over time" (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 12), systematically and contextually comparing similar and contrasting cases.

The writing centres involved in this study were the University of Bahrain Writing Centre (UoBWC) and the Bahrain Polytechnic Writing Centre (BPWC). The former is located within the University of Bahrain (UoB), the largest university in the Kingdom, with 22,002 students, 82 graduate and undergraduate programmes, and 20 specialised centres (Alnaser, 2016); while the latter is situated within the Bahrain Polytechnic, a government institution focusing on technical and applied professional qualifications, offering degrees and certificates in business, engineering, design, information and communication technology (ICT), and humanities. Since there are only two writing centres in Bahrain, random sampling was not needed.

Prior to data gathering and analyses, the researcher examined the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA) website

and publications to identify the people who can supply the needed information on the evolution of writing centres in Bahrain. When the contact details were identified, the researcher sent the interview questions through email. For the UoBWC, the researcher contacted its founder and former Director, since she had first-hand knowledge and experiences in setting up the centre. For the Bahrain Polytechnic, the current Manager was contacted to provide the needed data. After having their queries and requirements satisfied, they agreed to participate in the study. Follow-up emails were sent to remind them. After two weeks, the required data from both respondents were received, yielding 100% data retrieval.

The data gathered were mainly from questionnaires/email interviews, documents, and websites. To answer the questions on what factors and events influenced the emergence of writing centres in Bahrain and how they developed through the years, questionnaires/interviews and documentary analysis were conducted.

Results and Discussion

What Are the Factors That Influenced the Emergence of Writing Centres in Bahrain?

Documentary analyses revealed several factors that influenced the emergence of writing centres in Bahrain. Foremost was the need for more linguistically proficient and communicatively competent tertiary students who could rise up to the academic standards of various degree programmes offered in colleges and universities using English as medium of instruction. In 2004, a study was conducted revealing that "70% of Bahraini school graduates are unable to pass the TOEFL examination", and that most students of government-funded schools are weak in writing in English (Mubarak, 2013, p. 6). This was corroborated by an English proficiency evaluation conducted by the Quality Assurance Authority in Bahrain, reflecting that primary, intermediate, and secondary school students are weak in writing in English (QAA, 2011). These data imply that most incoming college freshmen in those times could face difficulties in college-level writing; thus, provision of an academic support mechanism, such as writing centres, was of prime importance to help students overcome such struggle.

Another factor that could have led to the evolution of writing centres in Bahrain in the late 2000s was the government's emphasis on the value

of English as an important asset for economy and the increasing awareness among individuals regarding the role of the language for their personal growth within public and private organisations (Mubarak, 2013). English emerged as the language of business and education. Thus, there was a realisation that if graduates are proficient in the language, particularly in written communications, they can have gainful employment in both private and public sectors, thereby helping the economy at large. This thrust paved ways for writing centres to exist to respond to the demands of the labour market and economic development.

The existing status and emerging roles of English in various sectors and industries also had a share in the evolution of writing centres in Bahrain. Based on the study of the Allen Consulting Group (2009), skills in such areas as communication, English language, and customer relations were lacking in most sectors of the labour market. This implies the need for writing centres that can address such identified problems and deficiencies.

While there were some general factors that indirectly influenced the birth of writing centres in Bahrain, there were also some specific ones emanating from the contexts of individual institutions. Data from the respondents reveal the unique stories of origin of their writing centres. The University of Bahrain Writing Centre, for example, came into existence in 2007 mainly to improve the writing skills of students at different levels and to provide support to the university's academic writing programme (J. Lefort, personal communication, September 26, 2016). In an email, J. Lefort explained that the centre evolved to help students of various colleges of the university to improve their written communication skills and to come up with quality written outputs as evidence of their achievement of student learning outcomes, as these evidences were needed in the accreditation review.

The BPWC, on the other hand, was founded in 2013 generally to support the country's educational reforms and the institution's instructional programmes (L. Lobato, personal communication, October 9, 2016). In the email interview, L. Lobato detailed that the centre was set up specifically to help Years 3 and 4 students produce specific genres of academic writing and to prepare students for their future career. She further explained that the centre was established following the findings of the English Review Provision at the Bahrain Polytechnic that employers and academics place heavy emphasis on proficiency in English writing skills. Given the explanations, it is clear that the institution's strong commitment to prepare students for their academics and beyond was the compelling reason for the creation of the writing centre.

As clearly seen in the documentary analyses and email interviews, the writing centres in Bahrain were built to respond to the needs of the labour market in the long run and to prepare students to fulfil the requirements of their degree programmes. The latter reason of existence supports the claim of Waller (2002) that writing centres evolved to extend classroom learning experiences, to provide remediation and/or proficiency work, to support writing across the curriculum programmes, and to be a haven for writers of all kinds. The latter purpose also coincides with the reasons for which writing centres of North American universities were built. For example, Lehigh University in Pennsylvania established its writing centre to help relatively weak students meet the rigours of academic standards (Lotto, 1993). Moreover, the University of Toledo also put up its writing centre as a support service to its WAC programme (Mullin & Momenee, 1993). Lastly, Harvard University created its writing centre to support its WAC programme offered in various colleges/schools of the university (Simon, 1993). Bahrain's writing centres, in terms of purpose, have some similarities with some of their Western counterparts.

How Did the Writing Centres in Bahrain Develop Through the Years?

According to J. Lefort (personal communication, September 26, 2016), the UoBWC began as a service of the Language Centre catering all colleges in the university. A Western-educated expatriate with relevant experience in establishing a writing centre, she founded the UoBWC and became the first Director, reporting directly to the Head of the Language Centre. She was assisted by one administrative staff and some faculty members from the Language Centre as tutoring staff, who were released from some of their teaching load. Over time, a peer tutoring model was introduced and high-achieving students were invited to apply for paid tutoring positions (J. Lefort, personal communication, September 26, 2016).

Prior to the birth of the centre, as J. Lefort (personal communication, September 26, 2016) further narrated, a proposal was made to the management and a staffing arrangement was negotiated. She recalled that faculty members of the Language Centre were involved in the earliest stages, as their support was critical, followed by information dissemination to faculty in other colleges and then finally to students. When the creation of the centre was approved, it went operational, offering services such as one-to-one writing consultation, writing workshops, and a small resource library.

J. Lefort described the tutoring approach as more of a collaborative rather than a directive manner, though, on occasion, direct tutoring was required. She added that tutors were trained to support students and provide feedback in an ethical manner, being careful to never take over the student's work.

When asked how the idea of the writing centre was sold to stakeholders, J. Lefort (personal communication, September 26, 2016) explained that it was done through campaigns and dialogues, highlighting the benefits of writing centres to campus and students as the main selling point. During its early operations, according to her, the centre encountered manpower and location problems. The required number of tutors did not meet the growing demand, and the centre's location was also not convenient for many students. Despite struggles and limitations, the centre has, to a certain extent, helped many students over the years.

In the case of the BPWC, it started as a part of the School of Languages within the Faculty of Humanities. According to L. Lobato (personal communication, October 9, 2016), it came as a recommendation of the institutional Review of English Provision, highlighting its potential to promote learner collaboration, learning autonomy, and empowerment. Prior to the establishment, as L. Lobato further traced back, the Writing Centre Working Group was formed to study the concept of writing centres and to make informed recommendations on the setting up of such a facility at the polytechnic.

In the early stages of operations, L. Lobato (personal communication, October 9, 2016) described the centre as being run by a coordinator reporting directly to the Head of the School of Languages, along with five tutors, who were then full-time faculty members of the same school. She further described the centre being initially housed in the library and then relocated to a purpose-built facility centrally located in one of the main student buildings. According to her, since its inception, the centre has been offering one-to-one 30-minute writing sessions with a trained tutor to students, faculty, and allied staff. She described the tutoring approach as a collaborative one, whereby tutors help writers learn from the process of engaging in meaningful conversations about their writing, talking through their ideas, and receiving feedback.

When asked how the writing centre became popular among stakeholders, L. Lobato (personal communication, October 9, 2016) explained that it was done through a marketing and promotion plan, continuous dialogues with the academics, and presentations at faculty and Academic

Board meetings. On the challenges faced by the centre, she enumerated several difficulties, such as the varying needs, abilities, and instructional contexts of learners; some staffing and administration concerns; stakeholders' misconceptions regarding the roles of the writing centre; and the lack of a common understanding between class teachers and writing centre tutors on what students needed to develop as competent writers and thinkers. However, according to her, these challenges were addressed through continuous training of tutors, strong support from the senior management and academics, continuous interventions clarifying the concept of writing centres, and enhanced collaborations between class teachers and writing centre tutors.

The development of the two writing centres in Bahrain was needs based—the needs of the students, the institutions they serve, and the nation at large. Before they were approved for operation, careful planning, with analyses based on studies and experiences, proposals, and negotiations were undertaken. This was to make sure they operate on purpose and are built to last. Considering that these writing centres adopted the North American writing centre model, there were some similarities in structure, approaches, and operational policies with those Western writing centres mentioned in the literature review.

Conclusion

The writing centres in Bahrain were the outgrowth of different academic, social, and economic dynamisms that have shaped the Kingdom through the years. They were built to respond to emerging academic, social, and economic concerns. Thus, they are useful entities that can transform the specific society they serve. They play significant roles in realising the vision and mission of HEIs and national development goals and objectives. With purposes beyond academic premises, these centres have a socio-economic value as well. This significance and value should be effectively communicated to stakeholders to enable writing centres to establish their role and identity in academic and socio-economic development and to ensure their sustainability in the years ahead.

In their development, Bahrain's writing centres were influenced by North American and other Westernised writing centre models. This is apparent in their pedagogical approaches, policies, and resources. While this is inevitable due to the inherent nature and origin of writing centres, remodelling or contextualising delivery modes, rules, and materials could help these writing centres better serve their clientele. Adapting some of

the practices of the typical North American writing centre model can allow these writing centres to fit specific contexts and needs (Turner, 2006). This being said, Bahrain's writing centres should introduce new approaches and delivery modes convenient to tutors and clients, formulate tutoring policies that respect individual needs, and produce customised online writing support materials that reflect local culture and customs.

Considering the upward trends in international trade and commerce in the Kingdom, coupled with the proliferation of digital technologies, globalisation, and the changing economic and educational policies towards global competitiveness, there seems to be a greater need for more writing centres in the future where prospective graduates are prepared to be competitive in the ever-dynamic global Olympic village. Therefore, Bahrain's other HEIs need to take aggressive and innovative actions to respond to emerging economic and educational needs. They may follow the paths the first two writing centres in the Kingdom (the UoBWC and the BPWC) have taken through the years and use their experiences as models in order to render more effective services responsive to national and regional goals for economic development.

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Joel C. Meniado is an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturer at the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu. With post-graduate degrees in English language education, he has taught English in Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern (Gulf Cooperation Council) contexts. He has internationally presented and written academic papers on language acquisition, English Language Teaching (ELT) technologies, and reading education.

CHAPTER 5

Development of Writing Centres in Oman: Tracing the Past, Understanding the Future

Khalid Albishi

Introduction

Oman is one of the Gulf Corporation Council (henceforth, GCC) countries which considers oil as their primary product and source of wealth. GCC includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab of Emirates and Oman. These countries are looking for ways to expand their role in global circles by developing their citizens in several aspects of life including education. To meet these goals, Oman implemented a new reform of education (Issan & Gomaa, 2010) and included English language as an important device. The Ministry of Education implemented several programmes to enhance the competency of Omani students in English language and consequently reach their ultimate goal.

This chapter traces the development of writing centres (henceforth, WCs) in Oman through history, its current state and future potentials. An overview of the historic and current state of WCs is used with a comparative analysis of the Western and GCC WCs, using the Murphy and Law (1995) WCs traditions model. Then a historical review of English language learning development in Oman is explored. The historical review also

K. Albishi (✉)
Bisha College of Technology, Bisha, Saudi Arabia

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gives us hints on Oman's readiness to accept foreign language at the present. Finally, further investigations are made on the current state of English language learning in relation to Omani education and the road to possible improvement on the part of the WCs towards meeting its vision and the overall ambitions of the Omani Sultanate.

An Overview of the Field of Writing Centres from the West to the Arabian Gulf Region

WCs are one of the important hubs in Western universities that provide instant and constant support to all students. The vast spread of WCs in thousands of universities and high schools in Northern America and Canada indicates the increasing need to these centres in academic life. Unlike WCs in the Arabian Gulf countries, WCs in the West are mostly documented through several journals discussing various subjects about issues of writing and WCs history. However, the pictures they paint are not always true. The idea of vagueness in tracking the history and activities of WCs is common in the West and the GCC. Carino (1995) states that although the history of WCs looks clear and clean, it goes through various ambiguities. The history of Western WCs is not documented until the late 1970s when the open admissions policy started and the increasing need for WCs and writing labs expanded (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999; Carino, 1995). At the beginning, WCs establishment aims to remedy the writing skills of international students who flux to the American universities in response to the open admission policy. It used to be the 'cousins of English departments, stereotypical "remedial fix-it shops" where enlightened staff administers current traditional pedagogy to underprepared and poorly regarded students' (Carino, 1995, p. 103).

It is difficult to appoint accurate dates in the history of WCs at the GCC countries; documents available show that the first WC was established in 2009 (UoN Writing Centre, 2016). The hesitation in giving accurate dates is due to shortage of official information and documents about WCs in the region. WCs in GCC are mostly not independent institutions. The available information provided by the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centres Alliance (MENAWCA 2016), and similar other resources such as the websites and annual reports of the hosting universities, shows that most of the WCs are integrated into the higher institutions as supporting and training centres. The English-writing support included in these centres was adopted as a result of the increasing need of the use of

English language across different disciplines and programmes in the region (see Albishi, 2016; Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011). However, there are a few independent WCs in the region.

Following the Murphy and Law (1995) model of WCs traditions, a comparison can be attempted between the difficulties faced by the WCs in the West and the current state of WCs in the GCC countries as a new concept in the region. The traditions include:

1. The tradition of sharing
2. The tradition of mystifying our colleagues
3. The tradition of being at the bottom of the totem pole
4. The tradition of incorporating collaborative learning
5. The tradition of tutors' personal enrichment
6. The tradition of being people oriented (Murphy & Law, 1995, pp. 28–35)

The WCs' work has gone through changes and sophisticated phases since the 1970s. On the one hand, the tradition of sharing where administrators, tutors and instructors are unsure about what to do, or hesitate on how to start a WC, has almost vanished. However, the concept of sharing evolved to become more institutionalized and professional. A lot of journals appeared dedicating their focus to writing and WCs. These journals such as *The Writing Center Journal* and *Writing Lab Newsletter* publish new findings and innovative knowledge in the field. Also, several associations and their websites such as the *International Writing Centers Association IWCA* and *Middle East–North Africa Writing Centers Alliance MENAWCA* were launched to serve and guide new and old WCs. So, sharing is taking new shape which privileged the new WCs in the GCC. The idea of cooperating on progressive activities in the higher education institutions still exists in the GCC countries. As an example of this, WC of the University of Nizwa (UoN) at the Sultanate of Oman assists several other universities to initiate their WCs (UoN Writing Centre, 2016). On the other hand, GCC WCs still have the tradition of helping individuals and students to develop in writing and other academic areas.

The tradition of mystifying our colleagues is a situation where our colleagues do not exactly know the role of WCs. They think that the purpose of the WC is to edit and proofread the papers of students, and, maybe, to only hold sessions to solve what they have failed to do (Murphy & Law, 1995; North, 1984). Unfortunately, these 'old familiar misapprehensions'

(Murphy & Law, 1995, p. 29) still exist in some GCCs' WCs even if they are not clearly articulated. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), among several others in the GCC universities, integrated their WC with the General Foundation Program (GFP) to help students acquire a wide range of academic skills in different courses, including overcoming writing problems (Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Faculty and instructors of WCs who are supposed to be professionals make it worse and deepen the misunderstanding when they do not understand their role or the role of their centres. Misunderstanding can be seen through links on MENAWCA's website which guide visitors to unrelated programmes such as universities General Foundation Programmes. So, websites presenting the General Foundation Programmes and preparatory centres which solve many problems of the students as WCs is one of the 'misapprehensions' about WCs. Ignorance of WC goals by their faculty and staff members helps to confirm the tradition of mystifying. In Saudi Arabia, a WC page at King Saud University includes link of instructions appeared to be directed at the faculty who seek help on reviewing and editing their abstracts of conferences or journal articles (Centre for Writing in English KSU, 2016). The report of WC at the UoN (2011) identifies this misunderstanding of the WC role by faculty, staff and students as one of their challenges and further invites them to understand

> that TWC is not a proofreading or editing service facility. It is important that members of the UoN understand that TWC provides assistance in writing for the improvement of academic students' writing proficiency. The Writing Center wishes to be invited at the beginning of each academic year of organized assemblies for student orientations, so that it may familiarize students and faculty alike regarding the services and programs offered by TWC. (The University of Nizwa Writing Center TWC Annual Report, p. 18)

The governmental process of the budgets of education at GCC is mostly similar (Alpen Capital, 2016). The governments set the budgets of the educational institutions according to several criteria. The institutions make their balance of fixed aspects of budgets according to the need of their entities and last records of previous financial year (Spending Regulations MOF, KSA, 2015). The spending on education at GCC countries was close to 22% of the countries' total budgets. This exceeds the education budget of some of the first world counties such as the USA,

the UK and Germany (Alpen Capital, 2016). The decision of WC initiations in GCC is based on a higher committee that takes into consideration the ability to fund the WC and provide it with proper facility and faculty, and make it share the same financial status and other privileges and rights of any other department. So, the idea of 'being at the bottom of the totem pole' is barely mentioned in WCs of GCC no matter the level of those rights and statuses.

Murphy and Law (1995) in their model of WCs' traditions mention the active participation of WC in enriching language learning context. They notice that the tradition of 'collaborative learning' succeeded in adding new approaches where students are expected to be the centre of the class and play an active role. However, the role of WC in creating teaching and pedagogical practices remain passive at the GCC (see Chap. 12 for more on this; see also Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011; Al Khateeb, 2013; Al-Khairy, 2013; Kamil, 2011). This does not ignore the fact that WCs in GCC play vital role in 'the tradition of tutors' personal enrichment'. It can be recognized that the existing WCs in the Arabian Gulf region are participating in training their tutors and providing sufficient experiences. For example, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, posts an advertisement on their website requiring students to apply for tutoring positions (Centre for Writing in English KSU, 2016). These opportunities are supervised by professional staff and scaffold with developing courses. Also, the WC at the UoN in Oman mentions the experience of their staff when they participated in their first ever conference abroad (UoN Writing Center, 2016). However, tutors do not generally improve their methodologies, and training does not guarantee excellent results (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011).

Murphy and Law (1995) further note the constancy of the last tradition that refers to people's orientation in WC. 'The tradition of being people-oriented' is the use of various machineries for people interactions in tutoring. Easy access to technology and writing support helps to maintain this tradition. The extensive financial support of the GCC countries on education helps in providing all necessary assistance to WCs. As mentioned earlier, almost one-third of some GCC countries' budgets go to education (Alpen Capital, 2016). Therefore, when the decision is made to initiate a WC, the needed facilities, hardware, software and labs do not constitute any obstacle. However, lack of sufficient staff may present a problem. The director of WC at the UoN lists inadequate numbers of human resources as one of their challenges (UoN Writing Centre, 2016).

One of the main reasons behind establishing WCs in the West is to answer the increasing need of centres to help international students admitted due to the open admission policy in the USA, especially the non-English speakers among them. In the GCC countries, one could expect that WCs will face similar hardships as they deal with similar conditions of both faculty and students relations. The traditions of WCs are still active in most of the parts where WCs are facing similar difficulties and hardships in the East and in the West irrespective of the various financial supports by governments. The question remains whether the WCs are going to keep struggling in GCC countries to find their identity or they will develop and flourish like the ones in the USA, and then we will be able to say 'history repeats itself'.

Historical Review of English Language Teaching in Oman

Linguistic History of Oman

Oman is located at the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. This location situates it at the heart of historic events, maritime and trading crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe (Nicolini & Watson, 2004). The location enables Oman to be exposed to different languages and thus be affected by them. Oman's early history is full of moves and important turns including the Portuguese colonization. As a result of this rich history including trading markets, colonization, immigration and other factors, Oman hosts different dialects that borrow vocabularies from different languages and influence its local modern dialects (Holes, 1996, 2006). Languages used in modern Omani Arabic dialects include Urdu, Persian, Baluchi and even Portuguese, which was a result of the Portuguese colonialization that ends in 1924. In the 1960s and early 1970s, another linguistic influence was noticed after the inflow of immigrants from Zanzibar and Indian subcontinent. This makes it linguistically richer. Holes (1989) notes that

> since 1970, with influxes of Omanis from other areas of the country and from East Africa, a flood of expatriate Arabs, chiefly from Egypt, and the permanent or semi-permanent immigration of non-Arabic speakers from the Indian subcontinent. The linguistic influences of these groups have been added to the already polyglot local community in which many local families were already bi- or trilingual in Arabic, Swahili and one or other of the

> languages of the Indian subcontinent as a consequence of Oman's maritime and trading heritage. … [I]t would make a fascinating site for the study of sociolinguistic phenomena such as multilingualism or code-switching. (Holes, 1989, pp. 446–447)

Therefore, Oman had long history of interaction with different languages and cultures, a history that commenced its new phase when His Majesty the Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said ascended the throne of the Sultanate of Oman.

English Language and Education in Oman

Oman lived in history until 1970 when major changes happened. Before 1970, Oman remained a poor country with almost no infrastructure nor education or even any proper healthcare system in place (Al-Jadidi, 2009). The renaissance of modern history of Oman started when Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said attained power (Rassekh, 2004). We can find evolution in education systems and planned developments with accurate vision in this period of time (Al-Belushi, Al-Adawi, & Al-Ketani, 1999; Rassekh, 2004). Different procedures were initiated and several factors were taken into consideration to achieve the intended developments.

English is considered to be a vital tool of development in developing countries (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011; Coleman, 2011). The importance of English language teaching (ELT) has been on the increase since the Second World War, and this is a direct result of the rise of two English-speaking countries of the USA and the UK with hegemonic powers. Consequently, this hegemony took over knowledge of science, economy, politics and related fields. These fields are going through huge development, where English is the main language in use (Albishi, 2016; Phillipson, 2008). Crystal (2006) claims that about 80% of the world science is published in English. So, various scholars discussed the phenomenon of English language as the lingua franca (Hülmbauer, Böhringer, & Seidlhofer, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2004), global language (Crystal, 2003; Gnutzmann, 1999; Seidlhofer, 2005) or English as a world language (Mair, 2003). Therefore, a noticeable interest increases from non-English-speaking countries towards the teaching and learning of English (Crystal, 2003), and Oman is no exception (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011). This drive was led by two main factors. First, ELT is supported by English-speaking countries like the UK through several ways including the spread

of ELT institutions like the British Council (Phillipson, 2008), which was established in 1934 and now reaches over 500 million people across the world (British Council, 2016). Second, non-English-speaking countries, like Oman, consider the importance of English in their overall development through communicating with others which will help in increasing their share in world domains (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011). So, they initiate teaching English language and prioritize it in education (Salha & Nariman, 2010).

The renaissance of Oman education started during the Sultan Qaboos's era in parallel with the oil floods in commercial quantities to be exported in late 1970s (Issan & Gomaa, 2010). The emergence of this wealth helps the country to build a solid educational system and meet the Sultan's vision in elevating the status of his people in several aspects of life including education. This vision was recognized by the Omani government and translated into actual policies to meet intended results. In this relatively short history of education, Rassekh (2004) states that the development of education in Oman has gone through three stages:

1. stage one emphasized the rapid quantitative development of education;
2. stage two started in the early 1980s, when the Ministry of Education initiated serious efforts to improve the quality of education; and
3. stage three began from 1995, after the Conference on Oman's Economic Future, Vision 2020, when a number of reforms were introduced in order to cope with the educational requirements of the future. (Rassekh, 2004, p. 8)

In the third stage of the Oman history, the government notices the ultimate role of education in modern world and thus included education in its reform agenda so as to achieve its developmental goals. It also considers English as an important tool that will satisfy the quality of Oman educational reform and supply the country with qualified Omani labour force so as to be ready to join the emerging local and international markets. The Omani Ministry of Education declared its belief in the crucial role of English as a statement of public policy which emphasizes the important role of English worldwide and its use in various domains such as economic, political, scientific and technological fields, including the academia, finance and telecommunication, which are all important in the new future that Oman is hoping to join (Al-Issa, 2002, 2006; Al-Issa &

Al-Bulushi, 2011). According to Al-Issa (2002), 'The choice of English here is primarily for transition purposes … based upon sociolinguistic, socioeconomic, sociocultural, historical and political factors' (2002, p. 198). One of the crucial reforms in education was to start teaching English from grade one in public schools (Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Sivaraman, Al Balushi, & Rao, 2014). English also became a medium of instruction in most majors of private and public schools and universities of higher education. All these are meant to ensure the success of their development plans, and to improve Omani participation in the world economy and technology.

English Language Proficiency in Omani Schools

At some point, it was discovered that the ancient and modern linguistic history of Oman and the ambitious steps of the Omani Ministry of Education was not reflecting on the Omani students' level of English proficiency. World rankings show that Oman is categorized as 'very low proficiency' in English language; ranking 64 out of 72 countries (Education First, 2016). In 2001, the Ministry of Education in Oman decided on a plan to prepare the students for the higher education where English is the medium of instruction. This plan hopes to improve English language proficiency, including the implementation of teaching English from Grade 1 (see Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011; Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Sivaraman et al., 2014). Also, Omani students have to pass through a GFP ranging from 6 to 12 months to prepare them for university so as to achieve an acceptable level of English writing and communicating skills. The programme was established in 2010 as a result of the inability of 70 % of the Omani applicants to meet university admission standards, one of which is the English language proficiency equivalent to 5.0 on IELTS (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011).

However, the English proficiency of the Omani students was still not satisfying (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011; Sivaraman et al., 2014). Sivaraman et al. (2014) conducted a study on 132 Omani students at the university level to measure their English language competency. The participants were grouped according to the university admission tests which classify them into two groups, namely those students who were unconditionally admitted to their chosen programmes and those students who needed to go through further English learning programmes. The study finds that both groups are found to be non-sufficiently proficient in English language

skills. The study finds that teachers are aware of the students' lack of competency in English; but they do not know the exact level of this problem. This is because students do not express their lack of understanding in class to avoid making mistakes when using English language to express themselves in class. So, teachers assume students' comprehension of the subjects. Also, the study finds that despite the well-provided facilities and infrastructure, the students are facing major problems in English language skills. More actions need to be taken to enhance ELT in Oman and focus on the tertiary students' language skills that could help to achieve the Omani overall ambitions. (For other pedagogical efforts made in Oman to improve English proficiency, please refer to Rania Kabouha in Chap. 12 of this book for further specific details.)

Issues Surrounding EFL Writing in Omani Higher Education Landscape

Writing is one of the most important language skills especially at the tertiary levels (Al husseini, 2014; Zhu, 2004). The Omani Ministry of Education realizes this importance and identifies it as one of the areas of weaknesses of the Omani students. Moreover, some English language teachers were found to be lacking modern experience in teaching writing. So, in 1998 the ministry implemented a $25 million programme with the University of Leeds targeting the teachers and aiming to enhance their ELT skills including writing (Al-Issa & Al-bulushi, 2011). However, the programme did not succeed and the teachers withdrew. Consequently, Omani students continue to face problems with English writing (Husseini, 2014).

According to Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), Omani students are found weak in writing in English at the university level despite their high or low scores in secondary schools. The English courses of the GFP include writing aspects that contain several components like grammar and vocabulary to enhance learning of the students and improve both the writing and other language skills. Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) conducted a study on 1431 Omani students to investigate their writing problems. University students represent 28% of the participants (317 students) selected from three different universities in Oman. The study concentrates on basic skills in writing like starting a paragraph, writing a sentence, connecting ideas and using appropriate vocabulary. It is interesting to mention that the university students use writing strategies (such as brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing) more than secondary students; but the results of the

study show that difficulties of writing English is more pronounced among university students. The study concludes that students are facing major problems with writing and more needed to be done to address it by the Omani education system.

The Emergence of Writing Centres in Oman

It is difficult to appoint the exact date of the establishment of the first English WC in Oman due to lack of reliable documents that can be used in research or documentation. It is for these reasons that this study utilizes the following data sources to capture and document the history of WCs in Oman:

- Personal contacts to collect as much data as possible (flyers, handouts, newsletter and reports);
- Specialized websites such as the MENAWCA in order to find information bordering on the history of WCs in Oman; and
- Governmental and official websites of higher education institutions in Oman to explore the availability of WC in each institution.

The MENAWCA shows only three links of WCs in Oman directing to the universities' official websites and not the WCs' web pages. UoN is the only university which has a WC webpage with most of the information needed. However, the report of 2011 is the latest document available. Searching the MENAWCA website and other sources, four universities (the Sultan Qaboos University, SQU; the Arab Open University, AOU; the Sohar University, SU; and the College of Applied Science, Rustaq) seem to have activities that correlate with writing and writing development.

Available sources show that the first WC in Oman was approximately established in 2009 (UoN Writing Centre, 2016). WCs are mostly supporting centres emerging to help students in their academic endeavours through tutoring, personal interactions and short courses. Also, these centres provide training on the use of facilities and other academic skills. The concern of the current centres is to help students in achieving effectiveness and build personalities at university levels. Most of these WCs offer support of writing in Arabic and English courses.

SU, AOU and College of Applied Science, Rustaq, do not mention writing clearly on their web pages but include it within different activities.

SU includes only two short courses in English for Specific Purposes writing under the division of General Studies. The courses are 'writing for Impact' under the category of 'Behavioural Competencies' and 'Technical Report Writing Skills Workshop' in the field of 'Industrial Management' (Sohar University, 2016). Activities of writing at AU and College of Applied Science writing support are barely mentioned in the web pages of students' support centres. At SQU, Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) disclose that writing training and teaching are included in GFP. The web page of the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) at SQU mentions the integration of writing and tutorial in the centre to serve both GFP and the advanced students in Arabic and English languages (SQU, 2016). Therefore, the policies of the CPS show that two separate divisions are included within it, namely the WC and the Tutorial Centre. The WC offers its services in English to the faculty and students. Although the WC is dedicated to advanced students, it can help any other student who seeks help. All students are assigned 30-minute sessions of one-to-one tutoring.

According to available sources, Oman has only one WC at the UoN which adopts the professional approaches of WCs (see Harris, 2016). Established in 2009 (UoN Writing Centre, 2016) and dedicated only to English writing, it instructs students of all disciplines and seeks to improve their writing proficiency. Its participation in initiating several other WCs in Oman and outside of it gains significant recognition within the GCC countries (UoN Writing Centre, 2016). The UoN WC (2016) annual report, which is the last published report, shows the services provided and approaches followed to help students. According to the published WC reports, appointments made within one year (from September 2010 until August 2011) were 15,054, pointing to the massive services provided by the centre, including workshops, tutorials and extracurricular activities. The total number of registered academic students for the WC services within the same period is 3750. A range of full-time staff instructors, part-time and peer tutors participate in the activities of WC. The activities vary according to the individual needs of beneficiaries. Services include 30-mintute one-to-one tutoring, 50-minute workshops, consultations, conversations and curricular scaffolding. The WC staff held 11 meetings in 2011 to ensure flexibility, experimentation through dynamic plans and immediate critical evaluation of emergent matters and implementation of new policies therefrom. The centre composed its mission and vision according to their goal of establishment as following:

Vision:

The Writing Center will be recognized as an educational facility that provides quality instruction and support across all disciplines to further develop students English writing abilities.

Mission:

The Writing Center will cater primarily to academic students currently enrolled in their degree programs that need to improve their English writing proficiency.

The Writing Center is a learning support service designed to promote a dynamic writing culture for students. The Center will aim to improve student English writing composition skills, reinforce quality study habits, support critical thinking, and encourage creativity and innovation. The Writing Center's programs, services, and extracurricular activities will reflect the Islamic and cultural values embraced by the Sultanate of Oman in order to assist in the development of quality graduates. (The University of Nizw Writing Center TWC, 2011 Annual Report, page 3)

Why Writing Centres?

The Omani reform holds English language as one of the important tools to achieve the intended goals. As in other languages, English consists of basic skills including writing which is one of the important language skills. It is considered to be the most important skill in a university environment (Johns, 1981) and beyond (Zhu, 2004). A study involving 35,000 participants at the university level shows that faculty staff upholds the crucial nature of writing in academic context and subsequently in the real world (Zhu, 2004). Writing starts before college levels and becomes dominant at the tertiary levels because students have to critically analyse and integrate knowledge and then propose results and conclusions (Al husseini, 2014; Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Flowerdew, 2005). Also, at the tertiary levels, students come up with various views and need to reference different sources and literature to gain wider perspectives after which they build their arguments. These skills accompany students to their classes in different disciplines (Al husseini, 2014). WCs help students to gain

different high-level academic skills such as evaluation and analysis. Herrington (1985) conducted a study on university students to observe their writing in academic context and found a social change of the roles of students which was observable in their writing across different disciplines. Thus, WCs encourage students to develop and use several skills in order to maintain a habit of critical thinking and eventually achieve effective writing skills.

Conclusion

The Sultanate of Oman gives high attention to its education. The three stages of Oman history put its human capital and its development at the core of its reforms to elevate the country. An observer of the Omani situation notices the huge leaps taken into the path of development during the last three decades. The infrastructural development, the policies and the plans support the overall vision of the country to increase its role and active participation in the world as an integral player. However, the standard of education at that point in time does not meet the ambitions of the sultanate. This includes absence of vital knowledge and skills such as English proficiency and writing. Several attempts were made to overcome this problem such as initiating WCs. However, the activities of these centres need to be more professional to reflect the generous spending of the country on all aspects of education. The WCs could witness better improvements by borrowing from past experiences of the Western WCs, and then expand their activities so as to further improve on the current levels of the Omani students.

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Khalid Albishi is Head of General Studies Department at Bisha College of Technology, Saudi Arabia, and Reviews Editor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA. He holds a master's degree in Applied Linguistics from University of Technology, Sydney. He has written some articles and participated in conferences in the field of linguistics.

CHAPTER 6

The History of Writing Centres in Kuwait: A Critical Perspective

Salih Abdullah and Inan Deniz Erguvan

Introduction

The purpose of a writing centre (WC) is to grant students the opportunity to get assistance with their writing from a tutor. Much of the time, professors are too busy to provide detailed formative feedback on students' papers. WCs are often used to support students with qualified tutors to review, edit, and comment on their writings. The staff within WCs are expected to be able to guide all students regardless of the class in which they are writing the paper for or their skill level as a writer. WC staff must be qualified and knowledgeable in many different disciplines to have some familiarity with what students are writing. The recruitment and continual

S. Abdullah (✉)
King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

I.D. Erguvan
Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mubarak Al-Abdullah, Kuwait

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development of professional staff are critical for there to be a constant growth of the knowledge and skills necessary to support all students.

The need for WCs within universities is evident to the casual observer. WCs are beneficial for native English speakers and English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners alike. WCs help students improve their ability to research, as well as the overall structure and flow of their written papers, in addition to supporting them with technical matters such as grammar, punctuation, citations, and spelling. Moreover, when students go to WCs, they are often looking to improve their skills, so their receptivity to learning is higher than a student who sits in class and is compelled to receive instruction whether he/she is interested or not. The skills that students learn in WCs can be applied to future assignments as well. Students may learn certain writing fundamentals at a WC that they missed or never learned in class. Also, the WC environment is much less threatening than a classroom setting. Often students may feel intimidated to ask a question in class for fear of revealing their ignorance, ridicule from other students, and an adverse reaction from the teacher or some other apprehension that causes them to hold back on their full effort. Working one-on-one with a tutor is a personalized experience that can increase the student's level of comfort and interaction. The tutor's ability to offer personalized feedback on a student's writing can help the student understand what error was made and how to correct those mistakes in the future.

The ordinary observer can attest to the effectiveness of WCs. However, empirical evidence has not been able to prove that WCs improve the quality of students' writing. Much of the difficulty lies in the fact that longitudinal quantitative data demonstrating the improvement of students' writing skills is not easy to measure due to the challenge of data collection and control (Jones, 2001). Also, any study taking on this topic must factor in the wide range of variability between different WCs, and the difference that exists between tutors and individual tutoring sessions. Finally, writing ability is a construct that scholars have not agreed upon in regards to its definition. J. D. Williams, Takaku, and Bauman (2006) conducted a rigorous study in attempts to remedy this problem and fill the gap. They conducted a four-year study wherein they sought to determine the effect of frequent WC visitation on students' writing performance as measured through grades. Participants were 256 international ESL students, primarily from Japan. They found that students who were more frequent with visiting the WC had better grades, regardless of their instructor or the

quality of their instruction. This study proves that when ESL students have the motivation to seek out help through WCs, they will improve their academic performance. Intuition tells us that WCs can impact other measures such as writing ability, self-esteem, critical thinking, and other soft skills which are much harder to measure but are undoubtedly essential life skills.

The small Gulf Country of Kuwait is a high-income country that is looking for alternative ways to generate employment in private sectors of the society. To accomplish this, prospective employees of the private sector must possess a broad range of skills with which they can create entrepreneurial alternatives. Therefore, reforming education at all levels has become a high priority within the government. Kuwait has four institutes of higher education that are supported by the state, including the most well-known Kuwait University, in addition to several other private institutions in operation, such as the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), the American University of the Middle East (AUM), and the American University of Kuwait (AUK). As of now, only two private universities contain a WC to help their students.

The purpose of this chapter is to better understand the history of the WCs in the non-English-speaking country of Kuwait and to determine when they were first established and what purposes they are serving within the context of the university and the larger society. This information may help educational leaders and academics identify the weaknesses in Kuwaiti universities and what needs to be done to improve them. The data for this study was extracted from the most updated version of the universities' websites, an article that contains detailed information about the WCs within the Kuwaiti universities (Aljuhail & Ahmadi, 2011; AUK: Academics, 2016; The Writing Lab | GUST, 2017), and personal observations. The theoretical framework used for qualitative data extraction is called "document analysis." This framework is a systematic process of finding, evaluating, and synthesizing data that is contained in all forms of documents (Bowen, 2009).

This study will begin with a history of WCs starting in North America, then in other parts of the world. Then we will provide a general overview of Kuwait and its educational evolution. Afterwards, we will analyse English language teaching in the Kuwaiti higher education context. Next, we will critically analyse the WCs in Kuwait based on their stated mission, vision, goals, and objectives. Finally, we will conclude with some insights and pedagogical implications.

Literature Review

Writing Centres: Background

WCs were born in the United States during the 1930s (Lerner, 2009). For decades, they were small in number until the 1960s, when WCs were established in many American colleges and universities. During that time, WCs acted as mere extensions of the school's administration. Tutors were restricted to follow strict pedagogical practices in which they were professionally and socially disconnected from the students they served. Tutors served as useful cogs in the rigid, hierarchal system in which their duties were to instil students with specific knowledge and information. In the 1980s, American WCs began to dismantle the strict power dynamics and transition into a more collaborative peer-based support centre. Landmark essays such as "The Idea of a Writing Centre" (North, 1984) and "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" helped spawn this evolution towards a more humanistic approach. These essays helped spread awareness of the need for a collaborative learning environment in which both the tutors and the students grow and develop. Afterwards, the dynamics of WCs began to evolve into a more community-based approach.

In recent years, WCs have been established in post-secondary institutions throughout the world. For instance, the International Writing Centres Association has affiliates and centres in various locations throughout the world. Higher education is expanding globally. University enrolment is on the rise, and higher education is becoming almost a necessity for those looking to enter the professional class. WCs are being used as a support for students who face challenges in writing or ESL. As global demand for high-quality university education goes up, the creation of WCs will likely follow.

Over the years, the quality of services offered in WCs has improved. For instance, tutors are granted training manuals which guide them to have natural conversations with students. This practice helps them build rapport (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2009; Singh-Corcoran, Fitzgerald, & Lanetta, 2015). This relationship-building process reinforces the concept that a writing tutor differs from a teacher in various ways. Classroom experiences may produce a particular type of psychosis in a student who struggles, and the WC environment is meant to alleviate that anxiety by providing a comfortable setting in which there is a balance

between revision, editing and proofreading, and conversational dialogue. When tutors are better able to understand the student they are supporting through careful listening, questioning, and discussion, they will be more able to develop the writer based on their personalities and unique experiences. These guides are being offered to tutors at WCs throughout the world to improve the professional practices of tutors.

General Overview of Kuwait: Educational Context

The State of Kuwait is a small Persian Gulf country that has been an independent state for over 250 years. Its educational evolution went through various stages as Kuwait emerges as a nation recognized on the world scene. In the early twentieth century, there were no formal education systems in place. Wealthy private citizens often funded Quranic schools, Al-Kataib, wherein the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught. In 1912, Kuwait established their first modern educational institution, Al Mubarakiya. The school was created to educate supply clerks that. The school curriculum offered training in Quranic studies and arithmetic, history, geography, and drawing. In 1921, the Al Ahmadiya School for boys was established offering courses in English. An all-girls school followed this school in 1927. The 1930s was the birth of Kuwait's modern period. Between the years 1936 and 1937, four primary schools were established. Due to the undersupply of qualified talent among the Kuwaitis, teachers from different parts of the Arab world were recruited to teach in these schools (Nyrop, 2008).

In 1938, oil was discovered in Kuwait. Shortly after the Second World War, Kuwait began exporting oil. Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, the first emir of Kuwait, used the newfound wealth to create a comprehensive welfare state which helped establish many education facilities among other social service projects. Until this day, the state offers essential social services such as healthcare and education to its citizens for free. Between the years of 1954 and 1955, the first kindergartens and the first technical college were established. In the following year, a special education institute was established. In 1958, an adult education institute for men was created, along with an institute for women in 1963. To accommodate the rapid rise of responsibility, the state's education department upgraded to a ministry in 1962. The apex of these accomplishments came in 1973 when the Kuwaiti government established their first university (Nyrop, 2008). Educational growth has steadily increased in Kuwait since then.

Today, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education is implementing a long-term education strategy that focuses on modernizing education teaching and practices for its citizens. The Kuwaiti state vision for 2035 is aiming at reforming and developing the country economically via the fulfilment of six strategic goals, one of which is to support human and social development (Ertl, 2014). A wide range of skills will be required to meet the country's economic needs. However, a vital aspect of improving the country is through developing their English language proficiency. This is mandatory for future workers to be competitive in a global economy.

English Learning in Kuwait

English is the second most spoken language in Kuwait. As the majority of the nations in the world, the Kuwaiti people acknowledge that English is the global lingua franca and learning it is a necessary component in preparation for work and travel in a global marketplace. In Kuwaiti schools, English is taught alongside Arabic. There are a large number of private schools and English language schools which offer courses to both the young and old. Both Kuwaitis and expatriates invest in quality education for their children. Kuwaiti primary and secondary schools are expected to equip students with the English language skills to attend university courses in English.

The country's emphasis on English is made clear after examining Kuwaiti university websites. Each university has an English language department, or offer courses in English according to their websites. Kuwait's public undergraduate schools are Kuwait University (KU) and the technical college Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). PAAET offers two-year technical and vocational training courses that prepare graduates to enter the workforce and other post-secondary programmes. KU was unable to absorb the large number of qualified students seeking entry into the University, despite having several campuses and a large number of college offerings and programmes. In 2002, a law was passed by the Kuwait Ministry of Higher Education allowing for private universities to operate in Kuwait. An independent council called the Private University Council (PUC) was created to oversee the establishment, management, and closure of private institutions. PUC requires these universities to be accredited so that they may "contribute to achieving the goals of higher education and applied education in the coun-

try in a manner that provides research service and serves the goals and the need of the developing society" (Al-Atiqi & Alharbi, 2009, p. 6).

To meet this mission of developing the country's human capital, each of the private universities formed partnerships with foreign partners. These universities are intended to help transform the country from the finite resource of oil, into a knowledge-based economy. The eight for-profit, private universities include the GUST, the AUK, the Arab Open University (AOU), the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK), the AUM, the Kuwait-Maastricht Business School, Algonquin College, and Box Hill College of Kuwait. According to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, approximately half of the student population are learning in the private universities (Faek & Lynch, 2015). English is the medium of instruction in nearly all programmes within each university. However, only two of the eight private Kuwaiti universities offer a WC to support their students.

Analysis of Kuwaiti WCs

To better understand the operational role of the WCs in Kuwait, we employ a qualitative document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009). The materials that have been extracted for this study were taken directly from the university's website and a presentation regarding the WC found through a basic Google search (Aljuhail & Ahmadi, 2011; AUK: Academics, 2016; The Writing Lab | GUST, 2017). Our goal is to discover more about this WC to determine the gaps. Specifically, we would like to know:

1. How is this WC supporting students?
2. Is their aim aligned with university standards?

Extracting detailed evidence is hard due to the lack of available information. The Middle East–North Africa Writing Centre Alliance, MENAWCA, lists only one link for a WC in Kuwait. The link is to the American University of Kuwait Writing Centre (WRC) page. It is a subpage found within the Academics section. Although they do not have any links to MENAWCA, another private university, GUST, has a fully functioning writing lab. The remaining Kuwaiti universities offer different forms of student support in writing, but none offer a WC.

Writing Centre at AUK

AUK is a liberal arts college that has formed a partnership with Dartmouth College in the United States. The WRC has been in operation since October 10, 2005. The website claims that it has evolved into a location that is popular on campus. It is unique due to the academic assistance that they are known to offer to students and the support they provide to faculty. They have recently expanded to accommodate writing support for Arabic, French, Spanish, and Italian (AUK: Academics, 2016; AUK: About AUK, 2016).

WRC's web page claims to offer a relaxed environment to support students, faculty, and staff seeking help with their writing or presentations. They offer writing workshops and private consultations where clients are free to exchange ideas to produce a well-developed piece of writing. Students are welcome to go to the WC during their free time or to reserve sessions online through a separate link. They offer 30-minute sessions and students are free to attend a maximum of two sessions per week. The site states that they look forward to meeting students and are enthusiastic about assisting them in the process.

WRC's stated mission is to promote "an understanding of writing as a way of thinking, learning, and communicating." Following the mission statement are six objectives:

- Cultivate an environment of collaborative inquiry with students seeking help with various writing and reading needs, concerns, and goals;
- Develop students' understanding of the various writing purposes, audiences, genres, and styles;
- Develop student' strategies for critical reading and engaging with a variety of texts;
- Support students' efforts in all stages of their writing processes by offering thoughtful and constructive feedback;
- Support faculty efforts to develop and integrate a variety of writing assignments into their courses;
- Provide resources on writing for the entire university community (AUK: Academics, 2016).

AUK's mission statement and objectives provide guidance as to how the centre must operate to obtain the high standards in which they have established for themselves. Their emphasis on a collaborative inquiry environment shows that they understand that learning comes about when we

challenge ideas through dialogue. Collaboration is a strategy that shifts the focus away from one individual who possesses the final authority, towards both parties who will each benefit from the learning experience. The following three bullets address the technical writing supports that students will need to improve their writing. The fifth bullet shifts the focus towards university faculty. This point shows that the WRC staff may also act as aids to professors looking to improve a writing aspect of their course. The final bullet indicates that the WRC also offers support on a macro-level, that is, the entire university community.

The WRC staff calls themselves "consultants" (AUK: Academics, 2016). This title connotes an impression of analysis via dialogue. Consultation is a flexible and fluid process, while terms such as "reviewer" and "editor" can evoke an impression that the department is highly technical in its delivery. The consultants who work at the department are qualified and active in their promotion of the centre and the ideals on which it stands. For instance, two of the WRC's consultants presented at an MENAWCA conference in 2011 a lecture titled the "Redefining the Visibility of a Writing Centre" (Aljuhail & Ahmadi). Today, there are three active consultants at the WRC. Two of whom are bachelor's degree holders and the third is a PhD holder. The biographies of each consultant are included. They consisted of both professional and personal narratives that appear to align with each consultant's unique personality and interests. This merger of scholastic and personal story helps to put a human dynamic to a department that may appear to be academic and intimidating to some.

The online resources are links to external sites which contain supports such as a handbook, citation and documentation guides, grammar books, and links to other supports. Navigation throughout the AUK tab is simple in design and accommodating enough for an English language learner of all levels to use. However, there are no pictures of the staff within the WC, nor are there pictures or videos of the centre itself. Visitors to the site would have been able to get a better impression as to what the WRC environment is like if they had been provided more visuals.

This mission and practices at the WRC align with AUK's mission of being an institution which "provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong learning and professional success" (AUK: Academics, 2016). Effective writing is a skill which students need for success in nearly all areas of working life. The quality of writing is how one's intellect is judged in professional settings, for it is one of the primary ways

in which one's thinking becomes visible to others. It appears that the WRC in AUK is a much-needed asset for both the university and, subsequently, the Kuwaiti society as a whole.

Writing Lab at GUST

GUST is a university that partnered with the University of Missouri at St. Louis to create and organize and develop their polytechnic academic programmes and curriculum. In 2016, GUST was ranked by QSnews as one of the top 100 universities in the Arab region out of over 900 (QS University Rankings: Arab Region, 2016). Moreover, 90% of GUST's faculty hold PhDs and are educated in the North America or the UK.

Information related to the Writing Lab can be found on the GUST website under the Academic Services tab. There are much fewer details found on this link in comparison to the WRC. For instance, there are no details related to when they were established or great detail about the type of atmosphere they provide as expressed via pictures or highly descriptive words. Moreover, they do not offer writing support for foreign languages outside of English.

GUST's mission statement claims that they have adopted a "We Care" approach to meet each student's unique needs (The Writing Lab | GUST, 2017). The environment is open, and students can seek help through a collaborative inquiry process. Like the WRC, the link claims to offer personalized services depending on each student's personal writing concerns. The mission statement is more of a paragraph than a statement. It seems unlikely that students or staff will remember the statement. However, most will understand what they do.

Students at GUST can receive support through the help of the English department's teaching assistant Ms. Rawan Kandari. Also, students will be able to receive one-on-one support through peer tutors. However, the website does not mention how many tutors are available. Unlike the WRC, GUST explicitly states that their services are for students, as opposed to offering services for all faculty and staff. However, instructors and students can make a request for special workshops on topics such as "essay writing, research papers, business writing, and grammar editorials."

The Writing Lab services section of the link offers a detailed outline of the provided services. The services are comprehensive and detailed enough to accommodate students at any stage in their writing or any skill level. The working hours and location of the Writing Lab are available on the website, in addition to the instructions as to how students can book their appointments.

Chapter 10 of this book is dedicated to a SWOT analysis of the Writing Lab at Gulf University for Science and Technology, and more detailed information could be found in this chapter.

Conclusion

Outside of AUK and GUST, we were unable to find any other examples of a WC in any other Kuwaiti university. However, there are many other examples of student services which are providing opportunities for students to reach other measures of success. The WRC and GUST efforts are praiseworthy and should be emulated by other Kuwaiti universities for them to establish WCs within their schools, each of which should align with their university's unique mission and vision.

Both AUK's WRC and GUST Writing Lab appear to be a significant component in helping students within both universities enact their mission on a daily basis and reach their visions sometime in the future. The WRC's emphasis on the term "consultants" and their focus on their personalities in their biographies evoke an impression that they have a flexible approach to aiding those in need of writing support. Also, the website offers an easily accessible menu for clients to find the help that they may require. Finally, the website provides help to clients on all levels of the institution. This non-discriminatory approach to guiding all in need reinforces the concept that the WRC is meant to be a comfortable environment. The Writing Lab at GUST appears to operate on a much smaller scale, but it is likewise a much-needed support for students working to improve their English proficiency skills.

Researchers and institutional leaders can benefit from this research by adopting some of these best practices to be implemented by another university in or outside of Kuwait.

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Salih Abdullah is an international consultant, trainer, and researcher. He is pursuing his PhD in Global and Comparative Education and holds two master's degrees, one in Educational Leadership and one in Adolescence Education. He is Lecturer in English at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Inan Deniz Erguvan is an assistant professor in the English Department at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) in Kuwait. She holds a PhD in Educational Administration. Her research interests are higher education management, academic writing and English language teaching (ELT).

PART II

Writing Centre(s) on the Ground

CHAPTER 7

Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Writing at a Saudi Arabian Writing Centre

Lawan Dalha

Introduction

Developing students' critical thinking skills in writing remains a challenging phenomenon across writing centres. Both within the writing centre pedagogy and the general academic writing theory, there are a few studies that investigate this aspect of language learning practice. Meanwhile, some of the studies attribute students' inability to demonstrate critical thoughts in language learning to the lack of a high-level critical thinking skill (Alagozlu & Sarac, 2010; Borglin, 2012; Klimova, 2013), knowledge also remains little about the way(s) teachers implement critical thinking strategies in teaching writing (Atac, 2015; Golding, 2006), and how students transfer the skills into their academic writing courses. Over the two years of its establishment as a support centre for students' academic writing, the writing centre at Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes (RCYCI Writing Centre) has employed various measures to help students develop their academic writing skills. Using both naturalistic and participant observations as well as a follow-up interview, this study explores

L. Dalha (✉)
Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

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the manifestations of critical thinking strategies in tutors' and tutees' interaction as reflected in tutees' writing in RCYCI Writing Centre. The results show that, though most tutors are aware of critical thinking as a strategy for teaching academic writing, majority of students remain unaware about it, and only a few instances of the practices of such strategy appear in tutoring sessions. It is recommended that the RCYCI Writing Centre should develop a practical model for implementing critical thinking strategy through frequently organizing workshops for tutors and tutees to further raise awareness about the use of the strategy and providing tutors with the instructional model to implement. This process should be adequately monitored and evaluated.

To achieve the goal of this chapter, I first reviewed the evolution of writing centre, focusing on the development of pedagogical strategies employed over time. This is linked to the historical formation of RCYCI Writing Centre, examining its foundational and instructional objectives. I also reviewed some theoretical assumptions on critical thinking to place the study on context. This is further supported by critical examination of some research on critical thinking and writing instruction and narrowing it down to writing centre context.

A Brief Evolution of the Writing Centre

Though it can be argued that the writing centre pedagogy started gaining prominence in the early twentieth century, it is difficult to point to a formal set-up of a present sort considered as the early writing centre. It was the establishment of the Writing Lab Newsletter in 1977 and subsequently *Writing Centre Journal* that began to document the early struggles of institutions, particularly American colleges and universities, to establish remedial centres, which were later considered to be playing the role of the writing centres of today.

Often termed as 'writing lab' or 'writing clinic,' early writing centres were seen by their critics, such as Ray Wallace and Andrea Lunsford, as fix-it shops, storehouse of grammar drills where the focus was on error or poor students (Carino, 1995). Not all agreed with Wallace. For example, Christina Murphy, who also was a critic of the early centres, believed that though writing centres were established to cater for the learning needs of weaker students, they also were essentially meant to develop students' potentials and facilitate their intellectual growth (Murphy, 1991). Hobson (2001) further reiterates this argument that even in the period before the

paradigm shift of writing centre pedagogy from behaviourist to constructivist approach, instructions were mainly carried out with focus on, 'albeit often covertly,' helping the students to develop their writing skills beyond basic grammar rules.

What would be identified as a writing centre in its modern sense came in the 1930s with the establishment of a writing lab by the University of Minnesota and the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa). The institutions, according to Grandy (1939), in Carino (1995) established separate facilities: for example, at the University of Minnesota, the writing lab was equipped with reference books and writing tables where students work with teachers (tutors) on their writing.

It was also believed that the laboratory instructional method, introduced in 1904 by Philo Buck, a St. Louis high school teacher (Carino, 1995), influenced the concept of early writing centres, thus the names writing lab and writing clinic. Laboratory method dominated the early twentieth-century pedagogy and was seen as a departure from traditional classroom teaching. And so, writing centre pedagogy saw laboratory approach as a way of one-to-one or individualized instruction to better help weak students. It was conceived of not as a place at all but rather as a method of instruction (Boquet, 1999). However, due to its quest for space in academic institutions over time, today's writing centre is both a place and a method.

In essence, the writing centre pedagogy went through a series of evolutionary stages, as did many other learning theories, but its foundational principles remain the same up to today—an individualized learning centre designed to support students' academic writing and critical thinking skills through one-to-one tutoring. It depends on the institutional focus, and it supports both undergraduate and postgraduate students. In my study context, for example, it provides support for bachelors' and associate degree students who mostly are studying engineering courses as well as foundation students who are undergoing intensive English course to enable them join the associate degree and bachelors' programmes.

The Writing Centre at Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes

In an Arabian Gulf city built on and driven by the petro-chemical industry, the dire need to create a programme for the development and refinement of writing skills has always been felt by learners, practitioners and administrators

alike. Indeed, various writing strategies and agendas had been developed and implemented, with mitigated success over the years. To further fill this writing gap, the management of Yanbu English Language Institute decided to establish a writing centre, which, after going through some administrative procedures, was achieved on 8 April 2014. I was charged with the responsibility to pilot the centre, a task that gave me an enormous opportunity to explore critical issues in the teaching and learning of academic writing. From the inception, we had centres in three campuses: Yanbu Industrial College, Yanbu University College and Yanbu Technical Institute. We had lots of books on writing centre tutoring, administration as well as writing instruction, which, though influenced by Western concept of writing centres, the new writing centre tutors and myself utilized them to equip ourselves with writing centre pedagogy. Gradually our centre went through conceptualization process to a fairly established practice within the Royal Commission Yanbu educational system.

Despite some of the achievements made, my preliminary study as a tutor myself shows that there is still lack of uniform and established pedagogical procedure used by tutors in the writing centre. The centre is still not far from what Ray Wallace and Andrea Lunsford, describing early writing centres, called as storehouse for grammatical drills where focus is on error. Also, it is not clear whether students transfer some of the skills they learned from the centre into their subsequent writing. The cause of all these, as far as RCYCI Writing Centre is concerned or any similar writing centre within the Arab region, can be easily linked to the common reason for their establishment discussed in Chap. 1 of this volume, which is to model writing centres from North America.

Theoretical Assumptions on Critical Thinking

Although the words 'critical thinking' suggest the idea of the concept, literature shows that it is difficult to underpin due to its complexity and somewhat abstract nature. For example, one of the issues related to its definition is the way some terms—critical thinking and higher-order thinking—are used interchangeably (Halpern, 2003), or with sharp difference (Facione, 1990). Other terms that interplay in the complexity of the concept and how it is viewed, include 'problem solving,' 'reflective thinking,' 'argumentation' and so on. The theoretical views of the concept by various disciplines also influence its definition. For instance, while

psychologists tend to focus on the process of cognition, the components and operations used to address academic practical problems, philosophers are more interested in the nature and quality of the products of critical thinking, such as argumentation (Reed, 1998).

Broadly speaking, critical thinking can be defined as the ability to evaluate information, establish argument and present clear and convincing position in a logical manner. Though we observe there is a variation of views with regards to the definition of critical thinking, there seems to be a consensus on its importance in life and particularly in education. It is believed to be the basis for modern education and an indispensable tool for growth in a dynamic economy. According to Ab Kadir (2015), developing the ability to think critically is indeed an imperative in a rapidly changing world which demands more of individuals in their personal, social and professional domains. Halpern (2003) further agrees that this ability is a necessity for the citizens of the twenty-first century. In a more educational perspective, Tapper (2004) opines that critical thinking is associated with abilities or skills such as selection, evaluation, analysis, reflection, questioning, inference and judgement.

There are two basic theoretical assumptions on critical thinking upon which this study is premised. There is the school of thought that believes critical thinking is a universal mechanism required for basic human survival (Moore, 2004; Casanave, 2004), and so, it is not only central to education, or writing in this context, but also an integral and essential part of reflecting, constructing and engaging with the world (Vyncke, 2012). This assumption is summarily conceptualized by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction (2003), which sees critical thinking as "a universal intellectual value that transcend subject-matter divisions; clarity accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth and fairness." Based on this perspective, therefore, critical thinking is perceived as an important life skill required for making judgement and interpreting the world irrespective of field of study or cultural background.

The second assumption on critical thinking recognizes though, all human beings have the cognitive capacity to think and reason, it does not imply that different societies and cultures practice or see critical thinking in similar manner. This school of thought sees the concept as something unique to the Western culture rather than universal. It presents critical thinking as a culturally specific, uniquely Western concept, an ability which people develop unconsciously as they are socialized in their

Anglophone cultures (Vyncke, 2012). It is the belief of this school of thought that because of their non-exposure to critical thinking skill culture, second-language (L2) learners may not do well in terms of high-order thinking in their academic writing (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996), a notion that was reputed by other scholars, such as Canagarajah (2002). Canagarajah believes that everyone has agency to rise above their culture and social conditions to attain critical insights into their human condition. More so, one would assume that the current globalization and movement of people across borders, and of course access to information, would increase cross-cultural influence, an opinion Canagarajah (2002) agrees with.

Even though critical thinking can be clearly associated with Western culture, given the preceded argument, many studies conducted show that L2 learners have also considerably achieved high thinking order in their academic writing. For example, Vyncke (2012) studied Asian students, who are believed to come from non-critical thinking culture, studying in Anglophone country, and found that despite the challenges of their academic background, the students could adapt to the new learning context by critically analysing texts, evaluating multiple interpretations and projecting their voice. According to Vyncle, the students were able to display a solid understanding and implementation of Wingate's (2011) three components of argumentation: analysis and evaluation of content knowledge, which is the student's ability to select relevant information from the literature and substantiate the writer's argument; development of a position, which refers to the need to establish a position usually presented through the writer's voice; and, lastly, the presentation of the writer's position in a coherent manner, that is, the logical arrangement of proposition throughout the writing.

The achievement of all these components in Vyncle's study is a clear evidence that supports the earlier argument raised by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction (2003), which says, critical thinking is a universal intellectual value that transcends subject-matter divisions; clarity accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth and fairness. It also proves Canagarajah's (2002) argument that everyone has agency to rise above their culture and social conditions to attain critical insights into their human condition. It is upon this assumption that I investigate the sights and sounds of critical thinking skills in the tutoring process as well as academic writing of students who come to Yanbu Writing Centre to seek help from the tutors.

Critical Thinking and Writing Instruction

"*If you can't write clearly, you probably don't think nearly as well as you think you do.*"—Kurt Vonnegut

The above quotation by an American writer simply depicts the mutually inclusive relationship between writing and thought, or contextually put here, critical thinking. The fact that writing is a high and complex representation of our thoughts, it is difficult to imagine a writing process that does not tap from our analytical skills.

Therefore, besides being an indispensable life skill, critical thinking is particularly important and remains a reliable approach in academic writing. In fact, there is consensus among scholars (Atac, 2015; Dwee, Anthony, Salleh, Kamarulzaman, & Abd Kadir, 2016; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Tsui, 2002) on the significance of these skills in academic writing. Vyncke (2012) believes that when critical thinking is applied to writing, the above abilities and skills usually helps the students through the process of argumentation, which ultimately produces the final essay.

Therefore, it is true to say critical thinking is critical to writing instruction as well as writing centre tutoring. Among other approaches to the teaching of writing, such as pragmatic, rhetorical, cultural and expressive, critical thinking is gaining prominence. Some recent studies (e.g. Borglin, 2012; Klimova, 2013; Liu & Stapleton, 2014) show that students' inability to demonstrate critical thoughts in language learning is due to lack of high-level critical thinking skills. Students find it difficult to evaluate information and project their voice, or sometimes they perceive such projection of voice as simply the manifestation of an adversarial stance in writing, by overtly criticizing scholars' research or claims (Vyncke, 2012).

Studies (Vyncke, 2012; Wingate, 2011) show that students generally understand the need for critical thinking skills in the development of their academic writing, but always fail to implement it when it comes to the real practice. As to whether teachers and writing centre tutors emphasize on this need during their one-on-one meeting with students is unclear, and thus, this study poses as a question to explore in the Yanbu Writing Centre.

Sometimes the problem with implementation of critical thinking comes from the tutors' approach and teaching of the concept to the students. A study by Mitchell et al. (2008) highlights that university tutors used non-specific descriptions and vague terms such as 'critique,' 'critical analysis' and 'opinion' to explain the concept of critical thinking to students, leaving

them with more abstract terms to digest. In addition, Paul (1995) believes that if teaching of critical thinking must be done effectively, teachers must avoid the practices of teaching by telling, learning by memorizing, concepts he terms as 'didactism.' Indeed, most scholars of critical thinking pedagogy (Golding, 2006; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Martin & Michelli, 2001) believe that for students' critical thinking skills to be developed, teachers' attitudes and dispositions must align with aims of teaching the concept, which thus demonstrates the contemporary view of education as an experimental space, where the teacher is seen as a catalyst or a facilitator of learning rather than a giver.

Arguing further on this claim, Golding (2006) suggests that part of the challenges of proper integration of critical thinking skills into the curriculum rely on both teachers' and students' efforts. Implementation must go beyond mere focus on results and contents to a more encompassing philosophy in which the school's practices, culture and surroundings all advocate and encourage good thinking.

It is therefore clear based on the above literature; a gap exists in the light of the role of the teachers towards implementing critical thinking education as further exemplified by Ab Kadir (2015). The study, which investigated the teaching of critical thinking and teacher knowledge, showed that there was apparent lack of readiness to implement critical thinking curriculum on the side of the teachers due largely to limited knowledge on the concept of critical thinking. The case was true for pre-service and in-service teacher, the population which the study investigated. In the context under investigation, we deal with in-service teachers, and our pre-survey already shows similarity with Ab Kadir's finding, which its analysis comes in the subsequent sections.

Pedagogical Approaches in the Writing Centres

Though each writing centre trains and utilizes its tutors differently, and it is almost difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of the tutorial measures within the overall practices of writing centres (Eleftheriou, 2011), certain common pedagogical strategies exist and oftentimes are under practioners' debate, for example the effectiveness of directive and non-directive approaches. Literature shows that most writing centres tend to shift strategies towards non-directive, collaborative approach (Bell, 2002; Bringhurst, 2006; Eleftheriou, 2011; LaClare & Franz, 2013; Powers, 2008). These scholars believe that tutors fixing tutees' errors and directly guiding them

on how to fix them, which is the fundamental principle of directive approach, is being prescriptive and does not allow the tutee to understand his or her writing problems or even implement them in subsequent writing. They emphasised the need for learners to take more active role in their learning process, with the tutor just asking probing questions and allowing the tutor to think critically and figure out what is wrong, a notion Gillespie and Lerner (2007) considers as 'keep hands off and let writers make corrections.'

This new approach, according to Eleftheriou (2011), has already become the tutoring norm in most North American writing centres and is influencing practices in the Middle East. However, she further argues that it may not be the effective way to address Middle Eastern students writing challenges due to the peculiarity of their language learning situation. Even though this is also true for Yanbu writing centre, I find it as an experimental ground to explore critical thinking strategies because, using the non-directive, collaborative approach, students could find an opportunity to think critically and reflectively towards developing their writing.

Baker (1988) specifically looks at the possibilities of critical thinking in writing centre. Her research, which reviews various research on critical thinking, particularly on the complexity of its definition, sheds more light on the application of the concept in the writing centre, but does not provide the basis by which theoretical principles discussed are examined through participants' voices. This is one of the gaps the current study seeks to address by collecting and analysing data from major writing centre stakeholders—tutors and tutees.

Methodology

This work is basically a qualitative study, adopting an ethnographic approach to explore the manifestations of critical thinking strategies in the tutoring and writing practices of RCYCI Writing Centre. Ethnographic method is an attempt to obtain a holistic picture of a particular setting or situation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Ethnography is believed to be associated first with cultural studies, but due to the intricate relationship between language and culture, it was later applied by language scholars to study to have a deeper insight into L2 learning context (Dornyei, 2007; Duff, 2002; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001).

Generally speaking, this study is based on three fundamental questions:

1. To what extent tutors and tutees at RCYCI Writing Centre are aware of critical thinking strategies as ways for improving academic writing skills?
2. To what extent critical thinking strategies are explored by tutors and tutees in RCYCI Writing Centre?
3. What are the possible challenges involved in the implementation of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre?

Data Collection

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) argue that the key tools in all ethnographic studies are in-depth interviewing and continual, ongoing participant observation of a situation. Therefore, the main tools used for data collection in this study were observation and interview. Observation is a method of data collection where the researcher merely observes the research situation and record whatever he/she observes without any interference. There are two types of observations: naturalistic and participant observation. It is considered naturalistic when the researcher's role is just to watch even unfolding and record. It becomes participant observation when the researcher participates in the activities being observed. In other words, he/she is part of what is being observed. More so, we use participant observation when we want to have a first-hand experience or a deeper insight into the situation, even though there is an argument over the possibility of the researcher influencing the responses. I use this technique being myself also a tutor in the centre. So, while tutoring I observed and evaluated students' writing, also reflected on my practices. I also used naturalistic by observing other tutors working with students.

The observation was carried out for one semester, a period of 14 weeks, in 2016. I observed nine tutors in a total of 89 sessions, involving 74 students. I used field notes and journals to record my observations. The 9 tutors were selected out of 16 using purposeful sampling technique in order to target a period in the writing centre schedule when students often visited. There were certain hours, for example 9 am–11 am and 1 pm–4 pm, when student did not have time to visit the centre because their regular classes were scheduled in those hours, an issue that I will also discuss in the analysis of results.

In addition to observation, I also used semi-structure interview, where I asked tutors and tutees questions about their knowledge and opinion on critical thinking strategies in developing students' academic writing skills. Interview is considered to be the most commonly used data collection tool in qualitative research (Briggs, 1986). It is indeed used to explore the feelings, thoughts and intentions of others, their 'inner-world,' that which cannot be directly observed or measured (Vyncke, 2012). Echoing this, Forsey (2012) further states that interview can provide detailed, rich insights, which surveys and observations cannot capture to the same in-depth level.

The respondents of the interview were the same tutors I observed during the 14 weeks' period. I asked them questions related to their experience as writing centre tutors. Each interview lasted about 7–10 minutes. For the tutees, since it was impossible to track and interview all the 74 I earlier observed, I therefore selected 30 using stratified and random sampling technique. I first used stratified sampling to group them into three strata: foundation, associate degree and bachelor's degree, which are the three groups of students within the colleges visiting the writing centre. At the second level, I randomly selected 10 students from each stratum, making 30, to represent their group. Thirty may appear to be a small number that may not allow for a generalization, but it provides an adequate representation of all the various categories of tutees that came to the centre during the research period and obviously, the visitation trend in general.

To ensure compliance with research ethics, a consent form was first signed by the respondents confirming their willingness to participate in the study. Also, a number (e.g. Tutor 1, Tutee 4) was used to represent them in order to close their identity.

Data Analysis

Since this is purely an ethnographic study, I used 'thick description' for my analysis. Thick description is a commonly used method for analysis in ethnographic studies, which, according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), involves detailed description, often using extensive quotations, of the researcher's field work experience. In this section, I provide an analysis and interpretation of the field notes and journal records I collected during the observation as well as the interview scripts, which I transcribed. In the analysis, I also used my personal experience as a tutor and a participant observer to make inferences, employing all effort to avoid my personal

views influencing the result or what ethnographers called 'judgemental orientation.' I further used 'member checking,' a strategy applied in ethnography to allow research participants to review what the researcher has written to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Results

Using thick description to analyse both the field notes from 14 weeks of observation and the responses of the interview administered on 9 teachers and 30 students, result were obtained and presented based on the research questions.

The Extent of Tutors' and Tutees' Awareness About Critical Thinking Skills as Strategies in Academic Writing

Majority of the tutors I interviewed responded that they were aware of critical thinking skills as strategies in writing instruction. For example, they made reference to when they taught argumentative writing. One of the respondents, in particular, says:

> "*When I taught IELTS classes, I used to group my students into two, each group would write their points for or against a topic, then they would develop an essay based on those points.*" (Tutor 3)

Making reference to a bachelor's degree course in academic writing, one respondent also said:

> "*We asked our students to use critical thinking when we teach them comparison and contrast paragraph.*" (Tutor 4)

Nearly all the tutees did not demonstrate any awareness about the concept of critical thinking. For example, when answering my question on whether he was aware of the concept of critical thinking in academic writing, Tutee 3 says:

> "*Uh … no. we only know how to write topic sentence and details. Is it something … about thinking?*"

Another respondent says:

"*I don't know critical thinking*"

After I clarified to him, giving him a general idea what it meant in writing, he then said:

"*We write paragraphs about advantages and disadvantages, also about comparison. May be something like this?*" (Tutee 11)

The above response, however, shows some indirect links between the tutee's understanding of critical thinking and the concept, but not necessarily how it is applied in writing. All the very few that showed some understanding was in similar way.

When I further tried to find out about the stages and elements of critical thinking they employed in their instruction, the answers were also unclear. They tend to use non-specific description and vague terms in their explanation, a similar situation Mitchell et al. (2008) highlight about university tutors' explanation of critical thinking. They further argue that this approach only leaves students with abstract and unclear terms.

The observation result also shows similar trend. There was no direct reference to the concept in tutor–tutee interaction, and most discussion did not appear to provoke students' critical thinking faculty. Attitudes and dispositions demonstrated in the sessions do not align with contemporary views of education, which Golding (2006) and Lillis and Turner (2001) describe as a system where teacher is just a facilitator that helps the learner to discover himself.

With regards to the tutees' level of awareness about critical thinking skills, my study appears different from Wingate (2011) and Vyncke (2012), which claim that students generally understand the need for critical thinking skills in the development of their academic writing, but always fail to implement it in their writing. Even though I did not expect it to be exactly the same due to the peculiarity of my study context, which Eleftheriou (2011) in her study of Middle Eastern writing centre described as challenging language learning situation, I presumed bachelor's students might show some level of awareness because they went through various academic writing courses. It is difficult to answer why they did not, perhaps a question that may be best answered by another in-depth research of the whole

academic writing teaching practices of the institute. But, at this level, it is clear that their lack of awareness might be due to non-specific description of critical thinking strategies by tutors.

The Use of Critical Thinking Strategies by Tutors and Tutees

Quoting Eleftheriou (2011), I earlier stated that non-directive tutoring approach, which emphasizes the need for learners to take more active role in their learning process, has taken over most writing centres in North America and was also influencing practices in the Middle East. Being one of the fairly known centres in the Arabian Gulf, I expected to see this influence gradually establishing tutoring practices in RCYCI Writing Centre.

However, the results obtained show, apart from the superficial level of awareness, no significant manifestations of critical thinking skills in the tutoring sessions as well as from their oral responses. The dialogue was dominated by directive approach with tutors being more prescriptive—fixing tutees' errors and directly guiding them on how to fix them—a method LaClare and Franz (2013) and Bringhurst (2006) claim do not allow the tutee to understand his writing problems or even transfer skills learned in future writing. There is little evidence of analysis of content of knowledge, development of position and logical presentation of the position, Wingate's three components of critical thinking strategies that I explore in this study.

The fact that they are aware of the fundamental principles of critical thinking strategies, tutors believe absence of these three components or using only directive approach would not help students enough, but they also express concern about the reality of implementing of all these in the RCYCI Writing Centre. For example, one of the tutors said:

> "*It's difficult for the students to explain some of the questions we ask them. Most of them only copied from the Internet or didn't have time enough to write down their ideas that they would be able to respond when asked.*" (Tutor 5)

When I asked one of the tutees about the use of their ideas or projecting their voices, which is an element of critical thinking, he responded:

> "*Sometimes, yes, we use, but we usually explain what we read.*" (Tutee 8)

Here he meant to say they usually write what the writer says, of course without having to analyse and show their position on the writer's idea.

To some extent, the above response clearly explains the reality of RCYCI Writing Centre. However, my observation also shows that tutors' effort towards using probes and questioning is minimal. In this regard, therefore, the non-implementation of critical thinking strategies reflects the opinion of Golding (2006), which states that the challenges of proper integration of critical thinking skills rely on both teachers' and students' efforts. He therefore suggests that practice should go beyond emphasis on results and contents to a more comprehensive philosophy of reflective thinking.

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Critical Thinking Strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre

There appear to be many factors affecting the use of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre. I already pointed out some of them in the course of discussing the previous two research questions. I will be discussing them again in details including those observations raised by tutors and tutees during interview regarding the general operation of the writing centre.

Based on the results, there is a consensus among both tutors and tutees regarding the schedule of the writing centre, which often conflicts with students' regular classes. As I stated earlier in the background of this paper, the centre is serving students who are mainly undergoing either bachelor's degree or an associate degree in engineering. So, they have regular classes usually from 7 am to 6 pm, with ten-minute break in between every hour, for example lecture at 7:15 am ends at 8:05 am, and the next one begins at 8:15 am. This is exactly the schedule of the Writing Centre, but instead of 7 am–6 pm, it starts at 9:15 am and closes at 3:05 pm.

Therefore, because the students' regular classes are usually packed with lectures, the only time they have to visit the writing centre is during the ten minutes' break, often rushing to catch the next class. In fact, the ten-minute break is the time the tutors change, that is, one comes and another one leaves, making the situation even worst, especially for the tutee. This schedule conflict neither allows them to concentrate and listen to tutor's guidance nor allows the tutors to employ any rigorous strategy to help them in reflective thinking. This concern was echoed again and again in

student's responses when asked 'why they do not come to the writing centre often or even early enough when they had any assignment.'

"*I have class from 7 till 5 most days.*" (Tutee 16)

Another one also said,

"*I have only one hour break the whole day.*" (Tutee 21)

Beside schedule conflict, tutors express so much concern about tutees' perception about the writing centre. Many students visit the writing centre expecting the tutors to just fix their writing.

"*They'd just pop in and hand you their work and expect you to just correct. They're not interested in the questions you ask them … or they don't understand. They just want to go.*" (Tutor 7)

The above response is clearly echoing the findings discussed in Chap. 1 of this volume regarding the teachers' opinion of students about the writing centre support.

In summary, these responses further demonstrate not only the low level of awareness, which I already discussed, regarding critical thinking, but also regarding the function of the writing centre. We can, therefore, sum up the major challenges of implementing critical thinking skills in the RCYCI Writing Centre as (1) lack of deep awareness about the concept, which leads to lack of adequate knowledge to apply the concept and (2) lack of time, especially on the site of the students to visit the centre. Even though, one of the tutors believes that "*if students show more interest, lack of time should not be an issue*" (Tutor 9). He further argues that "*there are times when the students are free and have the opportunity to visit the centre when tutors are available, but they just do not do that.*"

Conclusion

Even though we can consider the level of awareness and knowledge for the implementation of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre is low, it is difficult to say that the culture of critical thinking does not exist among tutors and tutees of the institution. Suffice it to say, this study still assumes the theoretical assumption of National Council for

Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction (2003), echoed by Vyncke (2012), Moore (2004) and Casanave (2004), that critical thinking is a universal mechanism required for basic human survival, and that it transcends subject-matter divisions or any social background. What people need is exposure to new concepts and ideas, and be given the opportunity to experiment. No doubt, required level of exposure to critical thinking concept is lacking in the context of my study. To me, the causes of non-implementation of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre is similar to the causes Ab Kadir (2015) found when he investigated the application of the strategy among pre-service and in-service teachers. His conclusion was that the non-implementation was due largely to lack of readiness and limited knowledge of critical thinking on the side of the teachers. I would like to say, in addition, students' lack of awareness about critical thinking skills as well as about the role of the writing centre plus lack of time appear to be the major challenges in RCYCI Writing Centre.

Therefore, I would like to recommend the following measures that would help to implement the use of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre to help students improve their academic writing skills:

- The writing centre administration, in collaboration with Yanbu English Language Institute, should develop a comprehensive model of implementing critical thinking strategies in the centre. This model should include the following:
  - A provision for workshop series to be conducted frequently for tutors and students mainly to raise awareness about critical thinking skills and to develop tutors' knowledge and implementation skills.
  - A timeline of activities that would include pre-implementation activities, implementation activities and post-implementation activities that propose evaluation and further plan.

Finally, this research did not explore every aspect of critical thinking skills implementation in RCYCI Writing Centre. For example, it has not explored the relationship between academic writing courses taught within the colleges and the development of students' critical thinking skills in the writing centre. I believe it has left a gap for further experimental investigation into the effect of critical thinking strategies in RCYCI Writing Centre.

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Lawan Dalha is the pioneer writing centre coordinator at Royal Commission Yanbu Colleges and Institutes. He holds a master's degree in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and has 16 years of experience teaching English and Applied Linguistics in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. His work has been published in many refereed academic journals and presented at international conferences. His research interests are at the intersection of language pedagogy, cognitive science and technology. He is also on the editorial advisory board of *TESOL Journal*.

CHAPTER 8

There May Have Been Other Stuff Going On: Affective Labor and the Writing Center as a Safe House

Ken Nielsen

Introduction

"She was nervous about starting to write." "He said he was a little taken aback by this prompt and scared about the writing process because it was so much less directive than he was used to." "[the student] seemed very anxious when he came in, and explained that he feels out of practice with writing and is very nervous about performing well in his classes." "She was pretty shot down in general. I think she was anxious about the deadline, but there may have been other stuff going on."

The quotes above are all taken from client reports written by consultants in the New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Writing Center, where we hold upward of 600 45-minute one-on-one consultations each

Most of the information in this article pertaining to the mission of the NYUAD Writing Center and its policies was initially written in collaboration with Dr. Marion Wrenn, director of the NYU Abu Dhabi Writing Program, and Luise Beaumont, writing center manager at NYU Abu Dhabi. None of this could have been written without them. I am grateful to be their colleague.

K. Nielsen (✉)
New York University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

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semester.[1] According to data from the NYUAD Admissions Office (available on the NYUAD website), NYUAD currently has students with approximately 110 nationalities (including dual nationalities) with the two main nationalities represented being the United States and the United Arab Emirates. Among them, students speak more than 116 different languages and approximately 92% speak at least two languages or more and 42% speaking at least three languages or more. While these numbers must be read with some caution, it is clear that NYUAD is a linguistically and culturally rich community. Indeed, this cultural and linguistic diversity is a defining feature of the liberal arts education offered at NYUAD. Such richness, however, also presents the writing center with particular challenges in serving our students' needs in terms of helping them write in strong academic English and master or navigate the particular—and for many students alien—codes of academia.

The few quotes above indicate the extent to which writing center consultants—as we call the writing instructors staffing the NYUAD Writing Center—do far more than coach students in the formal elements of academic writing and the mechanics of sentence level production: they work closely with the students as people, as young writers often struggling with the workload and with the academic demands of entering an elite university with complicated and foreign codes of behavior; in other words, "the other stuff" beyond the writing of an individual paper. This short chapter seeks to think about this "other stuff," suggesting that, in fact, it is just as much in the "other stuff" involved in participating in the university as a writer that the writing center, in particular in an international setting, can function as a "safe house" for students to try and fail and try again. It suggests that it is through the "affective labor"—a complicated term in writing center work—performed by the writing center consultants that the writing center can serve as a space for translation and growth for the multilingual, multicultural student unfamiliar, perhaps, with the conventions of North American academia. Arguably, it is through this affective labor that consultants help produce not only better writers, as Stephen M. North (1984) famously named the writing center's mission to be in his 1984 polemic "The Idea of a Writing Center," but also simply better and more confident writing one paper at a time.

Before delving into some specific case studies, a few words on the NYUAD Writing Center, the data analyzed in this chapter, and the theoretical conversation underpinning its ideas and suggestions will be presented.

The NYUAD Writing Center

The NYUAD Writing Center supports students at any stage in the writing, articulation, and expression of ideas. The writing center consultants are experienced readers and writers who work with students in one-on-one writing consultations, helping to develop strategies for revision of assignments or papers, teaching specific writing skills, and facilitating a deeper understanding of the student's own writing process. The NYUAD Writing Center is open to students from any field or discipline, and consultants work with all types of writing assignments, papers, and projects. In addition to writing consultations, the NYUAD Writing Center also offers specific consultations for oral expression and public presentations, capstone projects (the culminating project for all NYUAD students), and support for students with English language needs.

It is a fundamental belief of the NYUAD Writing Center (and the writing program for which it is a cocurricular space) that written and oral expression foster critical thinking, and, as such, writing consultations are at the heart of the writing center. Through our consultations, students are encouraged to find their voice and expand their critical thinking skills through the recursive process of writing.

As the above description makes clear, the NYUAD Writing Center is firmly rooted in a North American culture for Writing Centers and Writing Center work; however, we also firmly believe that our student population necessitates a constant evaluation of the kind of work we do, or, maybe more pointedly, the ways in which the NYUAD Writing Center needs to be more than an imagined North American space on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. It needs to be a place where an articulation of the struggle to understand new codes and ways of knowing is possible rather than a place of erasure of difference and streamlining of student work, rhetorical registers, and ways of knowing.

The specific examples in this article of consultants' affective labor with students stem from the reports consultants write following each consultation. In the Writing Center at NYUAD, writing center consultants write reports following each 45-minute consultation. In their reports, consultants are asked to reflect on the following questions (with the directions given to consultants in the *Writing Instructor Handbook*):

1. What happened?

- Here, you will briefly describe what you did in the consultation.
- Guiding questions: What did you work on (structure, thesis statement, argumentation, transitions, etc.)? What writing strategies and/or methods did you use (free-writing, clustering, reverse outlining, etc.)?

2. Students needs/progress

- Here, you will describe what areas you believe the student needs to work on and how the student is progressing. If you're seeing the student regularly, you can assess progress throughout the semester. If it's a one-off consultation, please assess the student's progress in the specific consultation.
- Guiding questions: What patterns do you see in his or her writing? What did not work at first, but later on?

3. Consultant self-evaluation

- Here, you are asked to reflect on your work as a consultant.
- Guiding questions: What went well in the consultation? What can you improve?

  Remember: These reports are not meant as evaluations of your work, but as part of a reflective practice—a crucial element of your critical pedagogical practice.

The inspiration for the findings—still in their infancy—in this article is based in a careful reading of more than 900 reports from the NYUAD Writing Center during the 2015–2016 academic year. These reports are confidential to the Writing Center—all consultants have access to them in order to be able to read up on students' needs and progress based on prior consultations; furthermore, writing center management has access to the reports for monitoring and training purposes. In other words, within the context of the NYUAD Writing Center, the reports are not anonymous, but for the purposes of this chapter all identifying information has been removed for both the consultant and the student. The six case studies offered below have been chosen because of their exemplary nature.

One could reasonably argue, of course, that choosing 6 out of more than 900 samples lends itself to cherry-picking of specific trends in the

evidence. While I make no claim to a comprehensive systematic analysis of the more than 900 reports, through a careful phenomenological reading of the material the examples below have been chosen to highlight general challenges that consultants and students face in terms of the "other stuff" or the extracurricular and affective labor that consultants perform in the writing center of a global university.

Theoretical Underpinnings

One could conceptualize the writing center as one of the many places at a university in which the university is invented for students. In his landmark 1985 essay "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae famously writes: "Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics, or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Bartholomae, 1985, 623). That is, according to Bartholomae, students entering the university are being asked to join discourse communities that they do not yet have access to; they are being asked to essentially perform in registers they do not yet know—in and outside the disciplines—and though this, of course, must necessarily be understood as a process, students entering the university are asked to participate from their first day in class. As such, Bartholomae points out:

> The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand. (Bartholomae, 1985, p.624)

I am quoting Bartholomae at length here in order to highlight the essential connection between his use of invention of the university as an act (albeit one that the student is likely unaware of), the existence of multiple discourse communities and registers that students are asked to enter

without being aware that they are in fact that—discourses and registers that can indeed be learned—and, finally, the way in which this invention happens: through assembling and mimicking.

In the process, then, of inventing the university through joining the highly specialized discourse communities of academia by "imitating" and "mimicking" codes and registers that may yet be unarticulated, the student is also inventing herself or himself—or a version of themselves. By entering new and foreign discourse communities, they are also entering into new and unknown identities, new and unknown ways of existing in the world. This process of can be—almost certainly is—anxiety producing for any student, first-year students in particular; however, the question of identity becomes heightened, I propose, at the global university. It does so because students enter into a North American liberal arts curriculum not only from a variety of linguistic backgrounds but also from a wide variety of curricular backgrounds. And this is exactly where the writing center can play a crucial role as a place of translation, challenge, and affective support. It is, in fact, where it may serve as a safe space that goes beyond the metaphor of home that has so often been used about writing centers in a North American discourse.

In her provocative and insightful account of the "grand narrative" of writing centers (in this case, North American writing centers) in her book *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2013) challenges some foundational myths regarding writing center work to task. Crudely summarized, the overall argument of her book is that writing center work is complex while the narrative about it is not. Clearly, this is an argument that this writer finds sympathetic. For example, Grutsch McKinney (2013) deconstructs the narrative of the writing center as a cozy home—filled with coffee pots, plants, bean bags, and posters—in which students will automatically feel safe to explore. She writes "The writing center grand narrative that writes writing centers as homes has taught us to narrow our gaze, to see particular items and to ignore others. Peripheral vision asks us to widen our view" (Grutsch McKinney, (2013)34). In other words, the focus on the writing center as a home risks limiting our understanding of the complex work happening in it while simultaneously narrowing our understanding of its role as a third space for student in the university. Though we may want to move away from a narrative of the writing center as a home, I would maintain that it needs to be what Suresh Canagarajah (2004) among others has theorized as pedagogical "safe houses."

Using the example of Tamil students being taught by missionaries in Sri Lanka in the early twentieth century, Suresh Canagarajah (2004) suggests

in "subversive identities, pedagogical safe houses, and critical learning" that these students, deemed insubordinate, were in fact trying to negotiate their own identities as simultaneously Tamil and part of the English-speaking elite. He suggests that such negotiation of identity—oftentimes a conflicted combination of loss and personal development—is ongoing and is integral to language learning. His question is how we may create a curriculum that allows for such negotiation to take place (Canagarajah, 2004, p. 117). His answer is, the "safe house," which he defines as "sites that relatively free from surveillance, especially by authority figures, perhaps because these are considered unofficial, off-task, or extra-pedagogical. Domains of time, as well as and space, may serve as safe houses in educational institutions" (121). If we think of the writing center as exactly such an "extra-pedagogical" domain, we might be able to mediate between the narrative of home and the safe house.

At NYUAD, the writing center was originally housed in the Academic Resource Center, an extracurricular place where students could seek tutoring in a variety of disciplines. The atmosphere in this place was exactly of the homey nature described by Grutsch McKinney (2013). For a variety of reasons, we decided to move the writing center into the library where it currently sits together with Research Services. Geographies matter, and moving the writing center to the library arguably highlights the centrality of writing to the academic undertaking and helps remove the remedial aura of visiting the writing center. Instead, its location in the library makes it a place of student agency and excellence. The challenge, then, I believe is to establish the writing Center as an extra-pedagogical domain that is simultaneously safe and challenging. Grutsch McKinney (2013) points out, "Writing Centers already make students uncomfortable—they make students revise, confront their shortcomings, formulate questions, engage us in their work, be active, and think" (Grutsch McKinney, 2013, p.27). While it should not be our goal to make students uncomfortable, it should be a goal to create centers that are at once safe and challenging, as safe spaces where students negotiate the invention of their university without direct consequences in relation to curricular or pedagogical powers.

As such, as the case studies below show, what we could call "affective labor" becomes central to the work of the writing center.

Case Studies

Case Study Number 1

Consultant Report on Student

What a way to end the semester! This was hard. XXXX came in 15 minutes late with a rambling 12-paper draft. There was a printing kerfuffle. Then, XXXX asked me to correct the writing. I had XXXX unpack what XXXX meant by this. XXXX wanted help with structure and source integration. It quickly became clear that XXXX had no idea how to do MLA citations or how to introduce sources. I showed XXXX a style guide online and explained a couple of things about in-text citations. It was hard to tell if XXXX was processing this in a helpful way. […] We spent a weirdly long amount of time on one sentence that made zero logical sense to me. I kept trying to have XXXX explain it and it continued to make no sense to me. We reached an impasse on this one. We also went over the conclusion. I felt it was undermining the argument XXXX had just made. This led to some tortuous reverse outlining on my part and a meta-discussion about the distinction between a filmmaker and his characters that I thought might be at the root of the confusion. Unclear if it helped or not. There were a ton of agreement and article issues we didn't address at all.

Self-reflection

Yikes. There is a lot going on here. XXXX is super smart and has good ideas, but really struggles with expression and clarity. It's really hard to understand what XXXX wants and needs since XXXX is a little all over the place. […] The consultation felt very jumpy and XXXX kept directing our attention to different issues in quick succession. In retrospect, it may have been helpful to be a bit more directive and establish clear goals for the consultation.

Self-reflection on a Later Consultation with the Same Student

I think XXXX was anxious that if XXXX didn't put ideas physically together (in one sentence or in one paragraph), [the] reader wouldn't know they were related. After overcoming that anxiety, and in talking through and rewriting, XXXX's writing became much clearer.

In this case study we see a student struggling with the codes of academia, and we see the consultant struggling to balance the student's directions and needs with imposing a structure on the consultation that will ultimately

lead to a productive experience and both a more conscious writer and a clearer paper. We also notice how the student wants the paper to be "corrected" and the consultant having to unpack with the student what that means in the context of the specific paper and the policies of the NYUAD Writing Center which, decidedly, does not proofread student work for both ethical and pedagogical reasons. We also notice a desire to balance higher- and lower-order concerns, though, in this case, that seems to have been unsuccessful. This case study is also an example of how much work it takes on behalf of the consultant not to directly mirror the hurried anxiety of the student who does not yet know herself or himself what is needed.

Case Study Number 2

Student Work

XXXX wanted to outline [the] final paper which XXXX has been brainstorming for the last few days. So we mainly discussed XXXX's plan and XXXX created a brief outline. At the end XXXX also wanted to work on source integration for another paper so I explained how to cite a picture and a quote within a source. XXXX prefers to use part of the consultation as work station so I sent XXXX off to write [the] paper sitting in a corner of the writing center and check in with me later when XXXX finished typing up the first draft according to XXXX's current outline.

Self-reflection

XXXX is working really hard to improve XXXX's writing. XXXX struggles to organize XXXX's thoughts and connect everything with a thread of an argument. XXXX finds it helpful to work (write) in my presence so that XXXX can check in with me if XXXX is stuck. XXXX needs a lot of continuous support which I try to provide and hope to see some improvements.

In this case study, an easier case it seems than the previous, we see a consultant honoring the student's desire to develop critical thinking and writing skills. It is clear from this consultation that the consultant is invested in the long-term development of the student and that the student is using the writing center as a space for both writing and emotional support—in other words, the student uses the writing center not as a home, but as a complicated space in which a negotiation of the transition to the university is possible.

Case Study Number 3

Reflection on Student Work

This was one of the more challenging appointments I had all year. XXX was writing a paper about "queer Muslims" and was arguing that Islam's prohibition of homosexuality in fact creates it. I initially struggled with how to begin discussing this paper since I so heartily disagreed with the argument, but eventually I found the best way to discuss it was to focus on how XXXX crafted the argument itself. We talked about how XXXX needed to include a primary source and consider a counterargument and flesh out XXXX's own positionality a bit more. Eventually I think we got to a productive place where we focused on the linguistic aspect of the argument which I think XXXX will be able to develop in an interesting way.

Self-reflection

I was impressed with how XXXX was able to complicate the thinking over the course of our consultation. However, XXXX still needs to work on finding a more critical way of approaching arguments and texts.

This case study is representative of a number of reports in the sample—the ones in which the consultant has difficulty engaging the student for political, religious, and/or ideological reasons. This is a particularly complex situation as the consultant negotiates his or her own beliefs while respecting the student's right to believe something else—a crucial tenet of the writing center and, of course, of the discursive community of the academic. As an extracurricular space—as safe house if one will in Canagarajah's (2004) words—the writing center here serves as a place for the student to be challenged not on the belief itself, but on the ways in which said belief is being expressed. The consultant's desire to "complicate" the student's thinking could be understood as wanting to "correct" the student's thinking, but seems here to be an effort to challenge the student to consider all aspects of the argument and to move into the necessary complexity of an academic discourse community that the student is expected to participate in. I believe that this is good example of a consultation that involves significant affective labor from the consultant and—indeed—as an example of a consultation that may successfully push a student beyond his or her

Case Study Number 4

Student Need

This consultation was a check-in on the student's progress. I had read [the] paper over the weekend and was troubled by how much of the professor's hand was in the paper. It was obvious to me that XXXX edited [the] paper heavily. I asked the student about the process of writing and revising the essay. XXXX mentioned that sometimes XXXX revised a document four to five times. We talked about what was helpful and not helpful about getting feedback from the professor, [another Writing Center consultant], and me. XXXX talked about feeling stifled in some cases and feeling like the writing improved in others. The paper itself was clearly organized and well written. I'm just not sure I like the process it took to get to this point. […] I think the professor has edited so much that I barely recognize [the student's] writing.

Consultant Self-reflection

I felt a little sad during this consultation. However, things turned around when the student hugged me at the end and thanked me for having this conversation.

initial thinking in a way that capitalizes on the extracurricular nature of the writing center.

This case study highlights the way in which consultants oftentimes work as translators between students (in particular multilingual/multicultural students) and professors. In this case, the consultant is faced with explaining the diversity of writing processes to the student and what getting feedback means within the setting of a North American university—here, the consultant has ethical issues with the paper as the consultant is unsure of who owns the paper anymore. What is illustrated here, then, is a conflict between the writing center's creed that we value the student's voice and a professor's demand for a paper that seems beyond the grasp of the student at this level. It is also, I believe, a struggle between the consultant's desire to maintain a space for the student within the curriculum and expectations that the student conform to codes that he or she is not yet fully aware of. It is a struggle that takes us back to the theoretical musings above. I also think the hug speaks for itself.

Case Study Number 5
Student Need

XXXX seemed pretty sleep deprived and at times incoherent as a result. XXXX also has problems narrowing things down to specifics, preferring to focus on broad topics and expanding things further when I ask XXXX to focus.

Consultation Self-reflection

I spent half the consultation wondering if I should send XXXX home to sleep.

Case Study Number 6
Student Need

Working with XXXX is always hard. XXXX has a lot of ideas and a great ability to describe things with insight and detail. However, XXXX has a hard time moving beyond description and making analytical moves. This can make XXX feel stuck and frustrated. I haven't figured out the best way to help XXXX move beyond this without explicitly telling XXX what to do. I've slipped up a few times and done this, but, even then, XXXX tends to slip back into cycles of description.

Consultant Self-reflection

I was really tired and a little irritated, which may have been coming across.

This case study highlights a trend in many reports: a general care for the student who is trying very hard to navigate the pressures of—in this case—the first year of college. Often we see this sort of report during peak times of the semester during mid-terms or finals. Here a consultant is balancing between being a life coach (go home and sleep and come back tomorrow) and trying to meet the student's expectations. One of the strategies discussed below concerns the writing center working with other offices—this is a good example of the need for this.

This case study—unlike the others—reflects the challenges of ongoing partnerships in the writing center. In this case, a consultant has seen a student repeatedly and is struggling to identify exactly what it is the student needs in order to be able to move forward with both the individual

paper (the writing itself, if we invoke North, 1984) and the overall understanding of him- or herself as a writer. The consultant displays concerns that he or she is "slipping up" and becoming too directive, though that clearly seems to be what is needed in this case and, as such, agreeing here with Clark and Healy—as discussed above—that a rethinking of the ethics of tutoring might be necessary.

* * *

What joins these six case studies together is the way in which they highlight the beyond-the-paper work that happens in these writing center consultations. While it has become writing center orthodoxy that we work with students holistically, it is often unclear exactly what it means to produce better writers and not simply better writing. In the case studies above, I have attempted to highlight six situations that asked consultants to do more than simply work with the student's argument and/or sentence level challenges in one individual paper. I have attempted to highlight the affective nature of the work writing consultants are doing in the NYUAD Writing Center.

In his article "Affective Labor," Michael Hardt (1999) theorizes the development of affective labor in relation to more traditional kinds of production. Hardt suggests that in the developed world what he terms "immaterial labor" (i.e. labor that is not directly tied to the production of goods) has replaced other forms of labor (Hardt, 1999, p.90). One can argue, of course, that education has never been part of the material labor; however, writing center work has always been caught between producing something specific (better papers) and producing something less concretely material (better writers). Hardt defines affective labor as: "This labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community. Categories such as 'in-person' services or services of proximity are often used to identify this kind of labor, but what is essential to it, its in-person aspect, is really the creation and manipulation of affects." (Hardt, 1999, p. 96) Hardt's definition of this kind of labor is illuminating in relation to the case studies above by how it reveals the focus on the intangible. In our case studies we see students come in looking for something tangible (proofread my paper; is it good?; check it, please; my professor told me to have you check it), and it becomes part of the instructor's work to divert

that attention to something else—a focus on creating "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community."

That said, if we are to work deliberately with affective labor as a concept in our writing center work, what are some strategies that we may employ, in particular at global universities (or universities with global student bodies) in order to establish awareness of this element of our work and make it visible to ourselves, our students, and the institution.

Strategies

Talk About It

The most obvious way of working consciously with affective labor is by talking about it. As we have seen in this chapter, at NYUAD, for example, consultants are encouraged to use their reports as a way of recognizing the ways in which their work goes beyond the paper itself. These reports, in turn, become part of an ongoing process of development of ourselves as reflective practitioners. It necessitates, though, that writing center consultants are given the tools—without become therapists—to recognize the often-invisible emotional component of their work. I would argue that doing this in a training situation in which the writing center is not identified as a home but rather as a challenging safe house allows for a recognition of the toll of the affective component of this labor without effeminizing it—a recurring challenge for writing center work.

Talk to Students About Process/Emotions

Connected to the strategy above is developing ways of talking to students about their process and their emotions. Here the extracurricular nature of the writing center as a safe house allows consultants to create space for students to talk about the relationship between identity formation, academic invention, and personal development. We have seen in the case studies that this happens automatically, but through heightening our consciousness regarding the affective component of both student and consultant work we allow for a space that demystifies the invention of the university. This, as we have seen in the case studies, happens through working on the individual paper—creating simultaneously better writers and better papers.

Partnerships

A third strategy is to establish ongoing partnerships between consultants and student writers. Establishing a Writing Partners Program in which students commit to meeting with a consultant a set amount of times during the semester allows for a relationship to develop that will strengthen the consultant's ability to help the student navigate "the other stuff" involved in entering academia without, of course, laying claims to the writing center as a space for therapy.

Connected to the strategy above is the necessity for the writing center to establish relationships with other offices and centers at the university so that consultants know when and where to refer students.

Conclusion

Keeping the invention of the university and the identity struggle of the first-year university student in mind, this chapter has suggested that the writing center is ideally suited to being a safe house, an extra-pedagogical domain in which students are simultaneously challenged and supported in their invention of the university. Through an analysis of the more than 900 client reports written during the 2015–2016 academic year, I have sought to complicate our understanding of the affective labor happening in the writing center and outlined a few strategies for understanding and undertaking the work of supporting students in their process of invention. I have suggested that it is partly, in fact, in the "other stuff going on" that we find the importance of the writing center as a third space in the Global University.

Finally, I would like to suggest that if we stop paying attention to the "other stuff"—that which is often unmeasurable in any direct way—we miss an opportunity to articulate what it is the writing center can offer which no other space on campus can. It is not that the writing center should be anybody's home and it is a misunderstanding to take "safe" to mean non-challenging. It is in students knowing that there are writing center consultants who know that the "other stuff" is what writing consists of for most of us that allows us to create a safe space from which to challenge students to grow and understand that, indeed, they have agency as they try out these confusing new codes of an academic world that they are being asked, as Bartholomae puts it, "invent." As such, the multicultural, multilingual writing center is a space of affective, safe, and challenging invention.

Notes

1. This number does not account for the full number of writing consultations performed by writing instructors at NYUAD. Writing instructors are embedded into the First-Year-Writing Seminar, where they perform mandatory tutorials with students. These large numbers of consultations are unaccounted for in the writing center statistics, though it is clear from my experience that the affective labor performed in these ongoing relationships between students and writing instructors is just as significant an element as it is in the writing center if not, in fact, greater.

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Ken Nielsen (PhD) is a senior lecturer in the Writing Program and Director of the Writing Center at NYU Abu Dhabi. He graduated from the Theater Program at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. His work concerns theater history, cultural studies, and composition. His research and his teaching of composition are invested in furthering an understanding of the interplay of popular culture, identity, cultural differences, and rhetoric.

CHAPTER 9

Writing Support in a Transnational Context: Decentring the Writing Centre in a Medical College in Qatar

A.S. Weber and A.H. Larson

Introduction: The Weill Cornell Medicine—Qatar Writing Centre in Context

The State of Qatar is a small peninsula situated on the larger Arabian Peninsula and surrounded by the Persian (Arabian) Gulf on all sides except for its only land border with Saudi Arabia. The country belongs to the political alliance called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar is governed by a hereditary monarch from the Al Thani family and recently adopted a constitution in 2004 establishing Islam as the state religion, sharia as the basis of law, and basic rights for citizens such as freedom of expression and press (as set forth in the law).

Qataris are predominantly Sunni Muslims influenced by the theology of the eighteenth-century conservative Saudi Sheikh Muhammad ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhab, with some Persian and Shia influence from returnee (*huwala*) Arab families from Iran and former Baharnah settlement from

A.S. Weber (✉) • A.H. Larson
Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, Ar-Rayyan, Qatar

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tribes now living in Bahrain. Qataris therefore often follow a strict, highly monotheistic, and literalist interpretations of salafist Muslim practice, such as a complete ban on alcohol consumption (with an exception for non-Muslims), gender segregation, first- and second-cousin marriage, and appropriate dress restrictions (hijab). Some of these practices originate from their traditional Bedouin heritage and not necessarily Islam.

The landscape is dominated by rocky desert, sand dunes, and salt flats (*sabkha*) with no streams or natural standing freshwater (almost all domestic water is produced from flash distillation desalination plants). Due to the hyper-arid climate, summer temperatures in excess of 50°C, and shortage of arable land, the agricultural sector contributes only a small fraction to the national gross domestic product (GDP). Agriculture in Qatar has been criticised as unsustainable since it draws on declining aquifers additionally threatened by saltwater intrusion from drilling. These dry conditions additionally limit other sectors of the economy, most notably tourism and water-intensive industries. Fishing revenues in the Gulf are declining due to pollution, overfishing, and increasing salinity of the Gulf from evaporation and slow discharge rates into the Indian Ocean (Sillitoe, 2016).

Most of Qatar's GDP derives from its tremendous gas and oil reserves. Qatar ranks fourteenth in world oil production at 2,055,000 barrels per day and third in total proven world reserves of natural gas at 24.7 trillion cubic metres (EIA, 2014). Other than sand, limestone, gypsum, and cement (which are also abundant in neighbouring countries), Qatar has no other significant natural resources. Even subsidiary industries in Qatar such as plastics, petrochemicals, fertiliser, and aluminium smelting are ultimately based on the low-cost hydrocarbons produced in the country. These important geographical, environmental, and economic facts mean that Qatar's economy depends primarily on extraction of non-renewable natural resources. Close to 70% of government revenue derives from these finite gas and oil reserves. By definition, its current economy is therefore unsustainable in the long term.

Due to recent advances in US shale gas and oil production and lack of production limits by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the price of oil dropped from a high of US$ 109 in 2012 to US$ 49 in 2016, severely impacting Qatar's government revenue stream and forcing cutbacks in all sectors of the economy. These 'boom and bust'

cycles have been known to economists since the 1970s (Koren & Tenreyo, 2012, pp. 189–217). Diversifying an economy represents one obvious way of tempering price fluctuations in natural resource markets (Ibrahim & Harrigan, 2012). As detailed above, however, certain sectors such as tourism, agriculture, fishing, and forestry are limited by fixed geographical factors and manufacturing cannot be carried out on a large scale due to the recent influx of 1.8 million expatriate labourers in the last decade who are already placing severe strains on existing roads, health, water, and sanitation infrastructure. These workers are primarily employed in construction of basic infrastructure as well as attractions for the 2022 FIFA World Cup to be held in Doha. Underdeveloped transportation networks in the Gulf additionally hamper import of materials for value-added assembly and manufacturing industries. Thus, Qatar has been turning to other sectors and industries for economic diversification, such as education, meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), performing arts, and biotechnology. As education has grown in importance, Qatar has begun to follow international best practices such as providing writing and learning centre services, which are common in the world's top universities.

In the 1990s, international development agencies began examining the causes of economic stagnation, overpopulation, growing social disparity, and low rates of scientific activity and research and development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as well as the Arab-speaking world. Analyses included Aubert and Reiffers' World Bank report entitled *Knowledge Economies in the Middle East and North Africa* (2003). Many reports concluded that growth could be stimulated by developing so-called knowledge economies, which encourage activities like biotechnology research, education, Information Technology and Communications (ITC), software, and media industries that generate what are known as 'knowledge products'. This form of economic activity requires a highly educated and highly skilled workforce (Weber, 2014a; Weber, 2014b).

Before the international development reports appeared 20 years ago, Qatar had already set out on a planned path of national development in the mid-1990s culminating in a formal developmental blueprint entitled *Qatar National Vision 2030*, issued in 2008, and *The Qatar National Development Strategy 2011–16* (GSDP, 2008, 2011). H.H. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Amir (former monarch), and H.H. Sheikha Moza bint Nasser founded Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and

Community Development in 1995. One key reason for this initiative was to modernise the society by upgrading education and social programmes to equip Qataris for participation in a high-income, knowledge-based society that has gained significant regional power in the last two decades. Other initiatives related to Qatar Foundation include the creation of Qatar National Research Fund—the national funding agency—Qatar Museums Authority, Qatar Science and Technology Park, and various specialised research institutes such as Qatar Biological Research Institute and Qatar Computing Research Institute. According to their mission statement: 'Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development is a private, non-profit organisation that serves the people of Qatar by supporting and operating programmes in three core mission areas: education, science and research, and community development. The Foundation strives to nurture the future leaders of Qatar. By example and by sharing its experience, the Foundation also contributes to human development nationally, regionally, and internationally. In all of its activities, the Foundation promotes a culture of excellence in Qatar and furthers its role in supporting an innovative and open society that aspires to develop sustainable human capacity, social, and economic prosperity for a knowledge-based economy' (QF, 2016). Qatar Foundation's goals of fostering innovation and discovery to stimulate economic growth and community development closely parallel the interrelated general mission of Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q), its writing centre, and the WCM-Q Writing Programme which all strive to advance knowledge not only for increasing the technical skills of healthcare professionals, and for providing personal growth for students, but also to solve real-world healthcare problems, including writing and communications challenges (multiculturalism, multilingual hospitals, cultural expectations of care, etc.) in healthcare workplaces.

Investments in education managed by Qatar Foundation have totalled billions of US dollars, and the consortium of six satellite campuses of well-known American schools, such as Weill Cornell Medicine (Cornell University), Georgetown University, and Northwestern University, as well as the British University College London and the French HEC Paris branch campuses, in addition to a locally based Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, are well funded with buildings, materials and supplies, and top-ranked international faculty. Education City produces several hundred highly skilled professionals each year in medicine, computer science, business, Islamic studies, political science, and art and design.

Due to the K–12 reforms in Qatar starting in 2001 entitled 'Education for a New Era', developed by the US RAND Corporation, and the many American branch campuses and affiliation agreements, American-style education is the dominant educational paradigm in Qatar. The term 'American-style education' generally refers to an educational outlook emphasising autonomous learning, critical/analytical skills, inclusion, diversity, equality, and well-rounded individuals. The challenges of both the WCM-Q Writing Centre and Writing Programme to negotiate the transition from the traditional style of Gulf education, the *kuttabs*—which was more instructor focused and memorisation based, with a strong religious component that is unfortunately de-emphasised now in the technical skills-based education city campuses—have influenced all aspects of educational writing, including expectations, assessment, behavioural norms, and day-to-day classroom experience. The WCM-Q Writing Centre and Writing Programme have both made strong efforts to adapt to the local cultural, social, and religious norms throughout their practices (Weber et al., 2015, pp. 72–92). As Badry and Willoughby have warned recently, Western paradigms that do not necessarily fit local practices are becoming dominant in transnational education (2016, pp. 28–54).

The WCM-Q programme began operations in fall 2002 in Education City with 25 premedical students. The college was the first medical school in Qatar and the first co-educational institution of higher learning in Qatar (the national university Qatar University still maintains separate male and female campuses and libraries). The medical college shares the same general mission as its parent institution in New York City:

- to provide the finest education possible for medical students
- to conduct research at the cutting edge of knowledge
- to improve healthcare both now and for future generations
- to provide the highest quality of care to the community

(WCM-Q, 2016).

The Qatar campus of the medical college offers an integrated six-year programme leading to a US medical doctor (MD) degree with a two-year premedical programme and four-year medical programme. The college also offers a one-year foundation programme for underprepared students. As of 2016, 256 physicians have graduated from WCM-Q (*Fact Sheet*, 2016).

The WCM-Q Writing Centre Programmes and Its Initiatives

The core mission of the writing centre obviously involves support of the writing programme as well as other writing needs of WCM-Q. Some other initiatives include: (1) specialised workshops both in-house and for the public on a variety of writing-related topics such as recommendation letter and personal statement writing; (2) a creative writing journal called *Between Seminar Rooms*; and (3) Peer Tutor Programme, which is distributed throughout the institution. The distributed peer-tutoring programme decentres the centre and represents a key and unique feature of the WCM-Q Writing Centre. Parallel to the writing centre ecosystem is the college's Distributed eLibrary, or DeLib, consisting primarily of electronic databases accessible anytime/anywhere (with a small print collection). DeLib provides up-to-date information for medical students at the point of care, or when they are studying or doing research. Both the library and Writing Centre leverage technology for e-learning environments and student-centred learning. The Writing Centre also participates in the region-wide professional organisation Middle East-North Africa Writing Centres Alliance (MENAWCA), formed in 2007, such as its conferences, e-mail distribution list and local events.

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

The WCM-Q Writing Centre is partnered with the WCM-Q Writing Programme and receives support and guidance from the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines located on the main campus of Cornell in Ithaca, New York. The Director of the First-Year Writing Seminars (FYWS) in Ithaca serves as Course Director for the FYWS in Qatar, the main writing experience for WCM-Q students. Students take two FYWS in their premedical years. On the main campus, FYWS are primarily taught by graduate students who undergo pedagogical training and who have access to a wealth of teaching resources at the Knight Institute such as print and online books, a database of previous syllabi and prize-winning assignment sequences written by Cornell instructors. Unlike on the main campus, the WCM-Q Writing Programme is staffed with full-time professors holding PhDs and with substantial publication

records. Due to the highly unique context of an American medical college in the Middle East, the high expectations of an Ivy League school, and substantial numbers of underprepared students, it was decided to employ highly specialised and highly trained writing instructors who normally teach writing within their PhD discipline, such as literature and linguistics, the history of medicine, Islamic Medical Ethics, the Medical Humanities, and medical sociology.

Each FYWS instructor is issued the *Indispensable Reference for Teachers of First-Year Writing Seminars*, a 36-page guide to teaching writing which spells out a general rubric. Students are required to write five to eight formal essays per semester, or 25 pages total, and readings are kept to fewer than 75 pages per week (Knight Institute, 2016). About one half of class time should be devoted to writing instruction, and although students are required to meet at least two times outside of class with the instructor for personal writing conferences, due to the small number of students at the medical college and the focus on personalised instruction, students often voluntarily work with instructors one-to-one during several sessions each semester and pay additional visits to the Writing Centre and peer tutors. According to the *Indispensable Reference*, writing learning outcomes for the FYWS should include the following:

- Writing that is suitable for the field, occasion, or genre in its use of theses, argument, evidence, structure, and diction. (An individual course statement could be more specific about each area.)
- Writing that is based on competent, careful reading and analysis of texts.
- Appropriate, responsible handling of primary and secondary sources, using a style such as MLA or APA.
- Effective use of preparatory writing strategies such as drafting, revising, taking notes, and collaborating (the latter might be demonstrated in peer review, conferences with the instructor, consultations in the Writing Walk-In Service).
- Final drafts of essays that have been effectively proofread for correctness of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics (p. 4).

In addition to the FYWS, other knowledge-building and professions-oriented types of writing occur at WCM-Q: students write research-based argumentative papers in medical ethics courses; in the old curriculum (which has recently been revised) students wrote short reflective papers on

professionalism, patient care, end-of-life care, and so on in the Medicine, Patients, and Society courses. The Writing Centre also provides support for students writing medical school personal statements and researchers preparing peer-reviewed journal articles.

Writing Centres in Medical Schools

Although all forms of communication—both written and oral—are key competencies for healthcare professionals, writing centres are not common in American medical schools due to the predominant programme structure of a four-year undergraduate premedical programme or concentration culminating in a bachelor's degree followed by four years of postgraduate study of medicine leading to the MD degree. Thus, students are expected to develop writing skills in their undergraduate programmes, as writing instruction is universal in US universities. Therefore, although a handful of six-year integrated medical programmes similar to WCM-Q's programme exist in the United States, the WCM-Q Writing Centre and Writing Programme are somewhat unique in the context of American medical education.

One of the earliest Writing Centres at an American medical school was established at The Medical University of South Carolina in 1994. As Smith et al. point out about the writing centre programmes that teach professional writing at the Medical University of South Carolina, 'Writing for an audience of specialist peers is amenable to mastery only within specialist contexts. In fact, writing for an audience of professionals is a cognitive challenge for novices in large part because writing and rhetoric are socialised behaviours, not because prior instruction in writing somehow failed' (Ariail et al., 2013; Smith, Ariail, Richards-Slaughter, & Kerr, 2011, p. 298). WCM-Q's Writing Programme and Writing Centre endorse a similar philosophy which is grounded in the pedagogy of Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which advocates for discipline-specific writing practices, in particular with respect to persuasion (rhetoric), technical terminology, and what counts as knowledge in a particular field. For example, students at WCM-Q take two writing seminars taught by experts from a wide range of expertise—literature, linguistics, film studies, sociology, history, and philosophy, and so on—who teach within their particular disciplinary paradigms.

Students are barred from taking two writing seminars from the same professor, which helps them to develop the key linguistic concept that dif-

ferent discourses with differing norms are used in different areas of both intellectual endeavour and daily communicative practice. Medical students must master the critical writing skill of understanding and engaging a particular audience and must become sensitive to a wide range of communication environments and registers, since on a daily basis their discourse domain will shift, for example, from reading highly technical medical literature, writing coherent patient case histories, talking to patients of varying levels of education and cognitive ability, and writing emails.

The University of Fullerton's School of Nursing in California created a writing centre for its pre-licensure programmes for registered nurses (RNs). The rationale for the centre, which in terms of language issues is similar to the WCM-Q Writing Centre mission, originated in the unforeseen challenges of matriculating minority, underrepresented, and financially and educationally disadvantaged students. These students may not have been exposed to writing in high school, or they may have been English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The assessment of the programme determined that students not only needed assistance in basic language skills, but also in developing and understanding the norms of academic discourse including 'scholarly writing skills, such as creating thesis statements, composing transitional sentences, and initiating a focused strategic approach to addressing their paper's major points with support from the literature' (Latham & Ahern, 2013, p. 620).

The WCM-Q Writing Centre: Transgressing Borders

WCM-Q's status as a transnational medical school in Qatar shapes the Writing Centre's mission and direction. Unlike centres in North America, which often lack strong departmental backing, the WCM-Q Writing Centre has a 'home' in the premedical division, which provides stable institutional and financial support. However, despite the benefits, the Writing Centre's close affiliation with the Premedical Division limits its ability to serve all of WCM-Q's students, staff, and faculty. To overcome this, the Writing Centre must 'transgress' geographic, disciplinary, and cultural boundaries through its programmes and initiatives to successfully promote writing and literacy practices in the institution as a whole. The primary borders that the Writing Centre must negotiate include those separating the educational and research missions, premedical and medical education, and science and humanities disciplines. By transgressing and subverting the logic of these borders, the Writing Centre

aims to create an institutional 'contact zone' on the frontier that facilitates bringing together WCM-Q's diverse professional, disciplinary and cultural identities (Severino, 1994).

Life on the Border

Borders, both spatial and ideological, originate in the exercise of power. Powerful social actors establish borders to control movement and configure the relationship between 'here' and 'there', 'us' and 'them' (Raffestin, 1986). Thus, borders represent 'power in action' that transforms physical and social environments by regulating, restricting, or excluding mobility. In his theory of frontiers, Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin argues that the process of establishing borders involves three main stages: definition, delimitation, and demarcation. First, definition entails determining the location of borders, whether through consultation or force. Next, delimitation means representing borders, or developing a map of the territory. Finally, demarcation signifies the effort to change the physical environment or to make map and territory coincide, including acts like building fences or establishing checkpoints. In other words, it involves converging representation with represented. These changes to the physical environment create a system of limits that translates, regulates, differentiates, or links communities on either side of the border.

Raffestin's theory of the frontier is significant for its potential insights into how institutional structures shape writing centre work. As a medical school, WCM-Q privileges biomedicine and its affiliate disciplines. Most medical school administrators are doctors or biomedical researchers, and they have the power to define administrative borders and assign disciplinary value, which manifests spatially in the institution. As the logic of biomedicine tends to emphasise technical competency and scientific knowledge, writing and humanities disciplines, which emphasise processes and cognitive skills such as critical, analytical, and reflective thinking, may receive less attention. This is compounded by Cornell University's decentralised structure, as the main campus in Ithaca, New York is separate from the medical school in New York City. By contrast, WCM-Q integrates both undergraduate and medical courses in a continuous six-year programme, combining premedical courses from Ithaca and medical courses from New York, fossilising boundaries between WCM-Q's educational

and research missions, and premedical and medical divisions, which becomes apparent in the allocation of institutional space.

WCM-Q resides in a large building with two multistorey parallel halls with smaller perpendicular single-storey corridors branching at regular intervals. The Writing Centre is housed in a regular faculty-sized office, due to space constraints. Writing faculty or students were not consulted on the details of the working space for writing, a common administrative practice (Latchaw, 2011, pp. 167–170; Hadfield et al., 2003, 166–76). The corridors house the institution's various administrative units (e.g. medical and premedical education, human resources, finance), laboratories and clinical skills centres, while research occupies a separate, concealed hallway that frames the building. For safety and security reasons, heavy doors divide each unit, further contributing to departmental silos, as there is little common space to foster interdepartmental collaboration. Hence, the building's allocation of space reinforces and ossifies historical borders between education and research, premedical and medical divisions, and science and humanities disciplines. The Writing Centre naturally aligns with the Premedical Division due to its close relationship with the Writing Programme (FYWS), which services primarily premedical students. However, this makes it challenging for students, staff, and faculty in other divisions to access writing centre services (both physically and conceptually), as there is a common misconception that the Writing Centre is exclusively for premedical students. As a result, the Writing Centre has had to develop programmes and initiatives to 'transgress' institutional borders.

Besides difficulty of access, the Writing Centre's location in the premedical division implies certain values about writing and its role in medical education. First, it suggests that writing is a 'basic' skill that needs to be mastered before entering medical school. This perspective disregards writing's role as a mode of learning and reflection that develops professional competency. It also underestimates writing's capacity for fostering critical thinking and communication skills, which physicians need to practise effectively. Second, curricular concern for the 'hard' sciences (i.e. chemistry, biology, physics) minimises interest in the humanities and social sciences, which students may see as nonessential. While physicians clearly rely on mastery of the basic sciences, overemphasis on these disciplines bolsters biomedical assumptions and strengthens disciplinary hierarchies within the institution. Thus, writing centres in medical schools operate at the margins, away from central scientific disciplines.

The WCM-Q Writing Centre as a Liminal Space

Borders, both real and imagined, have meaningful consequences for the WCM-Q Writing Centre and its role in the institution. Its curricular and spatial affinity with the premedical division exists in tension with its mission to promote writing and literacy across the institution. This tension drives the Writing Centre to 'transgress' borders and create a liminal 'contact zone' for interaction between WCM-Q's various departments and divisions.

In her essay outlining the nature of writing centre work, Sunstein (1998) characterises writing centres as 'liminal' spaces. The notion of liminality, introduced by Arnold van Gennep and expounded by anthropologist Victor Turner, describes an ambiguous state of 'betweenness' in rites of passage; the 'midpoint of a transition between two positions' (Turner, 1974, p. 237). Turner argues that 'liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). As such, they are structurally invisible, maintaining 'no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows' (Turner, 1967, p. 98). For Sunstein (1998), writing centres have a liminal character because they operate on the margins of academia. Writing centre directors often have ambiguous and non-standard job titles, which may cause difficulty with engaging disinterested faculty stakeholders in diverse disciplines, particularly those who actively maintain rigid professional boundaries. As Latchaw points out, 'While few faculty are hostile to writing centres, few are active advocates and collaborators' (2011, p. 233). Through their work, writing centre professionals 'strive to create a temporary space—not exactly home, not exactly school—that offers a momentary respite away from the competing cultures to which our students and colleagues belong' (Sunstein, 1998, p. 11). This ambiguous space results from transgressing borders, and from working in the margins—not quite here, not quite there. In her essay, Sunstein (1998) identifies six forms of liminality at play in writing centres: textual, pedagogical, spatial, cultural, professional, and institutional.

First, textual liminality refers to the shifting, work-in-progress nature of writing (Sunstein, 1998, p. 14). The texts that come through the writing centre are in various stages of completion, somewhere between an idea and a fully formed written articulation. Through their consultations, novice writers learn to adopt diverse perspectives and find their voice. In other

words, writing centres are where texts 'come into being'. Second, pedagogical liminality alludes to the intimate, one-to-one nature of the consultation, and the consultant's intermediary role between student and teacher. The liminality of the writing centre flattens hierarchy and creates a safe space for learning and experimentation.

Third, spatial liminality refers to interpersonal space between client and consultant, including seating arrangements and co-construction of writing. Hemmeter and Mee expand this notion to include three categories of ethnographic space: 'the interpersonal space of the writing centre itself, the broader space of the campus community, and the yet wider space beyond the campus in which relatives, friends, writing specialists, and the clients' ultimate audience reside' (1993, p. 4). Fourth, cultural liminality signifies the role of writing centres in creating contact zones and 'borderlands' where people from different cultures and backgrounds 'meet, meld or mix' (Sunstein, 1998, p. 19). Fifth, professional liminality suggests the blurred, shifting boundaries of writing centre professionals within their profession. Working in universities, colleges, schools, and professional associations, with different levels of education from various academic backgrounds, writing centre professionals defy simple classification. Finally, institutional liminality describes the ambiguous condition of writing centres, which are found 'everywhere and nowhere' (Sunstein, 1998, p. 22). In her analysis, Sunstein (1998) highlights the 'catch-all' nature of writing centre work:

> We house programmes to 'write across the curriculum', to serve ESL, LD, and non-traditional students, to link full-time and part-time faculty, to employ students as tutors, to tutor faculty. We conduct workshops in study skills, reading skills and test-taking strategies. In many schools, our centres sit in the spaces that hold computers reserved for students' institutional words—newspapers, literary magazines, flyers and brochures. We learn to count whatever we can count to justify our existence—contact hours, tutorial slots, courses served, papers revised, test scores and GPAs of the helped and the not helped. We are a place which invites student work, but because our work bears no credit, we often sink our budgets into holes our institutional monies cannot fill (p. 22).

Liminal status enables writing centres to initiate a wide range of programmes. As liminal spaces operating between institutional lines, they are well equipped to quickly adapt to local contexts and fulfil institutional

needs. However, there is always a danger that in providing everything, they in fact provide nothing. In other words, when they expand their reach too broadly, writing centres risk taking on more than they can manage (see McKinney, 2013, pp. 38–39). For this reason, effective writing centres 'leverage their liminality' by strategically allocating their resources to meet the needs of a diverse clientele.

Decentring the Centre: The WCM-Q Writing Centre's Programmes and Initiatives

The WCM-Q Writing Centre has developed several strategic programmes and initiatives to maximise its effectiveness and meet the needs of the institution's diverse students, staff, and faculty. These programmes and initiatives have three main aims: to surmount spatial limitations by distributing writing centre services across campus, to demonstrate the importance of writing in health professional contexts, and to 'transgress' administrative and disciplinary borders through targeted workshops to medical students and research staff, emphasising scientific, technical, and workplace writing.

The WCM-Q Writing Centre has sought to surmount spatial limitations by 'decentring the centre' and distributing its services across campus in four main ways. First, the Writing Centre holds walk-in hours at different locations across campus, particularly the DeLib reading room, a popular student study space. Second, the Peer Consultant Programme employs student consultants who are encouraged to arrange their consultations in student residences and other convenient locations across Education City during the evenings and on weekends. Together, these programmes have developed a network of secondary 'nodes' that extend the Writing Centre's reach beyond the confines of the Premedical Division. Third, the Writing Centre has increased its online presence by developing a 'Virtual Writing Centre' on the WCM-Q learning management system (LMS). This site provides students a 'one-stop-shop' of writing services, such as writing resources and walk-in schedules. At the same time, it has expanded synchronous and asynchronous online consultations, which have been particularly effective in assisting senior medical students undertaking electives at the main campus in New York. Finally, the creative student publication *Between Seminar Rooms* brings premedical and medical students into a creative 'contact zone' for those interested in writing, art, and photography.

However, while improving access is critical, the WCM-Q Writing Centre has also sought to increase demand for its services by raising student awareness about the relevance of writing to health professional contexts. It has realised this by developing strong relationships with faculty in scientific and health courses. For instance, the Writing Centre designed a capstone writing assignment for students taking a course in global and public health. The assignment offered students the opportunity to consider audience and format when composing evidence-based policy proposals. Similarly, the Writing Centre collaborated with biology faculty to provide scientific writing assistance to students communicating experimental findings at a simulated scientific conference. Initiatives like these question boundaries between the sciences and humanities, as students come to associate writing skills with future success in their careers as physicians and researchers.

Finally, the WCM-Q Writing Centre has 'transgressed' administrative and disciplinary boundaries by providing workshops to research staff and medical students in scientific, technical, and workplace writing. In most cases, personal relationships developed in the workshops result in follow-up consultations on various work-related projects. For instance, the Writing Centre paired with writing faculty to provide scientific and professional writing courses to Qatari national research assistants. This programme has contributed to developing Qatar's national biomedical workforce. Furthermore, the Writing Centre offers workshops to senior medical students who are writing their residency program personal statements. Mastering this high-stakes genre of workplace writing helps these young people attain their chosen medical specialities and ultimately their career goals.

Conclusion

As Sunstein (1998, p. 9) observes, 'Writing centres defy spatial definition'. This certainly holds true for the WCM-Q Writing Centre, though probably not in the sense that Sunstein intended. As part of a transnational branch campus operating in the Gulf, the Writing Centre is well resourced and strongly supported, but there remain departmental and divisional borders between education and research, premedical and medical education, and science and humanities disciplines at WCM-Q that must be transgressed to promote a culture of literacy and writing across the institution. By strategically transgressing these borders, the Writing Centre—working from the fringe—forms a liminal space that provides opportunities for

creative tension between WCM-Q's disparate communities. This creative tension can lead to clashes, but also to 'moments of communion, spontaneity and insight' (Lavie, Narayan, & Rosaldo, 1993, p. 3). It is in these moments that the Writing Centre's potential as a locus for learning truly emerges.

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Alan S. Weber is Associate Professor of English at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar in Doha. He has taught general humanities, writing, medical history, and medical ethics at Cornell University, the Pennsylvania State University, and the State University of New York.

Adam H. Larson is Writing Center Coordinator and Lecturer in English at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar in Doha. His research interests include writing pedagogy, learning theory, and professional knowledge. He received a doctorate from King's College London, where his research explored social and cultural factors influencing career choice and professional learning in Gulf countries.

CHAPTER 10

Writing Centers in Bahrain: Negotiating the Technologies of the Self

Sajjadllah Alhawsawi and Nasreen Mahmood Al Aradi

Introduction

Historically, writing centers have been part of North American education since the 1930s (Murphy & Law, 2013). They are a support system that most North American universities have to help tutees improve and/or overcome difficulties with their writing and also help educational institutions maintain certain writing standards for their students (Meniado, 2017; Rafoth, 2014). Today, due to globalization many countries have created writing centers including those in the Arabian Gulf. Between 2007 and 2013, two writing centers in Bahrain were established to help Arab students develop as writers. However, there has been little discussion on how these centers operate and the challenges their tutors face.

Through qualitative analysis, this chapter examines how tutors in a writing center in Bahrain Polytechnic perceive their roles and how they present themselves via technologies of the self. By technologies of self we refer to the process through which teachers act upon themselves to adapt

S. Alhawsawi (✉)
King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences,
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

N.M. Al Aradi
University of Bahrain, Isa, Bahrain

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or change their teaching practices. The chapter also explores the tensions associated with tutoring at their college.

Higher Education in Bahrain

Higher education in Bahrain is one of the oldest established higher educational systems in the Gulf region. In 1968, the Gulf Polytechnic was established and later merged with the University College of Art, Science and Education (UCB). In keeping with global trends such as approaches in the United Kingdom and the United States (Mwale, Alhawsawi, Sayed, & Rind, 2017), according to Bahrain higher education aims at sustaining a provision of higher education knowledge and skills that enables its graduates to compete in the global economy (Higher Education Council, 2017). With more than 13 higher education institutions, many of which are branches of famous global higher education providers such as Hull University and Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Bahrain aims to achieve a significant position in the global map of higher education that would allow its graduates to participate in the global knowledge and economy (Higher Education Council, 2017). Like other non-English-speaking countries, in Bahrain attaining English language skills is considered central to allowing graduates to achieve the stated aims of higher education. In fact, the English language is the only language medium in all higher education organizations in Bahrain. Thus, having a particular level of competency in English language is a requirement for gaining access to higher education in Bahrain. Most students in higher education institutes in Bahrain speak and read English at an adequate level and some even excel at it. However, writing is one of the challenges that many students face in Bahrain universities. The existence of this writing challenge has propelled some higher education providers in Bahrain to establish writing centers through which students' writing skills could be developed.

Higher education in Bahrain aims to achieve its national objectives through innovative teaching, learning and research promotion. Students in all universities are driven toward research production and innovative thinking in order to widen the education scope in Bahrain. Thus, building the capacity of students in Bahrain higher education institutions to write in the English language is seen as one of the key to success in promoting the intellectual production of Bahrain higher education to a global level. All higher educational institutions in Bahrain stress learning English and

developing students' academic skills, including writing which is seen as a vital factor to enable students to succeed in their learning journey and move toward the vision of Bahrain to becoming a higher education hub in the region. The Higher Education Council (HEC) supports all higher organization institutes in doing so and observes how universities function and whether they are meeting the national higher educational requirements or not.

Background About the Polytechnic's Writing Center in Bahrain

The writing center, which is part of the language center in Bahrain Polytechnic, was established in response to the needs of the students in the Polytechnic. The idea of a writing center in the Polytechnic was inspired by what some Bahraini academics saw in a writing center in a university in Qatar. The planning for a writing center in the Polytechnic was initiated in 2009 and establishment of the center was in 2013. They initial center was small in size and all academics working in the English Language departments had to schedule several hours a week to spend in the center to work with walk-in students. That system was not very effective as not all members of staff had the time to be there and students had started to have misconceptions about the center. These concerns were addressed by providing clear rules and regulations on the website for all students (Bahrain Polytechnic, 2016). Students were no longer permitted to ask academics in the center to check all their writing tasks; the academics in the center were only there to help resolve specific writing issues such as clarity and organization of ideas. In other words, the writing center was not a proofreading center but was set up to guide, support and enhance students in their writing abilities and knowledge. In addition, the center also has been running some workshops, writing activities and competitions for all students on campus to encourage students to write more and learn at the same time. Although the aim of the writing center has been clearly stated in the website of the writing center and perspicuously articulated by the tutors in the writing center, many students and faculty member are still not very clear about the roles of the tutors in the center. Many students still come to the writing center seeking proofreading and support with developing the structures of sentences in their writing. This issue poses a challenge to the role of the tutors in writing center.

Tutors' Roles in Writing Centers

Writing centers are a support service that is provided in many educational institutions around the world with the intention to enhance the writing skills of the students and sometimes the faculty as well (Meniado, 2017; Rafoth, 2014). Such support services help both students and faculty to effectively, efficiently and confidently function in an academic environment. The working environment of writing centers is often relaxed; here, students can gain feedback on their writing through discussions with either senior fellow students or writing tutors. Tutors or writing assistants are not only skilled writers but also brilliant readers who are able to assist students/clients with their projects by helping them with brainstorming, revising, answering enquiries about writing styles. Providing special assistance with specific writing issues or being a critical friend are skills that tutors in the writing centers often possess.

The roles of tutors in writing centers depend on many factors. These include the location of the writing centers, the tutors, the students and the type of writings. However, there are general roles that writing centers' tutors often adopt. The following discussion illustrates the tension that is embedded in these roles.

One important role of tutors in writing centers is to be critically conscious. This means to have a particular attitude that can help bring respect, energy, empathy, curiosity, thoughtfulness, flexibility and sense of humor to the consultation sessions. Through their attitudes, tutors are expected to able to create what Rihn (2007) called "contact zone" and "safe house". Part of the tutors' roles is to create these contact zones which they refer to as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1997, p. 34). Safe house, on the other hand, refers to "a social space where meaning can be made, where risk-free learning can take place" (Wolff, 2000, p. 45). Thus, it is part of the tutors' roles to propel the students to take a valuable element of risk while learning and attempting to challenge students to think beyond their zones of comfort.

Aiming to create such a safe house and contact zones is not something that tutors in writing centers only involve in once the students attend the consultative sessions. Indeed, these processes are often embedded in the roles of the tutors (Briggs & Woolbright, 2000). This means that part of the tutors' roles is to advocate for writing centers and communicate the notion of "safe house" and the "contact zone" to the students in their

institutions. It is also about reassuring the students about the differences between the space provided by the writing centers and spaces of the regular classrooms or lecture halls. Without proper promotion of the role of the tutors in writing centers and the role of the center itself, students would not be able to understand how tutors in writing canters are different from the lectures that they attend.

Part of the tutors' roles is also to promote the type of tasks that aims to help the student improve as writers. This includes changing students' and the community at large of misconceptions about the roles that tutors in the writing centers are often engaged in (Writing Center, Pomona College, 2016). One common misconception about the roles of tutors in the writing centers is that they work only on students' specific papers (ibid.). This misconception must be corrected by the tutors in the writing centers as their roles include helping students to become better writers instead of improving one specific paper. Another misconception about the roles of tutors in writing centers is that they often challenge the academic conventions of the students' respective academic disciplines. Such misconception should be adjusted by reassuring the students that the roles of tutors in writing centers are not to challenge ideas or the discourse of the students' academic conventions but to enhance it and help the students better understand it. Nevertheless, such assumptions cannot be easily corrected. Tutors in many writing centers still struggle with the perception that many students have about writing centers being a place where writing is improved and not the writer. Students still turn up to their writing centers few days before the submission days for their papers hoping for a quick fix in their work. "Asserting and maintaining the Writing Centre as a safe house has particular difficulties not present in the tension between the tutors' and the students' interpretations of the tutors' roles in writing center" (Writing Center, Pomona College, 2016: an online page). Such an assumption presents a challenge for the roles of tutors in writing centers.

Part of the tutors' roles in a writing center is to help students develop their writer's identity (Guy, Jurecic, Talley, Walk, & Wilkins, 2012). This means that a writing center helps students see that they can write and that they are in control of their writing. The way in which tutors in writing centers provide their prompts usually helps the students to develop a love for writing and thus leads them to identify themselves as writers. Through the use of the right prompts, tutors could help the students insert personal valence or value in the writings which in turn could help students get interested in the topic they are required to write. Once the students are

made interested in the topic, encouragement about their writing and the way they handle it is expected to be provided by the tutors. Tutors' positive comments on the way the students get their point across, and on their ability to use unusual syntax to construct certain points or the use of certain images, are often very helpful in helping students to develop a writer identity. The ability of the tutors to help students to have such positive experiences in writing centers often encourages the student to come time and gain to the writing centers.

Another role that tutors in writing centers are seen to adopt is managerial and administrative roles. In addition to their roles as tutors in writing centers, many tutors are involved in running the center. Their roles include recruiting and training tutors for the centers as well as educating others about the ideas of a writing center (Lefort, 2008). In their book, *The Writing Centre Director's Resource Book*, Murphy and Stay (2012) recognized the complexity and the challenges that tutors face. They emphasized on that part of the roles of these tutors that makes them "teachers, administrators, scholars, budget officers, technology coordinators, tutor trainers, and academic colleagues" (Murphy & Stay 2012, p. xiii). Lefort (2008) maintains that the role of directors of the writing center is particularly demanding on the part of the world where writing center are now ideas. In many writing centers, for example in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, tutors in the writing centers are expected to run the centers, sell the idea of the center, teach as English as a second language (ESL) teachers and attend to their students in the consultation sessions.

The discussion of the literature so far seems to suggest very smooth narrative about the roles of tutors in writing centers. It suggests that part of the tutors' role is to create safe environment for the students to experiment with their writing and provide dialogic spaces through which these students can develop as writers. Having said that one must address the complexity of the tutors' roles especially when it comes to tutoring students whose English is not their first language or students who use English as foreign language (EFL). A different body of the literature, for example Williams and Severino (2004) and Sato, Nakatake, Satake and Hug (2015), suggests that students whose English is not their first language expect writing tutors to perform different roles from the one that they conduct with students who are native English speakers. Although in most of the writing centers in the West and North America in particular, tutors are not involved much in the students' writing, such as at grammar and meaning level, some research (e.g. Blau, Hall, & Sparks, 2002;

Powers, 1993; Thonus, 1993) suggests that the roles of the tutors often change when it comes to students who use ESL. These students expect tutors to read thoroughly through the writing and often give them direct directions instead of asking them leading questions. Powers (1993) suggests that even in cases of ESL students, tutors should act as cultural informants and explain to those writers whose English is not their first language how the academic exceptions in West may differ from the ones that the students are familiar with. Other researchers (such as Blau & Hall, 2002; Thonus, 2002) seem to disagree with the notion of tutors as cultural informants and suggest that tutors should be more direct and assume more of authoritative roles when performing tutorial for writers whose English is not their first language. This research suggests a great degree of differences in terms of the interactional structure of consultation sessions with students whose English is their second language and with those who are native English speakers. McAndrew and Reigstad (2002) maintain that tutors should use different approaches (i.e. student-centered, collaborative and teacher-centered) in their tutorials regardless of the students' linguistic competencies. Williams and Severino (2004) question whether there are other better alternate consultative approaches that could better address the need for ESL writers. They argue that since many of the students whose use English as a second language might have better reading/writing skills than speaking/listening, using tutorials through emails might be a better alternative (Williams & Severino, 2004). The existence of asynchronous (i.e. not in real time) might allow the students time to thoroughly read and process the tutors' feedback and respond accordingly. Nevertheless, the use of such an approach might deprive tutors of asking for immediate clarification about what the students want to say (Rafoth, 2010).

The extent to which tutoring practice in contexts where English is being used as a foreign language should mirror ESL tutoring practice is another challenge for the conventions of writing centers (Nakatake, 2013; Strong & Fruth, 2001). This brings into question the level of English language proficiency that tutors should have and highlights issues around the language that should be used for tutoring. Researchers such as Thompson (2011) and Nakatake (2013), who discuss writing centers in EFL contexts, seem to suggest different reality about the roles of tutors. In Japan for example (Nakatake, 2013), writing tutors work with academic discipline tutors. This means that the writing tutors focus on developing students' writing, while the academic tutors help maintaining the

traditions and the discourse of the discipline. The nature of feedback that writing tutors give to their students differs in the EFL context of Japan. The writing tutors often give their feedback to their students in Japanese. Nakatake (2013) argues that feedback given in the students' local language helps to maximize their benefit. Issues of grammar correction have been flagged by researchers who addressed the roles of writing tutors in EFL contexts. Although tutors in many of the EFL writing center contexts are encouraged to pay more attention to content and organization than sentence-level errors, most of the tutors find themselves in a place where they are forced to negotiate grammar corrections, an issue that remains controversial in the convention of EFL writing centers (Ferris, 2004, 2006; Truscott, 2007). Tutors in contexts where English is used as an EFL find themselves having to negotiate further their roles as tutors and sometimes are required to adopt the roles of English language teachers. This is because they believe that EFL students are different from ESL students. ESL students are international students who are immersed in the English language throughout their stay in the English-speaking countries. EFL students, on the other hand, have fewer opportunities to improve their English language competencies. Thus, these tutors believe that part of their roles is not only giving feedback on students writing but also teaching them the language (Nakatake, 2013; Strong & Fruth, 2001).

The relationship between the tutors and the students often influences the roles of tutors in the EFL contexts. Unlike consultation sessions in the West, students in the EFL contexts often perceive their tutors to have the absolute truth and thus they often do not question them. Such attitudes toward tutors affect the dynamics of consultation sessions in an EFL context. The role of tutors changes from being a person who helps students to become better writers to that of a holy leader that the student need to follow blindly. In extreme conservative EFL culture, like Japan, Nakatake (2013, p. 19) argues that due to Japanese traditions that perceive discussion with tutors a form of impoliteness, "students tend to be passive [when attending writing tutorials] and follow their tutors' advice without any question, and during the sessions, some students do not become actively involved in the discussion". Such minimal interactions between students and tutors deprive the students of a real learning opportunity that the writing center aims to create.

Gally (2010) nicely sums up the tension about the roles of tutors in writing centers that exist in EFL contexts by stating that although the roles of tutors in the EFL context are heavily informed by the American

traditions for helping non-native English writers, not all aspects of the American model of writing centers can be applied to the contexts where English is being used as a foreign language. One must take into account the linguistic, social and cultural significant difference that exists between the American context and the other EFL settings.

The above discussion of the literature conceptualizes the roles of tutors in writing centers. Writing tutors in general are expected to be the ones who create safe environment in which students are able to develop as writers. Also, tutors are expected to guide the students through the process of their development as writer by asking indirect questions and helping them to see opportunities and challenges in their writings. However, such less authoritative roles of tutors in writing centers change when dealing with students whose English is not their first language or the writing centers exist in context where English is regarded as a foreign language. The roles of the tutors in such writing centers start to become more problematic and full of tension. Thus, tutors are expected to adapt and negotiate their roles.

Foucault's Notion of Technologies of the Self

The human being, or human to be, is the main idea behind the notion of the technologies of self that was proposed by the French philosopher Michael Foucault. Are we a complete being or do we always long to perfect ourselves! And how do our experiences help in improving ourselves. This notion of the technologies of self helps locate the agent in context through which he or she can devise ways through which they can adapt or develop their skills and knowledge. Elegantly put in Papadimos, Manos and Murray's (2013) words:

> *the technology of the self is an investigative and collaborative process whereby teachers and mentors, by their own means or with the help of others, act upon themselves to change their thoughts, conducts, and way of being or teaching.*

It is one of the notions that positions tutors in a space where they can address their challenges and also help develop oneself through a transformation of the self and devise new approaches that help an individual to improve themselves. It is not only about student improvement but also about the tutors finding ways that help them deal with the demands of their work in different contexts. Being a tutor in a writing center is a

demanding task and could require a certain level of transformation and negotiation. This transformation could occur to what the person is and what he or she wants to become through negotiating challenges and coming up with solutions that help better their roles. Being a tutor in a writing center sometimes entails continuous intellectual, social and spiritual growth over time and spaces. A space such as a writing center could be seen as a "structure of spirituality that tries to link knowledge, the activities of knowing and the conditions and the effects of this activity to a transformation in the subject's being" (Foucault, 1982:2nd hour). In asserting the notion of the transformation of the self, Foucault states that "the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning" (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988, pp. 9–19). Tutors who were able to work with the North American model of writing centers, that aims at helping native English speaker tutees or ESL tutees who are using English to improve and/or overcome difficulties with their writing (Meniado, 2017; Rafoth, 2014), might find themselves in a place where they need to negotiate their roles when tutoring ESL students or when dealing with EFL students. Through this notion of the self-transformation, it seems that Foucault is suggesting that "there cannot be knowledge without a profound modification in the subject's being" (Foucault, 1982:2nd hour). Papadimos et al. suggest that the notion of self-transformation might seem at first glance as "self-analytical socio-archaeological excavation that, at first blush, seems to be a reflective action that an individual (in this dialectic, a teacher and/or mentor) may wish to pursue only in the autumn of a career" (Papadimos et al., 2013, p. 2). However, the self-transformation is meant to be an ongoing engagement in "historical reflection of ourselves" through which a person must always ask themselves questions such as, what are they in their actuality, what are they today and how do they turn themselves into a subject (Foucault et al. 1988)? Papadimos et al. (2013) explain that the process of subjectivation involves questioning the "normative terms in and through which 'a person understand him/herself 'as social and ethical' creature in relation to others. To whom do these terms belong? And how should they define us?" (Papadimos et al., 2013, p. 2). Such questions help to shed light on the process of the growth of tutors in writing centers and help better understand the notion of self-transformation. This transformation of the self requires honest reflection of the self in order to understand who the person is, how the others think they are and how such perception is communicated. Foucault et al. (1988)

assert that to develop oneself one must be concerned with herself or himself.

The notion of technologies of the self is used in this study to help explains how tutors in the English writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic negotiate their roles and how such a notion helps them to deal with challenges that they encounter while performing their roles.

Methodology

To understand the experiences of tutors in the writing center in Bahrain Polytechnic, the study adopted a case study approach within the qualitative paradigm. The qualitative case study approach is very helpful in capturing the roles of the tutors and the changes that occur to these roles from the perspective of those who perform these roles. The participants of this study were three individuals, two women and a man, who worked as tutors in the writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic. For the sake of confidentiality, the real names of the participants were omitted and replaced with pseudonyms. Adam was a qualified English language teacher with 20 years of experience in teaching English to the speakers of other languages (TESOL). At the time of the study, he had been working in the writing center for less than six months. Jima was a qualified English language teacher with 35 years of experience in TESOL. At the time of the study, she had been working in the writing center for more than three years and was very much involved in managing the center. Sara was also a qualified English language teacher, and had been teaching in the field of TESOL since 1995. At the time of the study, she had been working in the writing center for more than six months. Between them, the team members shared more than 60 years of experience in the field of English language teaching. The countries of origin of the participants were not mentioned but all of them were identified as native speakers of English. There were only four individuals who worked for the writing center, and we could only interview three of them based on their availability. The fourth individual was not available at the time of the data collection.

To answer the following overarching research questions, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and tape-recorded with consents of the participants.

1. *How tutors in Bahraini writing center perceive their roles?*
2. *How their roles are negotiated or/and transformed?*

A set of scheduled interviews was used to illustrate the information from the participants. The questions in the scheduled interviews include questions about the participants' backgrounds, their roles as tutors, the kind of challenges they deal with and the coping mechanisms that they may or may not have advised. The participants were interviewed separately, and the interviews scheduled were shared with them beforehand. The data obtained from these interviews was transcribed, thematically analyzed and then interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

This section outlines the challenges that face the roles of tutors in the writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic. The data from the interviews suggests that these tutors face different challenges which cause them to negotiate their perceived roles and devise ways to cope with the different reality that the context of the polytechnic imposes on them. These challenges include the others' perception about writing center, encouraging students to engage critically with their writing; encouraging students not to deal with writing tutors as proofreaders; dealing with uncommonly discussed issues in writing consultations in the contexts where English is used as native language. The following subsections discuss these challenges in relation to tutors' coping mechanisms.

The Perception About the Writing Center

The first challenge for the tutors in the writing center is the way in which the center is being perceived by the community of the polytechnic. There seems to be a tension between what the center ought to do in relation to the mission of the polytechnic and the expectation of the community in polytechnic. This is reflected in the following excerpt by Adam:

> *The writing center should stick to its traditional roles which is helping the students; guiding the students in terms of their writing because it's all about the university; it is about the research. … The university here is about research and publications. … You can only publish when you have the necessary writing skills in order to communicate your message … and if you [the students] wish to publish and can't write, you can't get your message across then everything is defeated.*

This quote of Adam, who is a writing tutor in the center, states what he thought the writing center should do in relation to the role of the polytechnic and the general mission of the higher education in Bahrain. From the same quote, it could be understood as to how writing tutors like Adam view the writing center. They perceive the center as a space that aims at improving students' writing skills and helps them to become better writers who are able to publish globally. This is significant because it explains the type of writing that the center is aiming to develop, that is, to improve the students' ability to communicate their ideas at paragraph and passage levels and not so much at vocabulary or sentence levels. Interestingly, one can infer from the same quote that the center is probably attending to other businesses that are beyond what it should do, for example proofreading and explaining grammatical rules. That is why Adam suggests that the center should stick to its 'traditional roles' which is to develop writers and not writing. The perception that writing tutors like Adam have about the 'traditional roles' of the center is influenced by who these tutors are and the kind of experience that they have gone through. Since most of the tutors were educated in contexts where writing centers were originated, it seems that to some extent their views about what a tutor in a writing center should be or do is influenced by their actualization of themselves. However, this actualization of themselves by the writing tutors seems to have been challenged. It seems the wider community of the polytechnic is expecting them to teach the students how to structure sentences and proofread their work.

The wider community of polytechnic seems to have different perceptions about the roles of the writing tutors in the writing center. It perceives them as typical EFL teachers whose job is to teach students how to write. In addition, the fact that writing tutors give tutorial in individual sessions and not as running classes full of students puzzles the wider community in the polytechnic. This tension between what is expected of the tutors in the writing center by the wider community of the polytechnic and what they actually do reflects how foreign the entire notion of the writing center is in Bahrain Polytechnic and the whole Bahraini education system. In fact, the notion of a writing center is relatively new to the Arabic context and thus leads to many misconceptions about the roles of tutors in the writing center which often gets conflated with that of EFL teachers. Faculty members and students expect tutors in the writing center to teach English as their counterparts in language learning centers do.

Such a perception affects the roles of the writing tutors in the center and has adverse effect on the way students relate to the jobs that tutors in the writing center do. Since the lecturers of other departments do not seem to comprehend or value the work of the writing center, it is probably not surprising that they do not encourage their students to go to the center in order to develop the writing skills. It seems that they only propel their students to go to the center just before the assessment deadlines in order to get quick help with editing or proofreading. This mismatch between how writing tutors and the community of polytechnic view the writing center seems to cause tension in understanding the role of writing tutors. The way tutors in the writing center view the center influences their roles in the center.

Encouraging Critical Engagement

A second challenge that writing tutors of the writing center had to negotiate in their roles was how to encourage critical engagement. Part of the role of writing tutors is to encourage students to open up and take the risk in a safe environment that the tutors create in the writing center. By that, we mean that tutors encourage the students to identify mistakes in their writing and try working on them with the tutors' help and guidance. However, such tasks are seen as a challenge to tutors' jobs in Bahrain Polytechnic writing center. In her comments on this point, Sara said:

> The major obstacle to me is that if I get the student to identify the mistake then subsequently if they make it again then they will … 'oh yeah I remember [Sara] is saying that' … the students want the answer but they don't want to know or think about the reason why it's wrong.

This quote indicates how getting students to be critical in their work can be a challenge that most of the writing tutors felt that they had to negotiate. In the West, traditionally the roles of tutors in writing centers involve giving feedback in the form of asking leading questions through which learners are encouraged to discover issues and solutions for their writing (Meniado, 2017; Nakatake, 2013; Rafoth, 2014). However, in the context of this polytechnic the writing tutors seemed to constantly negotiate this part of their roles, that is, raising students' critical consciousness. Helping the students understand the importance of engaging in learning is extremely important for these tutors. However, Sara's quote

above seems to indicate that the students are not very concerned with the learning that occurs through the process of gaining the feedback. They are only concerned about the final outcome, that is, whether their answers are correct or not. Thus, in addressing this challenge, writing tutors in Bahrain Polytechnic devise ways to communicate this point to their students. This includes talking to the students during the promotion of the writing center. This is reflected in Jima's comments below in one of the promotion session that she delivered to the students. In her words:

> in the promotion visit, I'd say if you give me your writing and I fix it up between speech marks because you think this is what I am going to do; you are wrong. … You think this my role is to fix that?! But in time I change things, I would say who is the owner of this writing! Once I put it in that way they would smile and understand that they need to do thinking and the writing.

Through her comments, Jima attempts to explain to the students the sort of learning opportunity that she is trying to create for them. Her quote highlights part of the role of tutors in the writing center by eliminating the part that is not in the role. It is not part of the role of the tutors to rewrite students' essays but their role is to highlight issues in their work that the students need to rethink and come up solutions.

Encouraging Students Not to Deal With Writing Tutors as a Proofreading Facility

Students coming to the writing center around exam times or few hours before deadlines is one of the challenges that writing tutors have to deal with when performing their roles in the writing center. This attitude of approaching the writing center around assessment times is a result of how wider community in the polytechnic view the center as we alluded to earlier in the section of "The Perception About the Writing Center". This attitude of coming to the center around the assessment time not only prevents the students from getting sufficient feedback on their writing but also reflects negatively on the role of the tutors in the writing center. This is because students often do have time to work on the issues discussed in the consultation sessions and then not being able to submit their assignment in timely manner. This also reflects negatively on the writing center, especially when the students are unable to get their desired grades. These students often tend to blame the writing center for

their failure. Many of these students receive an initial feedback from the tutors in the writing center and either never come back again or show up once again few hours before the submission deadlines. The ability to make the students return the writing tutorial after the initial consultation was flagged as a major challenge by all the tutors in the writing center. The tutors in the writing center often feel that they have to negotiate their feedback so that they are able to contain the students and make them come again. In negotiating the feedback, they seem to negotiate their roles as tutors in the writing center. Although they still have to take the students through the normal conventions for a consultation in the writing center, the tutors feel that the students must walk away with some answers that they desired. Helping the students to get the answers is one way of assuring that the students would come back to use the services of the center.

The Nature of Issues Discussed During the Consultation

Another challenge for a writing tutor in the polytechnic was the issues that are picked up and discussed during the consultation. Discussion about ideas, planning, brainstorming, writing style, developing writer identity and love for writing are among the common issues that a consultation in a writing center dealt with (Rafoth, 2010; Sato et al., 2015; Williams & Severino, 2004). However, In Bahrain Polytechnic, where English is been used as an EFL, it seems that it is expected from the tutors in the writing center to go down at micro level and discuss issues of grammar, punctuation and spelling very often. This seems to have propelled tutors in the writing center to assess the students' needs in the polytechnic and subsequently provide workshops in order to address these needs as reported by the tutors that we interviewed. These practices indicate a great shift in the roles of tutors of the writing center in order to accommodate the needs of the students who are not native English speakers and do not live in an English-speaking environment. Thus, the tutors in Bahrain Polytechnic writing center often tend to go beyond what they perceive as "traditional roles" in context where English is used as a native language and borrow some instructional element from EFL teachers. Such negation of the roles of tutors in the writing center is very much expected, especially in a context where English is used as EFL (Nakatake, 2013; Sato et al. 2015; Williams & Severino, 2004).

The findings of this chapter illustrate the roles that tutors play in the writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic. Through utilizing Foucault's notion of the technology of the self, the roles of tutors in the writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic can be understood. It helps capture the negation and the transformation process that occurs within the roles of the tutors. The tension and the process of transition that occur in the roles of these tutors were illustrated. The influence of the context in this transition was made apparent. All of the tutors who are currently working in Bahrain Polytechnic came from contexts where English is used as a medium of instruction, and they have experienced one way or another the notion of writing centers and the way they function in those contexts. Coming to Bahrain which is an Arabic state, these tutors are expected to run a writing center in a similar way that writing centers are traditionally run in their original contexts where English is a native language. However, the context of Bahrain Polytechnic presented a different reality which they needed to negotiate. This different reality involves dealing with the "others" whose notion of writing center is very alien to. Both students and their teachers in the polytechnic were not very much familiar with the notion of writing center and the roles of its tutors. In fact, the entire idea of having a place for developing writer is still an alien concept to the contemporary Arabic education system. Thus, the tutors of the writing center started to seriously negotiate the new reality of their roles through reflection on their past experiences and their knowledge about how a writing center should be. In the process of the negotiation they bargain some of the traditions of the writing center and the exception of their roles as tutors in these centers. Through this negotiation, their roles as tutors in a writing center seem to have shifted from being seen as individuals who tutees could come to, to individuals who chase after the tutees in order to provide them with help and support. Another shift that occurs in their roles was in the type of activities that they engaged in. Traditionally, tutors in writing centers are expected to engage in higher-order writing skills that involve helping users to find their voice and their writing identity. The different reality of Bahrain Polytechnic writing center propelled them to shift the kind of activities that they engaged in when giving tutorials. Proofreading and editing to some extent are common issues that the writing tutors are made to deal with in this different reality of the writing center in the Bahrain Polytechnic. This different reality about writing centers suggests voluntary transformations in the roles of tutors in the Bahrain Polytechnic.

The notion of the technology of self helps highlight the influence of the structure on the agency of the tutors and also illustrates the ability of these tutors to negotiate the pressure of the structure. It shows ways in which agents are able to exercise their agency in order to have a dialog with the structure. The tutors were able to negotiate the roles that were imposed on them by the different structure (i.e. the context of Bahrain) in which they attempt to maintain traditional roles of tutors in writing centers.

Conclusion

Tutors of the writing center in Bahrain Polytechnic play different roles in their center. These roles involve attempting to popularize the writing center and the kind of activities that it offers. Part of the tutors' role is to help create a safe environment for the students of the polytechnic where they can come and get help with their writing. Although the tutors of the writing center are seen to be working hard to focus on developing the students to become better writers, in reality one could sense that their efforts have been made to be geared toward improving students' writing. Nevertheless, one should not deny that part of the activities that the tutors in the writing center are involved in are aimed at developing student creativity and enhancing their abilities to think for themselves and develop their writing skills. These roles that the tutors perform differ from the ones that are traditionally done in writing centers. To a certain degree, these roles were negotiated and altered in order to fit the context of Bahrain. Using the notion of the technology of the self does not only position the tutors of the writing center in Bahrain Polytechnic in a space where they are able to reflect on their practices but also help capture the changes that occur to the roles through the process of adoption. The findings about the roles of tutors in the writing center of Bahrain Polytechnic helps to shed light on different roles the tutors in writing centers are expected to play and how these roles could be negotiated or transformed.

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Sajjadllah Alhawsawi is Assistant Professor of English at College of Science and Health Professions, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Nasreen Mahmood Al Aradi has nearly 15 years of experience in the field of education, in Bahrain. She is a lecturer in a Medical University in the Kingdom of Bahrain, teaching diverse learners. Her main research interests are in professional development, teacher training and student learning.

CHAPTER 11

Negotiating Pedagogies in Omani Writing Centers

Raniah Kabooha

Introduction

English has emerged as an important foreign language to be mastered in all Middle Eastern regions. Proficiency in the English language is considered as an invaluable skill which gives a competitive edge to people in this globalized world. In Oman, English language teaching (ELT) is a fairly new undertaking. It was incorporated in the Omani education system in 1970 when Sultan Qaboos began modernizing the country. The Sultanate has ever since recognized the significance of English as a lingua franca and the only official foreign language in the country.

In an effort to improve ELT in the Sultanate of Oman and tackle all the challenges and requirements of domestic and international businesses, the Omani government implemented a new system for elementary and secondary schools, called the Basic Education System (BES), in 1999. According to the Oman Ministry of Education (2008):

> Teaching English became part of the education system at all levels of institutions, from kindergarten to college. Knowledge of the English language was

R. Kabooha (✉)
King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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> required in order to successfully complete an undergraduate degree, regardless of the major. (as cited in Alrawas, 2014, p. 2)

However, ELT statistics in Oman indicate that more than half of the Omani students who finish school and join public and private universities are unable to use the language fluently or in a meaningful way using all literacy skills. A similar situation is observed in the majority of students who are granted scholarships to countries where English is the official language to study for their degrees. These students spend their first year studying English in their respective preparatory programs even though they have received formal instruction in English at schools for 12 years (Al-Issa, 2010). According to the Education First English Proficiency Index (EFEPI, 2015), Oman is at the bottom of Education First's global ranking of English skills and is one of the main regions to register declining proficiency in the English language. The report indicates that Oman demonstrates incredibly low levels of English ability overall and is ranked 58th among 70 countries. In addition, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) performance report (2015), which illustrates the mean overall and individual band scores achieved for Academic and General Training test-takers, indicated in its 2015 figures that the *average overall band score for Omani candidates in* the Academic version *of the test* is 5.0, which translates as a modest user of the language/which is considered a modest proficiency level of language use.

Even though students in Oman receive 12 years of English education in schools, they still struggle with the English language when they enter university. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011) indicated that almost 1900 students out of 2700 students accepted at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 2010–2011, which is one of the biggest and most prestigious universities in the country, were required to join the General Foundation Program (GFP) English language course.

From the discussion above, one could assume that many Omani university students encounter difficulties when they write their academic assignments, term papers, and projects, as their writing skills have not been developed adequately throughout their school years. Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are flooding college and university writing centers in Oman; remedial writing classes provided in the Omani writing centers try to meet the needs of the increasing number of students (O'Connell, 2012). Nevertheless, the majority of professionals at Omani writing centers are expatriates who come from a variety of Western and Eastern countries, such as the United States, Canada, China, the Philippines, Korea, India, and Pakistan (Ambrose, 2016). These writing instructors try

to apply a wide range of writing approaches and strategies imported from their countries when tutoring the Omani students. Research on localizing foreign writing pedagogies has emphasized the importance of negotiating foreign imports with students. ELT scholars argue that when imported or Western writing approaches are implemented for local use, writing instructors should take into consideration the literary practices, educational traditions, students' needs, and instructional constraints in the local context (Barnawi, 2016; Bradley & Orleans, 1989; Erbaugh, 1990; Leki, 2001; Liu, 2008; Muncie, 2002; Sampson, 1984; Sapp, 2001; You, 2004). Recently, studies in L2 writing have supported a critical awareness of students' agency in academic writing (Liu, 2008). Canagarajah (2002) contends that the linguistic and cultural eccentricities that EFL/English as a Second Language (ESL) students demonstrate need to be seen as "resources" to enhance the academic discourse community and be appreciated as portrayal of their voices and personalities. Writing center professionals should help students "in negotiating with academic conventions and creating multivocal genres" (Liu, 2008, p. 88). Studies in recent times have revealed the effectiveness of considering students' agency in academic writing through negotiating the writing pedagogy in EFL/ESL contexts. Thonus (1998) argued that greater participation and cooperation from student-writers leads to more improvement in writing skills. However, there has not been any study conducted to discuss the effect of negotiating the writing pedagogy as an instructional approach in Middle Eastern writing centers. This chapter attempts to discuss the effects of negotiating writing pedagogies with EFL students at Omani writing centers. The following section views the challenges that many Arab students face when improving their writing skills.

Challenges Arab Students Face When Writing in English

By and large, writing is a complex and demanding skill for both native and non-native speakers, as writers have to consider different aspects in their writing, such as "content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary and mechanics, which means using the right punctuation, spelling and capitalization" (Abu Rass, 2015, p. 49). Writers are expected to present written texts that are syntactically appropriate, semantically accurate, and culturally acceptable (Alsamadani, 2010). Because English and Arabic linguistic and orthographic systems vary, it is believed that Arab learners face difficulties in learning EFL/ESL (Alsamadani, 2010). Arab learners

often import the stylistic features of Arabic as their first language; for instance, learners usually "write long sentences with coordinating conjunctions, repeat themselves and argue through presentation and elaboration, talk around the topic, and repeat phrases before stating the main points" (Abu Rass, 2015, p. 49).

Furthermore, the level of explicitness and implicitness of the meaning creates another difference between Arabic and English stylistics (Mohamed, as cited in Mohamed & Omer, 2000). For example, Arab writers often try not to convey the meaning of their sentences explicitly, expecting their audience to be responsible for comprehending the meaning. Jabur's (2008) study about Omani Muslim women's perceived experiences as writers in ESL notes, "the way Arab people write in Arabic is implicit and circles around the point; if they write directly and straight to the point, they are considered uneducated" (p. 6). In addition, Arab writers often transmit their Arabic patterns of thinking to their writing in English. Another problem with Arab writers is the fact that their writing instruction in schools and universities tend to focus on the product rather than on the process. Since many writing teachers in Arab countries focus their instruction on grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation instead of content and organization of ideas, many Arab learners of English struggle to express their opinions fluently (Abu Rass, 2015). The next section highlights some major factors that influence the English-language skills of many Omani students, especially their writing skills.

Factors Affecting Students' Writing Skills in Oman

Several reasons can be attributed to the inefficient writing skills of many Omani students. First and foremost, many Omani EFL teachers are not provided with adequate preservice training for teaching writing. In 2006, Al Rasbiah conducted a study on the needs of EFL instructors in Oman. She found that all instructors believe that they need more training in the area of teaching writing. This indicates that teachers are not well-prepared to teach writing as they should be and only moderately competent in teaching one of the most important language skills. Worse still, teachers' skills are not regularly developed because of the limited number of training courses, workshops, and conferences that are offered to them every year (Al Rasbiah, 2006). Alrawas (2014) believes that despite the fact that Omani EFL teachers may seem to understand their students, they are not able to offer efficient academic writing support and instruction.

The second reason is the rigid curriculum. Sergon (2011), in his study about the English education in Omani public schools, interviewed a number of EFL teachers to find answers to his question of why, with all the effort that the government exerts over the English education and with the 12 years of English education, Omani students still struggle with the English language. He found that all the interviewed EFL teachers thought that the curricula were inadequate and "clearly not challenging or engaging enough for the students" (Sergon, 2011, p. 20). In addition, the teachers reported that the curricula have no sense of continuity of skill levels, and that they sometimes completely underestimate students' English level.

Moreover, the lack of motivation is another factor that has an impact on students' English language improvement. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) examined the different kinds and triggers of motivation of 100 university students in Oman before and during their formal schooling through a series of one-on-one oral and written interviews. They found that the majority of students believed that the materials used in class were tedious and did not offer them enough opportunities to practice, and that the teachers firmly followed what is in the book without relating the content to their lives. Students rarely felt engaged or motivated in the classroom, and one of them indicated that she felt she learned English more from life than from school; other students reported that learning English was all about the grades, which made it boring. Thus, Omani EFL students need the English curriculum and the teaching methodologies to be more motivating and engaging, as well as to be more relevant to their lives.

Another important factor influencing students' English writing skills is textbooks. Al Abri (2008) evaluated EFL teachers' perceptions on the Basic Education English textbooks. He found that the textbooks were viewed as inappropriate, as they did not reflect students' needs or objectives. Almost all of the teachers in the study indicated that they needed to be professionally consulted, as they were the ones who had to use the textbooks (Al Abri, 2008).

Other factors that influence students' writing skills include the limited class time, the large class size (often over 30 students in one class), and the huge amount of materials that teachers have to deal with in class in one term. Additionally, there is the heavy workload for teachers, as their duties involve "planning, implementing and marking lessons, providing remedial lessons to struggling students, giving and marking portfolios

and exams—all in addition to any administrative work" (Sergon, 2011, p. 19). The Omani Ministry of Education tends to place too much pressure and responsibility on EFL teachers without giving them the opportunity to make important decisions related to their teaching. As a result, teachers seem to focus on improving students' marks and getting through the materials at the expense of ensuring their comprehension. The teaching is merely geared toward tests.

As far as the writing skill is concerned, there is a pressing need for the Omani government and educators to improve EFL writing teaching practices. It is clear that there exist various obstacles in Omani's English learning environments and teaching methods, resulting in the low level of proficiency in the English language among Omani students in general and the writing skills in particular. Both EFL teachers and students seem to be unsatisfied with the current curriculum and methodologies, as they are not engaging and out of touch with students' needs and objectives (Sergon, 2011). Hence, if instructors intend to improve Omani students' English competence, specifically their writing competence, among other needs, writing should be regarded as high priority in improving English instruction. Moreover, students should have a more powerful and active role in constructing and transforming EFL pedagogies to satisfy their needs and reach their educational goals. Al-Jadidi (2009) insisted on encouraging Omani students to take responsibility and ownership of their learning. The next section introduces the concept of writing centers and highlights the popularity and importance of institutions in the Middle East, specifically in Oman.

Writing Centers in Oman and the Middle East

A large number of students in Oman are seeking writing support at college and university writing centers due to their underdeveloped writing skills. Ryan McDonald, who is the writing center coordinator at SQU in Muscat, Oman, and the chair of the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centre Alliance (MENAWCA), once mentioned in an interview with Ambrose (2016) about the university writing center that the number of students who visit the SQU writing center has significantly increased in the last few years, especially for Foundation Year students. He further explained that "in the Foundation Program, the students are roughly divided into 6 levels and a student completes two levels a semester. By level three (equivalent to a per-intermediate language learner) they begin

to write, descriptive essays, guides, and plans. This is the level they begin to use the WC" (Ambrose, 2016, p. 2).

In recent times, educators in the Middle East have become more and more cognizant of the importance of developing writing centers in educational institutions in order to improve students' writing composition skills. In the United States, nearly all high schools, colleges, and universities provide writing centers to help students enhance their writing competence (Albishi, 2017). However, writing centers in the Middle East, especially Gulf countries, are relatively new; their value has been only recently recognized and now several have been established in the region (Eleftheriou, 2011). A number of universities, such as the University of Nizwa (UoN) and SQU in Oman, United Arab Emirates University, College of the North Atlantic in Qatar, and the University of Bahrain, are aware that writing centers and studies that focus on the best practices in teaching writing are essential to the success of students.

However, there is a limited amount of literature available on writing center research in the Middle East (Eleftheriou, 2011). The MENAWCA, a corporation established to create relationships and improve connection between English-language writing centers all over the Middle East and North Africa, has issued only two newsletters since its formation in 2007. Despite the scarcity of studies on writing center practice in the Middle East, writing centers are helping a growing population of students (Murray, 2010). Similarly, in Oman, students are flooding writing centers nationwide, seeking writing help and support in order to improve their writing skills. For instance, around 1200 writing sessions per semester are held at the SQU writing center. According to O'Connell (2012), the number of Omani EFL students who have been utilizing the writing center at the UoN, which is the first Omani writing center in the country, has significantly increased since its establishment on April 18, 2009. He also stated:

> The UoN's Writing Center officially began to provide English writing programs and services to students on April 18th 2009, consisting of a modest staff of only 2 full-time employees. Since that time, the perspicacious student support facility has come to be recognized as an invaluable learning facility for academic students, faculty, and the community alike, servicing the needs of more than 38,247 scheduled appointments in less than 3 years. (O'Connell, 2012, p. 4)

In the Sultanate of Oman, the majority of writing centers have a homogenous student body, but their backgrounds, goals, perspectives,

and needs toward education and writing are varied, as in any multicultural university in the West (Ambrose, 2016). Although Oman is considered a small country, with a population of around three million people, there are various languages and cultural values and traditions influencing literacy and composition at all levels.

Writing Centers' Approaches

In recent years, writing center scholars and researchers have started using expressions like "dialogic" and "collaborative" in tandem with "non-directive" to describe learning approaches that highlight the active role of the student and the interactive nature of the learning process (Eleftheriou, 2011). Concepts such as non-directive, dialogic, interactional, and collaborative approaches "encompass terms that are used interchangeably in the literature: facilitative, minimalist, Socratic, and noninterventionist" (Eleftheriou, 2011, p. 1). The non-directive approach encourages students to assume an active role in the writing tutorial. Tutors need to encourage students to have a sense of responsibility toward their writing: "Make sure that writers take ownership," "Trust the writers' ideas of the text," "Ask them their plans for revision," and "Keep hands off and let writers make corrections" (Gillespie & Lerner, 2000, p. 45). On the other hand, the directive approach "encompasses terms that are used interchangeably in the literature: authoritative, top-down, and interventionist" (Eleftheriou, 2011, p. 1). With the directive approach to writing, the responsibility for the tutorial falls on the tutor. Nondirective strategies involve making corrections on the page and telling writers what to do (Gillespie & Lerner, 2000).

A number of scholars have encouraged the integration of both directive and non-directive approaches in the interactions between writing center tutors and tutees (Blau & Hall, 2002; Brooks, 1991; Carino, 2003; Corbett, 2008; Eleftheriou, 2011; Evertz, 1999; Jones, 2001; Shamoon & Burns, 1995; Thonus, 2001; Williams & Severino, 2004). Williams and Severino (2004) argue that even though studies in the early 1990s promoted directive strategies and authoritative roles for tutors, research in the last few years recommends the use of dialogic and collaborative approaches to instruction to help students maintain ownership of their writing.

In the Sultanate of Oman, culture and society play a very important role in the lives of people; educational institutions, such as schools, university, and writing centers, are no exception. Omani students are affected by

external challenges and influences that hinder their progress in English language learning. An influx of expatriate EFL instructors from both Eastern and Western cultures may not be able to adapt to the needs of Omani students (Alrawas, 2014). Al-Issa (2005) argued that cultural issues play a significant role and should not be neglected in foreign language learning. He further explained that learning English includes cultural aspects, which need to be adapted to suit Omani EFL students, in order to create a mutual understanding with students and offer an effective learning context. Writing centers' tutors should pay attention to the religious and cultural backgrounds of students to provide a positive classroom atmosphere. According to Vaidya (2007), a high-quality education commences with the needs and objectives of students, as well as of teachers, and takes the best feasible actions to tackle all the obstacles. Therefore, understanding EFL students' needs and goals at Omani writing centers through negotiating writing pedagogies is one solution that offers a path for progressing further with students taking more powerful and effective roles in their learning process. This approach of negotiating writing pedagogies with student-writers could help lesson or eliminate some of the persistent challenges in teaching writing (Alrawas, 2014).

In recent times, ELT researchers and scholars have integrated the concept of negotiation in EFL classrooms and emphasized the role of students in expressing their preferences and needs. Learners have more freedom and power within a "negotiation curriculum" (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Negotiating writing pedagogies includes interaction and communication in the classroom, where teachers' and students' experiences are exchanged. The subsequent section introduces the notion of negotiating pedagogy in EFL writing classrooms, particularly in the case of Omani writing centers' tutorials.

Negotiating Pedagogy in EFL Writing Classrooms and Writing Centers

Most writing center studies have been conducted in Western contexts, with results that encourage the use of a non-directive or collaborative approach to writing. The effect of this approach has expanded to the Middle East, including Oman, where the emphasis on this pedagogical approach is possibly not the best solution to tackle the specific challenges and concerns faced by Omani students striving to improve their English writing skills. Students in Oman who seek help at writing centers may not

have had prior knowledge or experience with non-directive, collaborative tutorials. However, as tutors at Omani writing centers come from a variety of countries, they often transfer their own pedagogical approaches to writing tutorials. Nevertheless, research has shown that Arab students may experience some challenges in the ways in which they respond and adjust to imported approaches and methods (Eleftheriou, 2011).

Contemporary scholars have stressed the importance of considering students' agency when adapting Western or imported pedagogies (Barnawi, 2016; Canagarajah, 2002; Liu, 2008; Liu & You, 2008). According to Liu (2008), negotiations between student-writers and their tutors concerning different aspects of their academic writing not only inform the tutors of the students' goals and needs, but more importantly, such interactions can help the tutors in adjusting imported pedagogies. Liu encourages local writing teachers to consider their students' agency when adapting imported pedagogies. Social constructivists' approaches in language learning and teaching emphasize the fact that students learn through active, dialogic interactions with their instructors and peers, and with the context (Brooke, 1987; Lantolf, 2000; Russell, 1997). Canagarajah (2002) contends that "understanding the strategies preferred by the students to accomplish their pedagogical tasks will help teachers to encourage students to adopt their own styles of learning rather than imposing methods [or strategies] from the outside" (p. 144). Writing tutors should raise students' awareness of the importance of using their selected strategies and the advantages of representing their identities and voices (Barnawi, 2016). The utilization of such "socially engaged" and "ideologically informed" instructional approach to writing can help EFL student-writers to develop metapedagogical and critical awareness of writing, besides forging a connection between a person and public professional writing (Canagarajah, 1997; Liu, 2008; Pico, 2013).

Negotiating students' pedagogical needs in writing classrooms can provide students with ample opportunities to bring their own meanings and ideas to class (Canagarajah, 2004). Therefore, writing centers' tutorials can be viewed as platforms for social interactions, discussions, negotiations, transformations, and identity construction by student-writers. In this atmosphere, investment plays an integral role "in language learning theory for demonstrating the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment."

Informed by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism, the author of this chapter made an effort to discuss the

effectiveness of implementing negotiating pedagogy in Omani writing centers. Through a dialogic learning approach, student-writers in Omani writing centers can interact and negotiate their pedagogical needs with their writing tutors in order to develop a creative and meaningful learning environment. They can also negotiate with their peers, construct their writerly identity in classrooms, and, at the same time, demonstrate their autonomy of thought and authorial presence (Barnawi, 2016). Student-writers can be "radical agents of change" (Fielding, 2001, p. 124); thus, negotiating their pedagogical needs with their tutors in writing centers through a dialogical learning approach could help promote their agentive appropriation and uptake (Canagarajah, 2015; Norton, 2011). That is, "recognizing that they have the agency to assert their own identities, learners are able to negotiate symbolic capital, reframe relations of power, and challenge normative ways of thinking, in order to claim the right to speak" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47). Thus, student- writers will see writing center tutorials as a place for individual growth, development, negotiation, and personality construction.

Dialogism

Dialogism is a concept that is related to the idea presented in the book *The Dialogic Imagination* by Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogism refers to a dialogic communication between a person and the world. Omani writing centers' tutors can create a dialogically based context in which they discuss and negotiate their imported pedagogies with their tutee in order to help them adapt the pedagogies, take ownership of their leaning, and actively engage in the learning process. This chapter emphasizes a dialogic interest in language connected to the "multiple ways of communication in a social world" (Cohen, 2009, p. 332). This refers to the notion of heteroglossia, "or the multiple ways of speaking in a social environment" (Cohen, 2009, p. 333). Bakhtin stated that heteroglossia was "distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). This indicates that words communicated at a certain situation and time have a distinctive meaning than when uttered at other times. In a writing center setting, writing tutors and student-writers can interact in multiple ways.

What follows are two global concepts of dialogism and an argument which explains that these concepts can create a framework for negotiating academic writing pedagogies between tutors and tutees at Omani writing centers.

Global Concepts

Bakhtin differentiated between two types of discourse, namely authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse (monologic discourse) refers to the voices of authority requiring acceptance or acknowledgment (Bakhtin, 1981). Authoritative discourse can form our inner thoughts and, thus, our discourse. In contrast, internally persuasive discourse (dialogic discourse) is the opposite of authoritative discourse. Our words are "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). With internally persuasive discourse, the self creates a personal understanding of world experiences. The dialogue and interaction of internally persuasive discourse shape our identities (Morson & Emerson, 1990), hence constructing our inner voices. Through a dialogic leaning approach, students can negotiate their pedagogical needs with their tutors, which help them develop a creative and meaningful internally persuasive discourse.

This chapter is related to Bakhtin's global concept of unfinalizability, as it explains the use of negotiating pedagogy with Omani writing centers' students. Negotiating pedagogy is an important approach to writing centers; writing tutors can implement such pedagogy to help students assume an active role in writing tutorials. By producing an unfinalizability environment that creates dialogue, students' identities can be reshaped as students-writers communicate with their tutors and peers (Barnawi, 2016).

Bakhtin uses the concept of culture to help us think of language as a "tool" (Hall, Vitanova, & Marchenkova, 2005, p. 3). Language is regarded as emergent and structured, exposing cultural backgrounds, protecting them, and reconstructing them for our own needs and use. Experiencing various opportunities to interact socially with other individuals enhances our understanding and engagement (Hall et al., 2005). Through dialogue, culture emerges as it is experienced through the culture of others (Bakhtin, 1986). Punekar (2004) contends that cultural competence in a writing center involves knowing how to deal with specific issues during a tutorial with a student from a completely different culture than the tutor. Cultural competence also includes having a basic knowledge of the tutee's background, goals, and needs and dealing with specific challenges which may otherwise hamper the effectiveness of the writing session and compromise the objectives of the writing center. Negotiating pedagogy can also involve discussing cultural issues related to writing, which can help in

resolving many of the conflicts and challenges in teaching writing. Therefore, the role of students and teachers is central to the implementation of dialogic learning strategies in the classroom. The following section discusses tutors' and learners' roles in applying negotiating pedagogies in writing centers.

Tutors' and Learners' Roles in Implementing Negotiation in Writing Centers

Teaching and learning roles are interrelated, yet the instructor's role is essential in reinforcing negotiation. To apply the notion of negotiating pedagogy in Omani writing centers, writing centers' tutors need to have a strong faith that "maintaining an ongoing dialog among their learners is intended to accommodate the learners' needs and ultimately to achieve significance of the learning experience" (Zaki, n.d., p. 3). In addition, writing instructors should encourage their student-writers to discuss and negotiate their learning needs and outcomes. As for the learner's role, their engagement and communication in tutorials allow them to have more power and responsibility (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Students need to get involved in meaningful learning experiences that enhance their understanding of the language and the world. Consequently, students' ability to express their opinions freely and to criticize the materials or content is considered a foundational principle of negotiating pedagogy which could improve their critical thinking skills and, hence, interactive negotiation in the writing classroom. A number of scholars (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Keşici, 2008) have proposed some steps that can help teachers pursue negotiation in the classroom and create a meaningful learning context that enhances students' negotiations and critical thinking skills:

T: Clarifies activities and defines their purposes
S: Take learning seriously and think critically and reflectively
T: Negotiates goals and encourages students to express their thoughts and opinions openly and freely
S: Improve self-confidence and take responsibility for making decisions
T: Constructs the course syllabus together with students
S: Make joint decisions regarding important aspects of the course syllabus, such as assignments, projects, and assessment procedures
T: Helps students grow independent and gives them opportunity to prioritize their learning activities in and out of class

S: Use time efficiently and present assigned work accurately
T: Trains students to work collaboratively and to accept peer feedback and error correction
S: Value cooperation, accept critique, and show respect for other opinions
T: Encourages research and gives time for guidance and consultation
S: Follow directions in questioning and carrying out research
T: Ensures that students are involved and interested in evaluating their learning progress
S: Learn to monitor and assess their progress through positive interaction with their peers and the teacher
T: Creates an atmosphere of understanding and accepts innovative ideas
S: Respect the equal opportunity and rights given to them
(*tutors*: T; students: S; as cited in Zaki, n.d., p. 3)

The characteristics discussed in this section explain briefly what tutors and students should do to utilize negotiating pedagogy in the classroom. In order to sustain negotiation, instructors need to offer students the opportunity to develop their research and critical thinking skills; therefore, students should reflect and create their own work from their experiences. However, there has been very little research conducted to investigate the effect of using negotiating pedagogies on EFL writing courses. The next section reviews studies that utilized negotiating pedagogies in writing classrooms as well as strategies that can be used to employ negotiating pedagogy in writing courses.

Practical Examples of Negotiating Writing Pedagogies

After discussing the theoretical underpinning and emphasizing the democratic context for negotiation in EFL education, practical examples of the use of negotiating pedagogy in EFL setting are presented in this section. The examples are not all-inclusive, but do demonstrate the strategies instructors can utilize to implement a negotiation pedagogical approach in their classes.

Johns (2002) offers an excellent example of academic writing in a Language and History course. In her classroom, students were not simply writing about historical accounts and facts, but were trained to criticize and question historical events and not to take them for granted. Students were introduced to new notions that reinforce critical appraisal and evaluation of

historical incidents and link them to their experiences. In this democratic class, students were encouraged to be unprejudiced, broad-minded, and willing to accept new ideas, as opposed to emphasizing fixed, inflexible concepts that leave no space for negotiation and interaction.

Johns' (2002) pedagogical strategy is essentially based on the idea of liberating students, motivating them to learn, and helping them develop their critical thinking skills, question their previous knowledge, negotiate the course content and objectives to take ownership of their learning. Reflection and research were focused to help students reach the objectives of the course. The outcomes of her approach were quite encouraging, considering its impact on students' critical thinking skills and their ability in questioning, reflecting, and connecting what is learned to their experiences. Abbasian and Malardi (2013) contend that motivating students to write effectively involves reflecting on the social and cultural aspects of their experiences, which help encourage students' identity formation and self-expression.

Liu (2008) conducted a study in which she investigated how her Taiwanese students negotiated with imported writing pedagogies adopted from the United States. Specifically, she examined students' agency in adapting her imported pedagogies. The pedagogy employed in her class is referred to as the sequenced writing assignment approach, which was used in conjunction with two English writing classes at a Taiwanese university. This approach comprised five interrelated writing tasks: "project proposal, summaries, a survey, an interview with an expert, and a final report" (Liu, 2008, p. 89). Data were collected from her "teaching journal, students' writing (writer's autobiographies, major papers, and end-of-semester reflection papers), and notes from teacher–student conferences" (Liu, 2008, p. 89). The findings of the study indicate that even though she intentionally adjusted the pedagogy for her students, the students intentionally or unintentionally negotiated with different areas of academic writing at metacognitive, textual, and contextual levels. The study also found that students' negotiations with academic writing not only inform her with students' pedagogical needs, but more importantly, negotiations are considered an essential aspect of the socio-academic process of reforming Western pedagogies in a local context. The researcher believes that local teachers need to respect and consider their students' agency when adapting imported pedagogies, without being critical toward students' negotiations in academic writing.

In addition, Liu and You (2008) observed their students' negotiation acts in first-year college academic writing courses at a Taiwanese and an American university. They used teaching journals to record their observations of and negotiations with their students as well as with their own reflections. They also used Microsoft Network Messenger to daily discuss their pedagogies with each other. The sequenced writing assignment approach was utilized in their teaching, which included four writing projects: personal experience, literature review, survey/interview, and a final report. They found that their students actively negotiated with their writing assignments at different levels like metacognitive, textual, and contextual. The study reported that "both Chinese and Angelo-American rhetorical traditions and students' high school writing experiences played an important part in their initiation into new academic discourses" (Liu & You, 2008, p. 169). Nevertheless, the Chinese and American students did not follow their high school traditional writing styles passively, but "they actively negotiated with the teachers' expectations, discipline-specific conventions, their own dreams and experiences, and other contextual factors in their academic apprenticeship" (Liu & You, 2008, p. 169).

Another study which has investigated the effect of using negotiating pedagogy in EFL writing classrooms was conducted by Barnawi (2016). He studied how his 23 Saudi senior engineering students' negotiations with American writing pedagogies that he adopted from the United States on aspects related to self, content, and form helped the students assume active roles in class and take ownership of their learning. For this purpose, Barnawi (2016) utilized two negotiating cycles in his writing class with the aim of scaffolding the students "in strategically negotiating with academic conventions and creating multivocal genres" (Liu, 2008, p. 88). The first cycle aimed at helping students actively engage in the learning process with his guidance and support. The cycle included negotiations with aspects relating to revising the objectives of the course, choosing the materials of the course, text modeling and formation, collective creation of texts, autonomous formation of texts, student–teacher meeting, and relating to connected or similar texts. He thinks that these activities are interrelated and dependent on each other in order to support and advance the teaching and learning process in the writing class. The second negotiating cycle was intended to examine if students can effectively transfer what they have learned to exam papers. This cycle involved "developing the context, modeling and deconstructing texts, independent construction of texts, and portfolio submission" (Barnawi, 2016, p. 7).

The study found that this approach transferred students' writing conventions from writing to display knowledge to writing to establish knowledge. In addition, the study found that these pedagogies helped the researcher to think reflectively of his teaching practice as an EFL writing instructor, as well as enhanced his students' learning process. Barnawi (2016) found that his students had a different reaction toward this pedagogy. Participants' attitudes to the negotiating strategies varied from "appropriation, wake-up call and awareness, to interrogation and resistance" (Barnawi, 2016, p. 17). Barnawi encourages EFL writing teachers to adopt a dialogic learning approach in their classrooms, as it helps students become more engaged and agentive in the classroom. He believes that learner's agency is an integral part of academic writing classrooms. The study indicated that the implementation of negotiating pedagogies provides ample opportunities for both the teacher and students to recognize their favored writing strategies and, hence, adapt to their pedagogical needs and comply with academic writing conventions. Barnawi (2016) acknowledged that the implementation of this approach is a difficult undertaking, especially with Arab students. In the next section, some major challenges that could hinder the application of negotiating pedagogy in writing centers, as well as in EFL classrooms, will be discussed.

Challenges of Negotiating Pedagogy in EFL Classrooms and Writing Centers

The implementation of a negotiation learning approach might not run without problems and difficulties. Undoubtedly, some obstacles will stand in the path; the followings are the factors that hamper the employment of this approach in Arab EFL classrooms/writing centers.

Sociocultural Factors

Negotiation is at risk in a culture that does not permit freedom of speech and questioning, limits individuals' natural instinct to inquire, denies individuals' viewpoints, and places no value on critical thinking. In a society where democracy is non-existent, people are not allowed to question or be involved in a dialogue; negotiation is outlawed. This situation will be mirrored in the EFL classroom, where learners are not allowed to negotiate, as they have not been familiarized with this kind of practice in their social, education, or cultural life (Alrawas, 2014).

Studies conducted on the use of constructivist approaches in EFL classrooms with Middle Eastern students have revealed that the application of such approaches can sometimes be ineffective due to some cultural factors (Martin, 2006). Scholars argue that some Arab students do not welcome learner-centered, facilitative teaching approaches, as the education system in many Middle Eastern countries focuses on rote learning, memorization, and other passive learning styles (Richardson, 2004). Martin (2006) highlights that people in power in many Gulf countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, are seldom criticized in public. This trend is reflected even in EFL classrooms and writing centers. Teachers in Oman are highly valued and rarely confronted or challenged (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2011). Learners "are not expected to initiate communication or speak up unless called upon to do so" (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p. 138). Mynard (2006), explains that Arab students hardly ever defy rules and regulations or take risks in the classroom, as they are afraid of disgrace.

Omani students, as do many other Arab students, may feel nervous and confused if they are asked to take an active role in the EFL classroom. Punekar (2004), in his paper on tutoring Omani nursing students at the Villanova University Writing Center, mentioned that it is important to make student-writers feel comfortable at the writing center, particularly with regard to Omani students, as they can be reticent to communicate or interact with the tutor. He believes that this is in part because of cultural factors, and Omani students, all of whom refer to tutors as "instructors," are afraid to question or negotiate with tutors. One solution to this issue is to help students become more interactive by integrating humor or showing interest in and inquiring about students' culture (Punekar, 2004).

Mynard (2006) maintained that such students

> [f]requently feel unable to adjust to a different system of education-one where they are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning and apply higher-level cognitive processing and problem-solving skills. Students often feel ill equipped to make the move toward autonomy. (Mynard, as cited in Martin, 2006, p. 3)

Richardson (2004) agrees with this argument, stating:

> The current student-centered learning paradigm where the student forms a partnership with her teachers to achieve her individual potential is a notion contradictory to the Arab students' home lifestyle. In fact, individual growth is seen as a concept that could cause disharmony within families. (Richardson, 2004, p. 432)

Institutional Requirements

These refer to the academic or language prerequisites that need to be met by students to be able to reach a specific level of language competence (Benesch, 2002). They contain, for example, course books, tests, quizzes, tasks, collaborative work, papers, participation, and attendance. Learners who take a language course should follow the institutional requirements if they want to complete the course. However, some students could be hesitant in completing the demanded assignments because of a variety of reasons, such as the absence of motivation, lack of dialogue in the EFL classroom, or difficulty in adapting to the classroom atmosphere. In fact, when negotiating, the curriculum is not considered as an integral aspect of the institution's demands. This creates a condition, called "dictated curriculum," that is extremely inflexible and does not consider students' needs or goals. In this situation, students will be forced to comply with the institutional policies without receiving any advantage from the learning experience (Richardson, 2004). Sergon (2011) argues that students in Oman do not feel engaged or motivated in their EFL classroom, as their instructors strictly follow the textbook without linking it to their life experiences.

Learners' Expectations

Many Arab students consider the information in the textbook as non-negotiable, and that instructors are prophets who never make mistakes. Therefore, students may never have the courage to doubt or question the teacher or criticize the task (Abu Rass, 2015). In addition, those learners perceive the teacher's role as the knowledge provider, and when they are offered with the opportunity to negotiate, they actually misjudge the teacher's ability and qualifications. It is also presumed that some introverted students may experience difficulty, as they cannot express their ideas openly in public. In this case, teachers are recommended to treat these students with a lot of tolerance and understanding.

Teachers' Perception

Tutors who support the notion of negotiation in education often attempt to encourage students' interactions in the classroom. A negotiation learning approach does not simply mean chatting or giving students more space for talking (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Nevertheless, it is about allowing learn-

ers to think critically and question what is being presented or taught in the course. Additionally, negotiation helps in addressing students' needs and enables them to adapt their learning aims and attitudes.

Time Constraints

Many teachers experience the problem of limited class time. They have to complete certain materials during a very short period of time (Benesch, 2002), which is presumably not appropriate for applying the negotiation approach. Meeting the course objectives and emphasizing language accuracy and fluency could restrict the teacher from offering opportunities for maintaining adequate negotiation or dialogue in the classroom (Jabur, 2008).

Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

An increasing number of EFL students are seeking writing help and support at Omani college and university writing centers. This trend emphasizes the significant supplementary role of these centers and EFL writing instruction in improving academic writing skills. Writing centers and EFL writing pedagogy share similar directive and non-directive approaches to writing. However, it is sometimes troublesome and strenuous for EFL instructors to implement constructivist learning approaches in EFL classrooms; even the most experienced, skillful, and innovative teacher may experience some complications when applying such strategies in the classroom curriculum. Reasons that discourage teachers from using dialogic teaching strategies include time constraint, large class size, class management issues, and inconveniency in the teacher–student relationship (Punekar, 2004). Obviously, the essence of classroom logistics hampers the activities that are important to the enhancement of writing skills. Fortunately, these approaches can be used effectively with EFL students in writing centers. As writing centers' tutors are unburdened by classroom dynamics and assessment or evaluation, they can effectively apply dialogic learning approaches in their interactions with tutees. However, many writing centers' tutors in Oman are oblivious to the needs of their tutees and are often inadequately trained to deal efficiently with this special population, as the majority of Omani writing centers' faculties are expatriates who come from several Western and Eastern countries with different educational and pedagogical backgrounds and specialties that influence their

teaching practices. Hence, negotiating and discussing writing pedagogies between tutors and tutees at writing centers in Oman can be considered an effective method for instructing this distinctive population of writers, who come to the writing center for a wide range of purposes and from different fields of knowledge.

According to Rafoth (2015), author of *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, writers' concerns and needs should be the tutor's top priority, and the writing center is considered as a consumer-oriented business that attends to the needs of students. Research has shown the effectiveness of negotiating writing pedagogies in EFL classrooms with students. Such an approach offers opportunities for the instructor to recognize the preferred writing strategies by students as well as to addresses their pedagogical objectives. Therefore, integrating such an approach in Omani writing centers can fulfill their ultimate aim of satisfying students' needs and producing self-sufficient writers.

This chapter encourages the implementation of negotiating writing pedagogies in Omani writing centers. This notion of negotiation is discussed within Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism, as well as within democratic pedagogy, as a context for building critical thinking skills and improving students' writing skills through meaningful negotiation. Nonetheless, conflict may occur between learners and instructors, who then negotiate to arrive at an agreement. During the negotiation process, learners are encouraged to take initiatives, express their needs, and take decisions. On the other hand, instructors need to become facilitators and colearners. Learners can negotiate with their peers and teacher as to what they need to learn and question the teacher's evaluation system (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Research conducted on the use of dialogic pedagogical approaches in EFL writing classrooms indicates promising results that support the utilization of such strategies. Indeed, negotiating students' pedagogical needs may trigger different kinds of reactions and "at the same time, make the relationship between writing teachers and students more complex than might initially have appeared" (Barnawi, 2016, p. 17). Student-writers who look for help and support at a writing center generally come "with baggage, desires, hopes and fears about the world [of writing]" (Kent, 1994, p. 4). Providing students opportunities to voice out their pedagogical needs, negotiate, and express their thoughts freely about the curriculum, with acceptance, respect, and appreciation on the teacher's part, is the core of democratic education. Such an atmosphere will encourage

learners to take ownership of their own learning and become more agentive critical thinkers as well as better writers. As Canagarajah (2002) states, "understanding the strategies preferred by the students to accomplish their pedagogical tasks will help teachers to encourage students to adopt their own styles of learning rather than impose methods [or strategies] from the outside" (p. 144).

Using a dialogic learning approach in Omani writing centers where learners negotiate pedagogy with their tutors entails training instructors to comprehend and encourage the principles of democracy within the writing tutorials. Moreover, as studies have revealed, such a strategy motivates learners to become more independent and responsible for their own learning and view themselves as critical thinkers who collaborate with their peers and tutors and reflect on what they learn. Writing tutors in the Sultanate of Oman need to raise students' awareness about the effectiveness of negotiating their pedagogical needs in EFL classrooms or writing centers. This "socially engaged" and ideologically based strategy to writing pedagogy enables EFL student-writers to develop "metapedagogical and critical awareness of writing and, at the same time, address the gap between individual and public professional writing" (Barnawi, 2016, p. 19).

Therefore, when writing teachers tailor instruction for their students, they need to encourage their students' negotiations with pedagogy. In addition, teachers have to show acceptance, openness, appreciation, and tolerance toward students' negotiations. To stress the significance of this approach and the value of engaging tutees in writing tutorials to tutors, it is of paramount importance to pinpoint the weaknesses in tutors' tutorials and promote a sense of cooperation; hence, tutors will become self-critical and open-minded toward students' suggestions (Liu, 2008). In this case, the writing center becomes "an ideal place in which to begin teaching and practicing a critical and self-reflective form of acculturation, what Edward Said calls 'critical consciousness'" (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999, p. 42). The writing center will be seen as a place where different discourses wrestle with each other and are negotiated, or as in the words of Mary Pratt, the writing center becomes like a "contact zone."

It is recommended that writing centers' tutors in the Sultanate of Oman participate in workshops, conferences, and courses that raise their awareness of the significance of dialogic teaching approaches to writing and how to use them effectively in teaching students. Writing center studies in recent years have emphasized the importance of pretutorial discussion and

negotiation (Eleftheriou, 2011). Tutees reacted positively to tutors who offered time at the beginning of the writing session for discussing assignments and concerns and negotiating an agenda for the tutorial. Therefore, this aspect of tutorials should be highlighted during training, and tutors need to realize its importance throughout their employment at the writing center. This initial dialogue is especially useful and helpful for tutees who may not be sufficiently fluent in English to completely comprehend the requirements of assignments or to express their own intentions about the task. In addition, this gathering of data directs the tutorial and creates rapport between tutor and tutee. It is also important to note that university professionals need to be keenly cognizant of the growing alliance and connection between their fields and the writing center tutors in order to be able to deal effectively with all students and address their needs (Eleftheriou, 2011). This chapter confirmed the desirability of encouraging tutors at Omani writing centers to negotiate their writing pedagogies with their students and explain the significance of this approach to first-time clients at the beginning of the session and to implement it with sensitivity. Thonus (2003) states that when student-writers interact with writing tutors who are trained in applying methods that effectively respond to their needs, there is a greater possibility that they will enhance their writing skills.

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Raniah Kabooha is an instructor at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She has a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from KAU. She has written some articles for well-established journals and presented papers in international English Language Teaching (ELT) conferences. Her research interests include technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), language acquisition, and learner motivation.

CHAPTER 12

SWOT Analysis of GUST Writing Lab

Inan Deniz Erguvan

Introduction

What Is a SWOT Analysis?

Strategic planning helps organisations to express their needs and justify resource requests, addressing potential shortfalls in budgets, space and technology. Good strategic planning requires basic knowledge in the real strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. A SWOT analysis is a commonly used tool in business settings which helps administrators understand stakeholders' perceptions about the operational effectiveness of an organisation by focusing on four perceptions—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Taylor, 2016). The interactions within these categories are also touched upon in the analysis.

SWOT is an acronym of the words Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, and it is regarded as an integral part of the strategic planning procedure (Valkanos, Anastasiou, & Androutsou, 2009). The strong and the weak points of an organisation are the factors of its internal environment, while the opportunities and the threats are considered to be parts of its external environment.

A SWOT analysis is a familiar and easily understandable technique, and it provides a good structuring device for sorting out ideas about the future

I.D. Erguvan (✉)
Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait, Kuwait

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and an organisation's ability to exploit that future. It has become widely known because the technique is simple enough to be immediately and readily accessible to managers. Also, it offers a device to structure the mixture of quantitative and qualitative information, of familiar and unfamiliar facts, of known and half-known understandings that mark strategic marketing planning (Piercy & Giles, 1989).

A SWOT analysis leads to one of the four major conclusions (Sherman, Rowley, & Armandi, 2007): if strengths outweigh weaknesses and opportunities outweigh threats, a growth strategy should be adopted. If strengths outweigh weaknesses and threats outweigh opportunities, a maintenance strategy should be used. On the contrary, when weaknesses outweigh strengths and opportunities outweigh threats, a harvest strategy is needed; and when weaknesses outweigh strengths and threats outweigh opportunities, a retrenchment strategy should be implemented in the company.

While carrying out a SWOT analysis, it is essential to consider all categories (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) equally and to analyse the interactions among the categories carefully. It is sometimes easy to focus on the strengths and what is working well at a writing centre; however, the ultimate point of the analysis is to identify and build upon strengths, minimise the impact of weaknesses, make the best use of opportunities and, certainly, address threats (Matthews, 2016).

SWOT Analysis in Education

Strategic planning is of crucial importance for an educational unit. It describes the route that a particular unit will pursue in the future, as it plays the role of a compass by preparing the organisation to follow a certain direction (Valkanos et al., 2009).

Since most SWOT analyses are designed for "profit" organisations and most educational institutions are considered "non-profit," some of the terminologies may not fit, but the concept itself does (Moore, 2001). In fact, a SWOT analysis may be applied effectively to educational organisations. Writing centres, as an educational organisation, may also benefit from this tool, as it presents a snapshot of the centre through the eyes of stakeholders, that is, people who work closely with it (Ortoleva & Dyehouse, 2008). When implemented suitably, it is possible for a writing centre to get an overall picture of its present situation in relation to its

community. An understanding of the external factors, coupled with an internal examination of strengths and weaknesses, assists in making appropriate decisions to initiate competent policies and pedagogies or replace redundant, irrelevant ones with innovative and relevant ones.

In a SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses of the writing centre constitute the internal environment, while opportunities and threats are considered to be parts of its external environment. Pride and Ferrell (cited in Moore, 2001) suggest that the best way to differentiate between a weakness (internal) and a threat (external) is to ask the question, "Would this issue exist if the company did not exist?" If the answer is yes, then the issue should be considered external. We also need to ask ourselves the question, "Does this issue simply weaken the effectiveness of our program or does it actually threaten its very existence?"

To be more specific, elements of the internal environment of the Writing Lab at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) are Teaching Assistants (TAs) as writing consultants, peer tutors, the supervisor, students who use the centre, the location and the teaching equipment of the centre. Factors that represent the external environment of the Writing Lab are the university administration, faculty members, other centres with a similar function within the university, and financial, cultural and technological forces and influences.

Data Collection in SWOT

For a SWOT analysis to yield the most complete profile, convenient data collection techniques must be selected and a representative range of stakeholders must be consulted so that their input could be accurately analysed. Some examples of stakeholders that involve the university community are administrators, tutors, faculty and, of course, students. It may be difficult to gain access to all these stakeholders, and time constraints may restrict the access to a wide range of stakeholders and their input. However, the broader the range of stakeholders included in a SWOT analysis, the richer the data. There are some commonly used data collection techniques for a SWOT analysis, such as surveys, interviews and document analysis. The most appropriate data collection method for a SWOT analysis of a writing centre is best determined based on available stakeholders and resources, and the potential knowledge that the method will yield.

In order to develop a new strategic plan for the transformation of the Writing Lab at GUST, a SWOT analysis was conducted in the Fall of 2016. During the planning stages of the SWOT, the writing consultant, the supervisor, the founder and the former supervisor of the Writing Lab were interviewed. Also annual reports of the centre from 2011 to 2016 were analysed and student surveys in 2014 were evaluated so as to generate more data. Interviews helped generate discussion on issues of long-term strategic planning significance as well as on smaller or surface issues needing immediate attention. After all interviews were completed, responses were analysed for similarities and themes.

Brief History

a. Gulf University for Science and Technology (Kuwait)

In January 1997, the Kuwaiti Academic Group, composed of 41 faculty members from Kuwait University, was established to lay the foundation for a modern university in Kuwait to serve the ever-increasing educational demands of the local society and the Gulf region. Their studies culminated in the vision of GUST. The development was facilitated and shaped by the Private Universities Decree, No. 34, issued by the State of Kuwait in 2000, resulting in the establishment of a temporary campus with the necessary infrastructure in Hawally. In 2002, the issuance of Emiri Decree, No. 156, completed the legal establishment of GUST as the first private university in the State of Kuwait and permitted the start of the first academic year in 2002–2003.

b. The Writing Improvement Learning Lab (The Writing Lab)

The Writing Improvement Learning Lab (WILL) was opened in 2011, and since then, it has been operating under the auspices of the Department of English at GUST with its new name, "The Writing Lab". (Throughout the chapter WILL and the Writing Lab will be used interchangeably). Undergraduate students at the university can come to WILL to think and talk about writing and to receive professional assistance with their writing projects. The goal is to help undergraduate students grow as writers by helping them develop their writing. This goal is accomplished primarily through individual tutorials, called consultations, in which a student works one-on-one with an undergraduate writing consultant. The term "consultant" is used to denote the person's role as a professional; students are viewed as competent

adults who may not be experts in writing but who nevertheless possess substantial knowledge.

The mission statement of the Writing Lab is stated as:

- To help students with problems they face with writing, from grammatical issues to idea flow. Our mission is to help students address, recognise and fix any of their writing concerns, depending on each student's individual capabilities.

The Writing Lab offers the following services to reach this mission:

- Empowering writers to improve their individual writing projects.
- Providing information and resources about specific writing concerns.
- Providing pedagogical support to faculty who use writing in their classrooms.
- Proofreading and editing documents, which involve grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure.
- Providing documentation and citation assistance (MLA, APA, etc.).
- Holding special workshops for students and instructors regarding their writing enquires and concerns, and essay writing and grammar tutorials upon request.

Since its inception in 2011, WILL has served about an average of thousand students every academic year. As of December 2016, it employs two full-time tutors and is supervised by the coordinator of the Writing Division within the Department of English. The operation hours are from 8 am to 5 pm. The tutors do not work on weekends and do not offer online consultation. Students have to book their appointment by e-mail, as there is no online appointment system and consultations are conducted face to face.

Rationale for the Writing Lab

The Writing Division, which offers compulsory writing courses within the English Department at GUST was created during the 2011–2012 academic year as a means to improve the writing capabilities of students by creating engaging curricula, evaluating outcomes, revising syllabi to better achieve objectives, and recruiting and developing specialists who can

motivate students to achieve results. The courses comprise three composition courses and a business writing course. Every GUST student now takes these three composition courses. Several departments include writing as one of their student learning outcomes and require their students to produce written assignments.

WILL was established following the revision of the Writing Division curriculum, as first-year composition courses necessitated a unit where students could seek assistance with their written assignments. Writing professors at GUST are generally not satisfied with the quality of students' writing, as students' reading and writing skills are not adequate for mastering the material for most courses. Also, the writing abilities of students who enter the university are very uneven. All English professors struggle with the disparity among the abilities of students in English courses. Professors understandably feel a need to address individual student needs, and to accommodate their skills in order to help them progress. Professors from all disciplines hesitate to incorporate writing into their coursework because the quality of the work they receive is often unintelligible. This reluctance to include writing assignments university-wide creates a spiralling effect, as students spend even less time improving their writing skills. It is crucial for students to have some minimum writing ability in order to be successful in university courses.

The growth of the Writing Division has created new challenges and opportunities for the Writing Lab. In addition to strengthening the culture of writing on campus for faculty, the consultants in the Writing Lab developed their level of expertise through experience and training. One of the positive consequences of the three composition courses has been the opportunity they have provided for students from across the university to work in the Writing Lab as peer tutors.

The interviews I had with the former and the current supervisors of the Writing Lab reveal the rationale for the establishment of a writing centre at GUST as internationalisation and privatisation of higher education in Kuwait, coupled with English-medium instruction, paving the way for the implementation of Western educational concepts. The founder of WILL explains the rationale for the establishment of the writing lab as:

> They (the University Administration) just came to me and told me that they want me to make a writing centre. And the Dean said the same thing. But they didn't give a rationale. I just assumed what the rationale was that … it

> was student's writing at GUST was weak and they wanted to improve the writing skills of students at GUST and the Business department had been unhappy with the quality of writing. They wanted some of their courses to be writing intensive, but they couldn't because there weren't successful product from them, so, I just assumed what the rationale was. It wasn't explicitly stated, it was never in writing.

The rationale for opening a writing centre at GUST, according to the current supervisor of the lab, is as follows:

> I don't think they felt that there was a need at first, because the onus was on the writing instructors, the responsibility for fixing all those mistakes that the students come with wherever they come from, the Foundation programme or outside. It was the instructor's job. But the students come with a host of problems unresolved and almost impossible to result within two or three semesters. They're really lagging in many departments and so I think the writing centre was supposed to, sort of, help the instructors deal with, first of all, a large number of students and also with very basic issues, like grammar, vocabulary, so we teach writing but we cannot teach everything because we have a different goal in the writing course. So, that was the idea to bridge that huge, vast gap that exists between expectations and what the students can actually do; the very low proficiency students have. … And since the professor has, let's say on average, one hundred students for semester... how realistic is it that that the professor can spend one on one time, with students who are weak and who require extra attention? So the writing lab was created.

It seems to be that the establishment of the Writing Lab followed a top-bottom approach, as it was the administrators who demanded it be opened. However, once it was opened, they did not follow it up, leaving the centre to its own devices, more or less, as could be deducted from what the founder says:

> They were just happy to have one, they didn't care about quality. They were just happy that they could say "OK we did it," yeah … it's new and we had reports about hundreds of students were using it every month and they were happy about that but they didn't really set the standard. It was easy for me actually to make them happy because all you do is get go and they were not concerned about quality.

Obstacles and Challenges

Since 2011, teaching assistants (TAs) working at WILL have prepared an annual report every year, presenting some qualitative and quantitative data summarising the whole academic year, listing the challenges they have faced that year and proposing some solutions to those challenges. The following are the challenges the Writing Lab listed at the end of its first year (the 2011–2012 academic year):

- Some peer tutors lack efficiency in terms of correcting/editing academic papers and dealing with weak students. A peer tutor training session has been suggested to be conducted after hiring the best candidates, to avoid any sort of inconvenience.
- High demand of perfection from professors, dismissing their students' true abilities.
- Variation of formats according to each professor for English composition courses and other English written assignments. Being uninformed of these multiple writing templates prevents us from providing the full help and guidance that students need with their writing assignments.

In academic years 2012–2013 and 2013–2014, a new set of obstacles was listed in the report:

- Lack of workers to help with the student demand; many times students are sent away due to this.
- Loss of many good peer tutors due to their GPA being less than required, even though they scored highly in English classes and would be a great benefit to WILL.
- Time spent with each individual student varies from 30 minutes to 2 hours. The session duration should be standard.

In academic years 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, the recurring problems with peer tutors, high demand from some professors and the variation of formats in English composition courses were mentioned again.

These reports have been prepared by the writing consultants who conduct one-on-one consultations with students and who experienced these obstacles firsthand. By looking at the list, the major problems could be summarised as lack of consultants, the inconsistency in peer tutors' quality

and experience, students' lack of planning in making appointments and big variations in writing courses' assignments and lecturers' expectations.

These problems have also been expressed in the interviews conducted with the former and the current supervisors and the only consultant (at the time) of the Writing Lab. The current supervisor mentions the peer tutor issue as follows:

> We have two types of people working at the centre we have our regular TAs who have education and are trained by us on how to provide feedback and how to help without writing papers for students. And we have a group of people seasonal, or temporary. Peer tutors. … When it comes to peer tutors, we can't control the quality of their work because they are not hired by us, they are hired by the student affairs. They also provide important help but it's not necessarily professional help. I mean they are probably well meaning individuals but they're not always prepared.

The writing consultant pointed out to a similar problem, as also mentioned in the annual report, which is the lack of tutoring skills that peer tutors have and the problems they experience with students related to this:

> Student tutors is the problem. Maybe it is because of the age; maybe because they are students as well, peer tutors tend to be students. They know what they know, sometimes they correct mistakes that are not mistakes, and sometimes they don't understand completely what they need to do. Also the trust issue, most students say "No, no, I want to work with you. They (peer tutors) might teach me the wrong thing." Students don't trust the peer tutor; they think this person is a student, why should I trust him? Why would I study with another student? We have very good peer tutors with high GPA, they are perfect on paper. But in terms of skills, working with students, pointing out mistakes … that is gained with experience, with maturity.

Apart from the peer tutor problem, even the language proficiency of the writing consultants surfaced as a problem in the Writing Lab, particularly in the first years, as mentioned by the founder of WILL:

> Once they (the English department faculty) started using it, they found out that the tutors and the T.A.'s were making mistakes and that was a big problem and the problem is we're not paying these people lots of money it's not like we can get PhD holders in English or even the native English speakers to

> work because the pay was so low, so quality of the, you know, you get what you pay for so it is really difficult because they are better writers than most of the students, but they work better at writing than all of the students and the professors would see that sometimes they would make mistakes on student papers or have the students make mistakes and then the faculty were really disappointed. You know we're just trying to work with faculty and work with students and try to come to an understanding that it's better than nothing. I mean that was really the best that we can do and we have a number of training sessions for peer tutors and the teaching assistants. In the beginning they were making some grammatical mistakes with the students and so what I did was I said I made a test based on Purdue on my writing lab. I mean it was a long test was extensively covered lots and lots of things in grammar and I told both of the TAs that they had till January—this is back in October—to study for the test. If they couldn't pass with 90, then I couldn't employ them anymore because we had those kind of a requirement to be able to help students with grammar. One of them studied very hard and she took the test early, and she got like eighty-two. She wanted to take it again. I said that's fine because she had time till January, so she did it very seriously and she improved her skills a great deal and she passed it in January. The other one was Kuwaiti. I think she just figured that "they can't fire me, I'm Kuwaiti, I have this job," and she didn't study at all and she got like a seventy-two. So we hired somebody else after that … who was very good and had really good skills.

The interviews also point out some cultural challenges. The former supervisor and the founder of WILL said:

> Maybe it's been five years, four-five years since we opened, but a lot of students don't know about it. I think that's a problem but once they find out about it, I think they really appreciate people who work there. Although some of the students—maybe this is changing—but some of the students were really disrespectful towards the tutors and the teaching assistants in the writing lab because, I don't know, they just kind of saw them as their servants and as I was saying usually they're the teaching assistants put burden on student, and they didn't like that, they just felt like they had their own tutors at home and the tutors at home just fixed it for them and the students were expecting that and so we had some conflict between students and tutors because they expected them just fix it for them and some of them loud and angry. I think it is partially because the nationality of the tutors. Kuwaiti students were not respectful towards people who were helping them because they were not Kuwaiti.

Another problem related to students was mentioned by the writing consultant:

> Students become very dependent; this happened with several students, they came with the full work, but the next time they came with a tiny paragraph. Some they do less work every time they come here. They expect more, they expect to be spoon-fed. They assume that because I am identifying their errors, I would also correct them.

Maybe the most essential problem about WILL is that it falls short of full-time writing consultants, and during essay submission weeks, the existing consultants cannot cope with the increased demand and thus turn away some students. This has always been mentioned as a problem in the annual reports and repeated here again by the current supervisor:

> [R]egarding the effectiveness perceived across the institution … I think it's not great. And that could be because the writing lab recently has been overwhelmed with requests and they had to turn a lot of people away. Because there's just no way that a TA can spend less than, say, fifteen-twenty minutes with a student and there's no way they can see, I don't know, fifty students per day. So there was a period when a lot of students were turned away. We had only one TA and so basically word got out that the Writing Lab isn't doing anything because they just can't get an appointment. So that was the perception and previously we had a lot of negative feedback from professors.

The supervisor and the consultants have worked towards alleviating these problems throughout the years by taking the necessary actions, such as:

- Advising students to book a session with one of the TAs or peer tutors through sending an e-mail or passing by the Writing Lab to choose a suitable time slot. Priority is given to those with appointments; walk-ins can be admitted only if there is no student with a previous booking.
- To avoid miscommunication and reduce complaints from the professors, creating a "student track sheet" to keep record of all that is done with students, that is, students are to sign the track sheet document after receiving the needed assistance, detailing their name, ID, course number, type of assignment, professor and what type of help they received.
- Creating basic guidelines of tutoring for peer tutors to abide by and training them in student consultation.

Unfortunately, some of the problems, such as financial and budgetary issues related to hiring more consultants, have persisted. No peer tutors have been hired in 2016–2017 academic year, as the writing consultants tend to overwork and take care of the students themselves rather than spending time to train peer tutors or deal with problems associated with the low quality of consultation peer tutors tend to provide.

Overall, the supervisor thinks that there are not many major obstacles WILL has to face. Students who use the services are satisfied, the admin support for the Writing Lab is strong and they have really responsible and well-trained TAs, who have a lot of experience and do not require very close supervision or micro-management. However, she emphasises the following fact:

> We're only understaffed. At the moment, that's the biggest problem. So, I suppose economic problem … but … Maybe it is the only challenge we have right now, so it's also an institutional challenge. We believe that the TAs who are trained to work are in writing lab, should perhaps have a more glamorous job title because for example they don't teach we don't use them for teaching. That's they are sub for someone, right. They step in, and sub for someone or they proctor quizzes but that's hardly teaching, we try to sort of go around and have them teach you know, grammar labs in the foundation, but that was too much of a commitment because then they had to be away from the lab for an hour and a half and that created you know... a backlog of students appointments. So we did that last year but are not doing this anymore. Now our TAs are really just for us and for the lab, and we believe that because of the service that they provide maybe they should be given a more an upgrade in terms of title. Even though they are overwhelmed, I think we could use them, their skills in many different ways. If they could carve out some time from their busy schedule to teach, you know, simple like reviews, you know, courses … they would love to actually have teaching experience in the classroom and, they really enjoy it so that will be something that will be motivational for our TAs

SWOT Analysis of the Writing Lab

The SWOT analysis of WILL based on three interviews conducted with one consultant and two supervisors, along with the annual reports prepared by various writing consultants since the establishment of the centre and student satisfaction surveys conducted in the 2012–2013 academic year, yields the following findings:

Strengths:

- The Writing Lab has developed policies and strategies of consultation in order to help students who have challenges with writing.
- The Writing Lab has developed sound hiring practices for writing consultants and peer tutors and for training them on the job.
- The Writing Lab has established a tradition of preparing and presenting an annual report at the end of every academic year to point out the obstacles and challenges encountered.
- Writing consultants are also TAs reporting to the English Department, which increases their commitment to the position.
- Student satisfaction is reported to be high; the Writing Lab has a loyal group of student population who come regularly and recommend it to their peers.

Weaknesses:

- Student satisfaction surveys also show that the majority of the students in the composition courses have not heard of the Writing Lab and its services: they have never visited the centre.
- The Writing Lab is located in the library, not in convenient proximity to the English Department, which hinders the visibility and easy access of the unit.
- The Writing Lab lacks its own sources and equipment; it does not have copies of the course books that the Department uses, no library or reference books at its disposal.
- Students need to e-mail the consultant to make an appointment, as WILL does not have an online appointment system. Responding to student e-mails adds to the workload of the consultant and thus some student e-mails get lost in the system.
- Low levels of language competence of most of WILL users tend to create a consultant-led error correction process.
- The Writing Lab also relies on a peer tutoring model and peer tutors do not always prove themselves as reliable, as they lack the experience to offer accurate consultation to students.
- TAs and consultants feel out of the loop, as writing instructors do not keep them informed of their course contents and assessment details, such as rubrics.
- Student satisfaction is not measured regularly and WILL misses an opportunity to get feedback from its clients.

Opportunities:

- Compulsory composition courses offered by the English Department have institutionalised the university's commitment to writing and the necessity of a writing centre where students can consult.
- The university administration has generally been supportive of having a writing lab. WILL is seen as an indispensable part of an American-style university.
- An online Writing Lab established by a writing instructor in the English Department could be linked to WILL to create an online learning community.
- Recently, some writing instructors wrote a proposal emphasising the need for the transformation of the Writing Lab and appointing a full-time director/supervisor to run WILL and submitted it to the Head of the English Department, who agreed to discuss it with the Dean.
- Some professors introduce the Writing Lab in the first weeks of the academic term and encourage their students to use its services by offering some incentives, such as extra credit for regular visits.

Threats:

- Salary reduction of TAs throughout the university may have a debilitating effect on TA recruitment and retention at WILL.
- The position of a writing consultant is not attractive to ambitious TAs. Unless the job description or the title changes, well-trained TAs may not stay long on the job.
- A similar unit within the university (Student Success Centre) offers tutoring and consultation to students in a way that may contradict WILL's efforts to treat students as independent learners, which will affect students' expectations of WILL.
- Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are widespread among university students, and students resort to them as shortcuts to a passing score rather than investing time in developing their writing skills.

Recommendations and Conclusion

It is crucial to turn the results of any analysis into specific actions. The ideal action plan based on a SWOT analysis would be to convert internal weaknesses into strengths and external threats into opportunities (Moore, 2001).

Based on the SWOT analysis, some recommendations could be made for improvement of the Writing Lab at GUST. WILL urgently needs to hire at least one more qualified writing consultant to reduce the workload of the existing writing consultants. A minimum of three to four full-time writing consultants are needed in the Lab to meet student demands. Also, activating the online appointment system will reduce the number of complaints regarding the accessibility and availability of WILL consultants. These should be administered as short-term plan actions.

Improving the status of TAs/writing consultants could be handled through long-term planning, as this requires senior administration's intervention and approval.

For an increased recognition and visibility of the Writing Lab, open-house days could be organised; English Department faculty members could be reminded at the beginning and middle of the term to refer their students to WILL instead of resorting to illegitimate methods in the writing of their essays.

One should always remember that today's strengths could be tomorrow's weaknesses (Nyarku, 2011). Also, opportunities and threats are not absolute (Balamuralikrishna & Dugger, 1995). What might at first seem to be an opportunity may not emerge as such when considered against the resources of the organisation or the expectations of society. Plans can thus be tailored to fit the current, or changing, circumstances and should therefore be much more effective. A more active approach would be to involve identifying the most attractive opportunities and then plan to stretch the educational institution's capacity to meet these opportunities.

In short, in order to be most effectively used, a SWOT analysis needs to be flexible. Situations change in time and an updated analysis should be made frequently. SWOT is not a time-consuming tool and is effective because of its simplicity. SWOT can form a foundation upon which to construct numerous strategic plans for the Writing Lab, if used efficiently.

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Inan Deniz Erguvan is an assistant professor in the English Department at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) in Kuwait. She holds a PhD in Educational Administration. Her research interests are higher education management, academic writing and English Language Teaching (ELT).

CHAPTER 13

A Review of Writing Centre Tutor Training Materials in the GCC

Tony Schiera

Introduction

Long-held writing centre (WC) theory and praxis describes the work that is done between tutor and student as similar across institutions. However, the notion that WC theory and praxis can be implemented with equity from one institution to the next is an oversimplification of WC theory and an underestimation of the impact the environment in which a WC exists has on the WC. While WCs do share similar concepts of theory and praxis, how that praxis is carried out is greatly influenced not only by the environment in which the WC exists, but also by the population serving and being served within its walls; there is an ecology to each WC (Johnstone, 1989).

All WCs have different ecologies which are influenced by their institutional settings, yet the principles on which WCs run are similar. Consider two different farmers: one plants corn in Middle America; the other plants rice in a paddy in Korea. While there are underlying principles governing the growing of crops (fields must be prepared, seeds or seedlings must be sown, crops must be tended and harvested), each farmer has different tools to do the work, different seasons which

T. Schiera (✉)
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA, USA

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produce optimum crop output, and different environmental parameters in which their crops will produce the highest yield. In a similar way, we can say that the work a tutor in one WC does with a student is very similar to what another tutor does in a different WC, that is, it is similar in theory, but the praxis and tools implanting that praxis vary by location.

What the ecology of a WC looks like and how it is influenced by the larger institutional environment in which it exists can be initially explored by looking at the work tutors are trained to do across the contexts in which they work. Johnstone's (1989) concept of ecology in the WC can be extended to the ecology of tutor training, which allows for a greater understanding of the training tutors receive regardless of the settings in which they work.

Tutoring strategies (Barnett & Blumner, 2007; Bruce & Rafoth, 2016; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2015) offer views of what happens or what should happen in WC tutor sessions. All of these above-mentioned studies exist to describe the work tutors do with students in the North American context, yet little research exists regarding the work tutors and students do together in contexts outside of North America.

WCs in Arabian Gulf countries (AGCs) have been growing in numbers since universities from the West, specifically the United States, began opening branch campuses in the region (McHarg, 2013). Moreover, in opening the branch campuses, the importing universities have had to adapt the concepts of a WC to the needs of each local university (Ronesi, 2009). However, little research exists which investigates the tutor–student interaction in WCs in AGCs (Lefort, 2008; McHarg, 2013).

Similar to WCs elsewhere in the world, WCs in AGCs follow either the peer tutor model, where older or more experienced students tutor younger or less experienced students, or WCs employ professional tutors, who may or may not have a background in education or teaching. Whether a WC in the AGC region follows the peer tutor or the professional tutor model, like WCs' directors in the West, WCs' directors in AGCs have to contend with training their tutors in conducting a WC tutoring session (Lefort, 2008). But what does the tutor training material contain? What does it explain to tutors? What does it expect tutors to do with students?

As a metaphor, ecology works well for WC practice (Johnstone, 1989) and the learning that occurs in the interaction between the tutor, the student, and the location where they meet. Kramsch (2004) noted, "the 'ecology' metaphor is a convenient shorthand for the poststructuralist

realisation that learning is a nonlinear, relational human activity co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history" (p. 5). The investigative lens of ecology has been used in WC studies for years (Devet, 2011, 2014; Gillam, 1991; Johnstone, 1989). This chapter extends the ecological concept already in place in WC study to a review of WC tutor training manuals in order to better understand how WCs in AGCs train their tutors.

Definitions

Tutor training material from participating WCs in this review use a variety of terms to describe their tutors. These terms include peer tutor, writing tutor, tutor, writing centre tutor, and consultant. To avoid confusion when discussing what each training manual covers, I will use the general term "tutor" to describe a person who tutors another person in writing. Similarly, the tutor training material uses the terms student, learner, and client to describe the person who receives tutoring from a tutor. When referencing the person working with a tutor, I use the term "student."

The phrase "training document" is used as a blanket description to describe the various documents submitted for the purposes of this review, all of which are produced in-house in each WC. Each WC titled its training documents, and for the most part, I have kept the title intact unless using the full title identified by the WC or university where the WC is situated. In these cases, I eliminated the name of the WC or university from the title and used a shortened version of the document name.

Participants

As of this writing, there are 24 WCs (K. Wilson, personal correspondence, 24 March 2016) in the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centres Association (MENAWCA), which is an affiliate of the International Writing Centres Association (Affiliate Organisations, 2015). Of the 24 WCs in the MENAWCA, six are defunct or no longer have a web presence. Of the remaining 18, six ($n = 6$) or 0.33% are from AGCs and responded to the call for submitting training documents for the purposes of this review. These six WCs submitted a total of eight in-house produced documents (see Table 13.1) used to train their tutors in WC practice.

Table 13.1 Participating writing centres' (WC) locations, university model, and contribution

WC	*Location*	*University model*	*Contribution*
WC1	United Arab Emirates	American branch campus	"Course Syllabus"
WC2	Qatar	American branch campus	*Writing Tutor Training Modules*
WC3	Oman	National university	*Writing Centre Tutor Guide* and a frequently asked questions (FAQ) list
WC4	United Arab Emirates	National university	*Writing Centre Staff Handbook* and *Peer Tutor Handbook*
WC5	Qatar	American branch campus	*Peer Tutor Handbook* and *Policy Guidelines for Peer Tutors*
WC6	Saudi Arabia	National university	A list of chapters for writing tutors to read

Data Sources

The WCs agreeing to participate in this review did so with the understanding that the investigator would keep them and their universities anonymous. The participating WCs in this review fall into two categories (see Table 13.1): national universities ($n = 3$) operating under the guise of a local government within a single country, or American universities ($n = 3$) with branch campuses that have established universities in AGCs.

Methodology

This review of in-house produced WC tutor training material seeks to describe the ways in which tutors are trained at various WCs in AGCs. What follows is a word count analysis of the training documents and a summary of the documents, containing the main points in each. Through the analysis and the summary that follows, the values placed upon the tutor training process at the participating WCs can be explored across the various contexts from which they come. Exploring the pan-contextuality of training allows a better understanding of the ecological nature of WCs, in general, and how each participating WC approaches its training, which is influenced by the interaction of place, people, and goals.

Word Count Analysis

A total of eight WC training documents were run through the AntConc (Anthony, 2014) software. These documents come from WC1, WC2,

WC3, WC4, and WC5 (see Table 13.1). WC6 was not included in the Antconc analysis because it relies on commercially produced WC-focused texts and chapters to train their tutors. Among the documents submitted, the AntConc (Anthony, 2014) revealed the following.

A total of 33,879 words are represented across all eight documents. "Writing" is the most frequently occurring word across all documents submitted for review. Table 13.2 lists the most frequently occurring content words (word count), their frequency, and the overall rank of how often the words are used. While "writing" is used 566 times, with an overall rank of the ninth most used word, ranked words from first to seventh are as follows: (1) the, (2) to, (3) x, (4) and, (5) a, (6) of, (7) in, *and* (8) you. Table 13.2 shows the eight highest overall content words in the word rank, word count, and number of times each word appears (word frequency) in specific training documents.

Both word frequency and ranking show that, across tutor training documents, WCs share common words that help in the training of tutors.

Table 13.2 Overall word rank, count, and document appearance

	Writing	*Students*	*Student*	*Tutoring*	*Tutor*	*Tutors*	*Writers*	*Writer*
Word								
Word rank	9	12	14	23	25	46	102	166
Word count	566	362	356	197	170	102	45	29
Training documents								
WC1: "Course Syllabus"	89	51	22	15	12	9	7	4
WC2: *Tutor Training Modules*	160	11	11	75	50	26	21	5
WC3: *Tutor Training Manual*	58	29	60	2	20	5	3	5
WC3: FAQ list	28	4	0	0	3	3	0	2
WC4: *Staff Handbook*	58	52	33	5	11	8	3	3
WC4: *Peer Tutor Handbook*	154	94	63	8	9	20	11	10
WC5: *Peer Tutor Training Book*	3	82	86	64	46	16	0	0
WC5: *Policy Guidelines for Peer Tutors*	16	39	81	28	19	15	0	0

A closer analysis of the material submitted[1] for review reveals the following: "Writing" appears 566 times across the eight analysed documents. While 566 is a large number, it is important to know that the phrase "writing centre" figures prominently in the submitted documents because many inclusions of the phrase indicate the institution for which tutors are training or as the title of the document itself.

The word "student" appears 362 times, and "students" appears 356 times for a total of 708 instances across all documents. The word "writer" appears 29 times, and "writers" appears 45 times for a total of 74 times in eight of the ten documents. Taken together, the words student, students, writer, and writers appear a grand total of 783 times. Meanwhile, the related word "tutor" appears 170 times, and "tutors" appears 102 times for a total of 272 instances.

Of note, the synonymised words "student" and "writer" and their plural counterparts appear across the training documents more than twice the rate of "tutor" and "tutors." When considering the summary of the documents above and the total word counts of student, students, tutor, and tutors, a strong argument can be made that the training of WC tutors in universities in AGCs is focused more on the students receiving the tutoring than the tutors who provide the tutoring.

Summary of WC Documents

Writing Centre 1

A writing centre based at an American branch campus in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, Writing Centre 1 (WC1), submitted a "Course Syllabus" for the class Peer Tutoring in Writing. "This course is used to train talented writers for roles as Writing Centre Tutors or Writing Fellows from a pool of undergraduate students who demonstrate high levels of writing ability, interest, and interpersonal skills." To help students think critically about writing and the teaching and tutoring of writing, this course uses an experiential model where students observe WC sessions, teach one another through class discussions, and comment on sample papers.

In addition to the experiential nature of the course, with a focus on "addressing issues and theories of writing and peer-collaboration relating to peer tutoring in writing," students read and discuss several canonical pieces on WC practice: Brufee's (2001) "Conversation of Mankind," Trimbur's (1987) "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?," Reid's (1994) "Responding to ESL Students' Texts: The Myths of Appropriation,"

Bouman's (2004) "Raising Questions about Plagiarism," Harbord's (2003) "Minimalist Tutoring: An Exportable Model?," Sherwood's (1999) "Censoring Students, Censoring Ourselves: Constraining Conversations in the Writing Centre," Bahrainwala's (2013) "Should I Take Notes as You Brainstorm: Examining Consultants' In-Session Notes," Moore's (2013) "Revising Trimbur's Dichotomy: Tutors and Clients Sharing Knowledge, Sharing Power," Ronesi's (2011) "Striking While the Iron Is Hot: A Writing Fellows Program Supporting Lower-Division Courses at an American University in the UAE," and Kaplan's (1966) "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-cultural Education."

The articles listed above are covered in class via student-led class discussion. Students are divided into pairs, and they share the duties of leading class discussions on the topics within the articles. Students are expected to lead the class in discussion of the implicit and explicit aspects of the article through a variety of stimulating ways described by the course instructor. Through the discussions, WC observation, and practice on marking sample papers, students completing the course are eligible, for students come to "consider how such issues and theories may or may not apply in the" context of WC1.

Another aim of the course includes students developing an awareness of English grammar in writing, specifically coming

> to understand that a writing tutor's support with grammar is less important than support with organisation, idea development, cohesion, and coherence; however, weak grammar that hinders clarity is a common problem among students. As such, it is important for WRI 221 students to be able to identify and explain some of the most common grammar problems, particularly problems with tenses and run-on sentences.

Between the reading and discussion of WC-related articles and the grammar lessons, by the end of the course, students will be able to

- critically analyse course content via personal and real-world experience and understanding;
- engage with their classmates in substantive discussions on course content;
- explain discrete points of grammar and punctuation using an interactive, inductive approach (by engaging the class in an exercise where the class examines authentic language and generates grammar rules inductively);

- analyse the success of their tutorials in view of class content; and
- demonstrate knowledge of the issues and theories related to peer tutoring in writing.

Writing Centre 2

An American university branch in Doha, Qatar, submitted *Writing Tutor Training Modules* used to train students to become tutors. This training takes place over the course of the first semester while working as a peer tutor at the WC. To become a full-fledged tutor, or "Very Important Tutors in Training," candidates are required to attend weekly peer tutor training meetings, weekly writing peer tutor training meetings, and complete a set of 10 modules, composed of five parts: an objective part, readings, a writing and reflection part, an application part, and a focus on WC scholarship part. Pertinent to the discussion here are the goals of each module as well as the WC scholarship trainees read.

According to the training document, the goals of Module 1 are to introduce trainees to WC work and practice, to critical thinking and reflection on writing skills, and to how one-on-one tutoring fits into the goals and mission of the larger university. The goals of Module 2 ask for the tutors in training to become familiar with the taxonomy needed to talk to writers about their writing and to consider the recursive nature of the writing process. Module 3 begins the basic approach to learning about and understanding what happens in this WC's 50-minute face-to-face appointment and asks trainees to consider what process makes up an effective tutoring session. Module 4 asks trainees to apply their new learning to tutoring sessions in the WC and to focus on the best practices to meet the needs of their student population. Module 5 encourages trainees to build an awareness of their clients' needs, how to best help them, and how to build a rapport that fosters a relationship of work and trust. Module 6 introduces trainees to this WC's budding online tutoring practice and services. Module 7 asks trainees to consider how different writing assignments have different genres and audiences. Module 8 covers unusual or challenging tutoring situations and helps trainees learn about the potential difficulties that can occur while tutoring and the skills needed to get through difficult sessions. Module 9 is a review covering WC theory and practice and making connections to the local context in which the trainees work. Module 10 asks tutors to continue their practice in tutoring, welcomes trainees to the field of tutoring, and encourages trainees to develop enquiry into their tutoring to further the research in the field.

Through the course of the study, trainees read all nine chapters of Ryan and Zimmerelli's (2010) The Bedford's Guide for Writing Tutors and a number of chapters from Barnett and Blumner's (2007) *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice,* including North's "The Idea of a Writing Centre" and "Revising 'The Idea of a Writing Centre,'" Bruffee's "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation for Mankind,'" Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," Harris' "Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration: Writing Centre Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups," Trimbur's "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?," Coogan's "Towards a Rhetoric of On-Line Tutoring," Posey's "An Ongoing Tutor-Training Program," Wallace's "The Writing Centre's Role in the Writing across the Curriculum Program: Theory and Practice," and Newkirk's "The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference."

Writing Centre 3

WC3, situated within the foundation programme (FP)[2] of a national university in Oman, hired professional WC tutors living in the area where the campus is located. These professional tutors were all degree-holding adults. The training material WC3 submitted included a *Writing Centre Tutor Guide* and a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ).

WC3 used the *Writing Centre Tutor Guide* to train the professional tutors hired to tutor English-language students in the university's FP. The tutor guide serves to describe for tutors the function of the WC within the larger FP and to introduce them to the mission of WCs, including methodology, serving Arabic-speaking students, and a conference protocol.

In placing the WC within the background of the larger FP, the tutor guide for WC3 noted that the FP served more than 4000 students and employed more than 200 instructors from 30 different countries. At the time of the writing of the tutor guide for WC3, the WC served upper-level students in the FP first and, then, based on space and tutor availability, students outside the FP in their courses of study. All the students served by the WC were English-language students.

WC3's mission is similar to the missions of other WCs: "It is our mission to improve students' written communication through ongoing support in the form of collaborative dialogue, explicit instruction in academic writing, and an encouraging environment to practice and develop as writers." To enact this mission, WC3 provides students with one-on-one conferencing with a tutor, supports writers of any proficiency with writ-

ing tasks in any course, aims to establish dialogue with students about the writing process to offer encouragement as well as support through improving revisions, and promotes critical thinking and responsible academic enquiry through careful study of citation practices.

The students using the services provided by WC3 typically possess low-intermediate to intermediate proficiency levels in English, with strong motivation to improve. WC3 solicits students via classroom visits to voluntarily attend WC tutoring sessions.

WC3 encourages a methodology that involves approaching students as writers who often face challenges of confidence as much as of ability. In making students feel welcome in the WC, tutors are trained to follow Pemberton's (1994) *The Three Laws of Tutorics*:

1. A WC tutor should teach students how to write and revise their own work, not do the writing or the revising for them.
2. A WC tutor should help students identify the most significant problems in their texts, so long as the help they provide does not violate the first law.
3. A WC tutor should follow a student's agenda for the writing conference, so long as the agenda does not violate the first or second law.

In enacting Pemberton's three laws of tutoring, tutors in WC3 are trained "to address higher order concerns (content, development, organisation) before lower order concerns (word choice, grammar and mechanics)." Tutors are directed to avoid addressing all errors but encouraged to use their expertise to provide direction to students on correct usage and to guide them in their own editing. The *Writing Centre Tutor Guide* asks that tutors use their own judgement whether to move into more direct tutoring, as opposed to minimalist tutoring, where students are more involved in session workings.

Because the majority of WC3's tutors were expatriates living in Oman who might not be familiar with Arabic learners of English, WC3's training manual provides a list of 11 tips for tutors regarding how the Arabic language is constructed, which may cause confusion when students write in English. Some of the tips in the tutor guide include information on basic word order of Classical Arabic, where the verb precedes the subject, the lack of the auxiliary verb *do*, and the absence of the verb *be* in the present tense.

WC3's *Writing Centre Tutor Guide* also includes a writing conference protocol which provides guidelines for how tutors are to conduct a WC session with students. Included in the protocol are sections that can be described as welcoming the student, opening the session, analysing the paper, and closing the session.

Prior to opening the session, the protocol asks tutors to make sure that the space where the conference is to take place has scratch paper and reference material. In the opening steps of the session, tutors are to welcome the student, invite the student to sit down, and ask if this is the first WC for the student. If it is the student's first visit, the tutor guide asks that tutors explain what the WC is and how it functions.

The next steps in the protocol touch on helping the student be engaged in the session by answering any questions the student may have about the WC or the session, asking about what goals and concerns the student has, and agreeing on what the tutor and the student will work on in the allotted time of the session. The tutor is then asked to become familiar with both the writing task and how the student understands it.

The protocol tasks the tutor to begin analysing the student paper by asking the student to read the paper aloud. This is done to help the student identify places that "don't sound right" and to ensure the student remains an active agent in the session, rather than expecting the tutor to identify and fix the errors in the paper. As a student reads, the tutor should listen and take notes on a separate piece of paper and avoid writing directly on a draft of student writing. Tutors are directed to look for global, over local, concerns in so far as the draft meets parameters of the assignment and has identifiable parts of an essay (introduction, thesis statement, body, and conclusion). As this process continues, the tutor is encouraged to ask questions about the writing and to offer choices on ways to repair areas of the paper in question, rather than being directive in how to fix problem parts. Overall, tutors are asked to allow time for the student to respond to questions a tutor might ask.

In closing the session, the protocol tasks tutors with ending on a positive or encouraging comment, reviewing the work that was done, and discussing the work the student will do after the session. The protocol then directs tutors to complete for and email to the student a form describing the work done in the session, and then the protocol asks the tutors to invite students to complete an anonymous feedback form on the session.

WC3 also submitted a FAQ list with questions (and answers), written in both Arabic and English, that potential users of the WC might have.

Created primarily for WC in-promotion, the FAQ list was also used in tutor training to introduce newly hired tutors to how the WC functioned. The FAQ list can be divided into factual and descriptive information about the WC. Questions and answers about WC hours, location, making an appointment, and information about who can use the services fall into the category of factual information. Questions about making an appointment, how the WC can help students, how to prepare for a conference, and what happens in a WC conference can be categorised as descriptive information about the WC.

Writing Centre 4

WC4, a national university based in the United Arab Emirates, submitted its *Writing Centre Staff Handbook* and its *Peer Tutor Handbook* for the purposes of this review. The *Writing Centre Staff Handbook* serves to acquaint both peer tutors and professional tutors with information surrounding the WC's mission statement, an introduction to the WC, the services of the WC, and the tutoring methodology.

The mission statement of WC4 is as follows:

> The Writing Centre strives to assist all members of the university community as they learn more about writing and become better writers. By offering resources for writers in English and Arabic, the centre encourages development of academic and creative writing skills across the curriculum.

The mission statement of WC4 provides guidance for its staff of teachers from the university's English, Arabic, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) departments; the university's FP; and peer tutors of advanced abilities in English.

WC4 has two locations: one for female students and one for male students. However, teachers working as tutors in the WC serve in both locations regardless of their gender. The bulk of WC4's tutorial sessions are drawn from the university's FP and ESP programme; however, WC sessions are not the only service of WC4. It also provides workshops on various aspects of writing dictated on faculty's and students' need.

The tutoring methodology of WC4 articulates that a tutor is not a student's teacher, and that the WC session is collaborative and facilitative in style, which "helps students develop confidence and autonomy." Sessions and interactions with students are to be informal and non-judgmental, a

place where students feel free to explore ideas and discuss concerns in a one-on-one setting. WC4 lists several principles of tutoring, which include concepts such as collaborative consultation with dialogue and discussion, student-directed topic setting, and not writing on student's work.

Other guiding principles ask tutors to enact a positive approach and engage students in intellectual discussions about their topics to facilitate deeper thinking. Tutors are responsible for keeping track of the tutorial session timing of 25–50 minutes but not hurrying through the session, as "good writing takes time," which might mean asking repeated questions through non-directive techniques.

WC4's student population mostly comprises students of English as a Second Language. With this knowledge, the tutor manual mentions that students will enter the WC with varying abilities in writing as well as in speaking and may face serious challenges in written or spoken communication. To accommodate students of all levels and abilities, the *Staff Handbook* provides tutors with a general, four-step tutoring process. The tutoring process includes welcoming the student in a positive way to establish a comfortable relationship, asking the student to explain the assignment requirements and what he/she wants to do, setting an agenda in collaboration with the student, and working within the areas identified by the student.

WC4's second submission for this review, the *Peer Tutor Handbook*, provides some suggested tutoring techniques, which include understanding the assignment, brainstorming and planning, working with a rough draft, and working on a final draft. If students are unsure of what the assignment asks of them, tutors are instructed to have students check with their instructor. In generating ideas and planning, the *Peer Tutor Handbook* for WC4 directs tutors to consider questions such as "What do you know about the topic?" "Do you need to find out more about it?" "How can you find out more?" If students come to a tutorial session with a rough draft, the *Tutor Handbook* directs tutors to ask them questions that encourage reflection on the work that has been done: "What needs improving and why?" "What have you found difficult?" This section tasks tutors to provide feedback as a reader. If a student comes with a final draft, tutors are directed to make sure that he/she has already read the paper and checked the writing. Tutors are then asked to discuss with the student what mistakes are likely to be found in the writing and to supervise the student as he/she checks for that type of error. Because of the language level and ability of some students using the WC services in WC4, the *Peer*

Tutor Handbook advises tutors that if a student is unable to check the work himself or herself, the tutor is to point out and discuss two to three areas that need work but never to "proofread or correct the student's work."

Writing Centre 5

WC5 is a branch campus of an American university based in Qatar, and it submitted two documents for this review: a *Peer Tutor Training Handbook* (*PTTH*) and *Policy Guidelines for Peer Tutors* (*PGPT*). The *PTTH* provides tutors with a ten-unit training module introducing peer tutors to the art of tutoring and helping them become acquainted with how to address their tutoring when in a session with a student. WC5 also submitted the *PGPT*, which supports WC tutors by outlining WC and Student Services Centre policies and procedures.

There are ten sections in WC5's *PTTH*: Introduction, Ideal Peer Tutor, Conducting a Good Session, Communication, Listening Habits, Learning Styles, Learning Disabilities, Diversity, Group Tutoring, and Review. Each section has a brief definition of the topic, followed by informative reading that elucidates the importance of focusing on this topic.

In the first section, Introduction, tutoring is defined as helping "students help themselves, or to assist or guide them to the point at which they become an independent learner, and thus no longer need a tutor." Supporting this definition are discussions of a tutoring code of ethics and the benefits peer tutors receive from tutoring. The code of ethics in WC5's *PTTH* comes from the National Tutoring Association (2016) and is printed in its entirety. According to the Introduction, the benefits peer tutors receive from tutoring include increases in the following: motivation to learn, a sense of adequacy in adjusting to a new role, the ability to self-manage strategies in learning and studying, and content knowledge. The Introduction also explains that peer tutors will receive a heightened sense of ability to conform to a new role that encourages higher-level thinking, as well as learning, to empathise with students.

The second section of the *PTTH*, Ideal Peer Tutor, provides a list of guidelines that tutors are expected to follow. Tutors, according to the list, help students in the following ways: understand assignments, improve their writing and thinking skills through the writing process, identify strengths and weaknesses and build confidence in writing, and achieve a very high level of academic integrity. The guidelines also state that tutors

will assist in discussing the ideas the student brings to the session, not just the ideas of the tutor. Supporting this list of guidelines are descriptions of peer tutor behaviour expectations. Peer tutors are expected to be inspiring to their peers and tutees; professional towards other WC employees and students regardless of gender; confidential regarding details of who is tutored in the WC by maintaining the privacy of confidential information regarding student name, class, level of English ability, or other details; challenged to learn new skills and techniques to become a more effective tutor; and creative in developing new talents and interests in projects in and about the WC.

Section three of the *PTTH* is Conducting a Good Tutoring Session. In three steps, this section introduces tutors to a protocol for conducting a tutoring session. *Step one*, getting to know the tutee, mentions the tutee's psychological, academic, and social needs. *Step two* discusses the actions a tutor can use to lead to a good session with a student. These actions include being honest with the student, giving undivided attention to the student, and being empathetic towards the student. Tutors are directed to read ask what the student's concerns and goals are for the session. *Step three* discusses ending the tutorial session by assessing and recapping the work that was done in the session, providing extra assignments if needed, and offering to schedule a follow-up tutorial session. Through these actions, it is hoped that the tutor can improve the student's weak areas by working through his/her strengths.

The fourth section of the *PTTH* is Communication, and the fifth is Listening Habits. Both sections help peer tutors in training to learn about effective speaking, questioning, and listening techniques to have a successful tutoring session with a student. In the fourth section, tutors are asked to take a communication-style quiz to help them discover their communication style and how this style can help establish rapport with a student. The fifth section asks tutors to consider a wide range of habits associated with good and bad listening techniques, which mean highlighting that speakers (students) discuss what is most important to them and that they listen to ideas with the mind, not with emotions.

Sections six and seven of the *PTTH* discuss learning styles and learning with disabilities, respectively. Section six particularly discusses identifying the learning style of tutors in training and knowing how to adapt to the learning styles of tutees. Section seven discusses how to tutor students with disabilities. As WC5 is an American university branch based in Qatar,

the *PTTH* explains, it is bound by the American Disability Act, which guarantees access and services to persons with disabilities. This section also mentions some common learning disabilities, suggestions for providing assistance to students with disabilities, and strategies that can be employed in tutoring sessions for students with disabilities.

Section eight of the *PTTH* explores the topic of diversity, particularly the ways to tutor "a diverse range of students, and dealing with ideological conflicts during a tutoring session." This section focuses on identifying the actions the tutor can take if a student comes to the centre upset or angry or writes about something which the tutor disagrees with. In cases such as these, the *PTTH* advises the tutor to remove the student from the tutoring centre and take him/her for a walk. If a student writes about something, either a topic or in a way the tutor disagrees with, the tutor is advised to gently challenge the ideas present in the writing with counterarguments or to focus on seeing the writing assignment from the student's point of view. Section eight ends with a discussion on tutoring students of diversity, as WC5 is part of an American branch university in Qatar and students using the WC here come from many different countries. It is possible, according to the *PTTH*, that writing tutors may have to work with students from different cultures.

Section nine of the *PTTH* focuses on group tutoring within the WC. According to the handbook, working with a small group has many benefits and challenges, but the largest benefit is the possibility of sharing multiple viewpoints and information. The handbook instructs tutors to keep an open mind, to allow students time to think when asking a question, and to encourage everyone to speak, particularly when there is one dominant person in the small group.

Section ten of the *PTTH* is a unit serving as a review of the previous nine units.

WC5 also submitted the *PGPT*. In this document, tutors are given a broad overview of the policies and procedures of working in the larger Student Services Centre, in which the WC is located, as well a focused section on the art of tutoring. This section provides the values of the university where WC5 is situated as well as suggestions on beginning a tutoring session, how to help build student confidence while lowering student stress, how to provide corrections and feedback, and how to develop and improve tutoring skills. The remaining sections of the *PGPT* contain information on policies within the WC.

Writing Centre 6

WC6 is a national university in Saudi Arabia. In training WC tutors at WC6, tutors independently study and then discuss at staff meetings a number of readings from WC scholarship. Read at a rate of one or two per week over the course of an academic year, tutors discuss the following: Chapters 1–6 from Gillespie and Lerner's (2008) *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, Chapters 1–6 from Barnett and Blumner's (2007) *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, Chapters 1–8 from Bruce and Rafoth's (2016) *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Centre Tutors*, and Chapters 1–8 from Ryan and Zimmerelli's (2010) *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors.*

Notes

1. While WC3's FAQ list is included in Table 13.2, it has very few associated words in common with the other tutor training documents. One reason for this is that the FAQ list is a one-page question-and-answer document designed for intra-university WC promotion. WC3's FAQ list is used in training, but is not the main training document from which tutors are trained.
2. A foundation program (FP), often called a bridge or gap program, serves to bolster the English-language skills of first-year university students in order to prepare them for academic studies entirely in English. At this university, students tested into a specific level of the FP and stayed in it for as short as a semester or as long as 18 months, depending on where they started in the FP. This WC was mandated to serve FP students, but also worked with students in their regular academic courses if space allowed.

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Tony Schiera is a PhD candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). He has nearly 20 years' experience teaching English and writing in countries such as Ecuador, South Korea, the United States, and Oman. He teaches basic writing and English 101 to students at IUP.

PART III

Comparative Investigations of Writing Centres in the Arabian Gulf Countries

CHAPTER 14

Writing Centres in the Arabian Gulf Region: Dialogic Investigations

Habib Bouagada

Introduction

Any cogent enquiry into the emergence and the development of writing centres will be circumscribed within the boundaries of North America, their birthplace (Harris, 1982). A similar enquiry into writing centres operating in the Gulf region will fall short of yielding the tangible results required to give us a full grasp of these centres' dynamics, a situation that can largely be explained by the paucity of resources and the lack of elaborate, in-depth studies on the subject. Notwithstanding the relatively short span of time that saw the burgeoning of universities across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries by the second half of the twentieth century, writing centres were soon to gain ground, usually at the instigation of Western expatriates holding teaching and administrative positions in colleges or universities or, to a lesser degree, of their local counterparts trained in English-speaking countries. Oddly enough, at a time when writing centres in the Gulf region have been on the rise with the new millennium, centres in North America are facing closures, the recent one being the writing centre affiliated to the University of British Columbia in Canada.

Writing centres in the Gulf region are seldom incorporated into a historical account in any coherent way, due, in large measure, to their fairly

H. Bouagada (✉)
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes of Yanbu, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

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recent existence. As a natural consequence to this state of things, one hardly gets any idea whatsoever of their function or their position within established academic institutions as a whole. Two considerations stem out upon a close scrutiny of the writing centres' *modus operandi*: a substantial number of writing centres appear to be embedded within larger institutions from which they secure their raison d'être, thus acquiring a peripheral and undervalued position that makes of them vulnerable entities at the mercy of the tidal contingencies resulting from a confusion as to what status they are entitled to; whereas other centres, particularly the centres in Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE), function as full-fledged co-systems in the way they adopt specific norms, behaviours, and policies. In this respect, writing centres operating in Qatar, affiliated in their majority to American institutions, purport to have attained a level of excellence that gives them a distinctive academic position since the adoption of English as a medium of instruction. This "has shaped the dynamics of [the] Writing Centers and challenged their creative ingenuity and capacity to offer excellent proactive services to their students. The future of the English writing program in Qatar is bright, as it can further benefit from harnessing the resources of other language skills to help its growing student population"(see Julian Williams, Chap. 3 in this book).

Looking back at the history and the recent development of writing centres across the Gulf region, one cannot fail to experience a feeling of déjà-vu with respect to the rationale behind their inception and the functions they assume on the ground. There is widespread consensus among writing centres' users that writing centres in the Gulf region, with slightly varying degrees of approach, have been a natural and practical emanation of North American models, whose emergence in the 1950s—though no accurate date can unquestionably be ascertained—had a rationale of its own. From a place that offered remedial services for learners' writing deficiencies to a contemporary institution integrated into distance education and virtual technology, writing centres in North America have come a long way and have translated into a unique experience whose intricate tapestry can be reflected in the different appellations attributed to them. The names "writing centre", "writing lab", "writing clinic", and "writing studio" are the multiple facets of a rich historiography compared with which the nascent writing centres in the Gulf region are only at their stammering stage.

In terms of their own inception or the trajectory they have pursued, writing centres in the Gulf region were created as a replica of those in North

America, with the exception that writing centres in the West are to be found in secondary and post-secondary education, while their counterparts in the Gulf region are confined to post-secondary education only (Blumner, 2008). This disparity, in itself, is indicative of a long writing tradition in Western academia, of which writing centres are a natural recipient. In the Gulf region, however, writing centres are a novelty in a tradition whose foundation is deeply rooted in orality, and, therefore, their existence can only be legitimized by the very existence of the institution of which they are part.

The reality of the Gulf writing centres being what it is, it stands to reason that these centres should claim ownership of their practices in relation to their learners' specific needs. A close look at the internal workings of these writing centres shows indisputable evidence that most of these centres have arguably disentangled themselves, though partly, from the very concept of a writing centre as upheld by the International Writing Centres Association (IWCA). Such disentanglement is not tantamount to a genuine autonomy sought by these writing centres, but their current situation was rather de facto imposed by exogenous and endogenous parameters that have hampered their functionality, or at least have endowed them with a mission not so much akin to that of the IWCA.

While the IWCA advocates a tutoring approach based on collaboration between tutors and learners in a way that promotes a process whereby learners can claim authority over their writing, most writing centres across the Gulf region still remain, to borrow North's (1984) terminology, a "fix-it shop" where the primary role of tutors is to assist learners with all aspects of writing assignments. There still seems to prevail on the part of tutors a propensity towards a prescriptive mode of tutoring that leaves no room for experimentation and risk-taking, which renders the writing centre an extension of the classroom or its own replica. Testimonies from tutors in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and, to a lesser extent, in Bahrain, Qatar, and UAE, indicate that writing centres are home to learners whose expectations of the centre is that of a place where their written work could be improved through the full agency of the tutor. The aggressive and direct intervention of tutors in the learners' writing can find its justification in the lowest scores, as indicated by international examination institutions[1] conferred on students from GCC countries in regular classrooms settings as well as at international proficiency examinations such as he International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), with the writing skill being the main source of affliction, the students' "pet peeve" so to speak.[2]

An examination of the prevailing modes of operating across these writing centres reveals significant differences that prevent any attempt at viewing them monolithically, even if, by virtue of their affiliation to the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centres Alliance (MENAWCA), they ostensibly adhere to the same concept of a writing centre and display in their literature a feeling of working along the same continuum of ideas. These differences can be construed around key concepts: tutor training, discourse, and market-driven economy.

Tutor Training: A Blot in the Writing Centre Landscape

With the exception of a few manifest cases in the UAE and Qatar, if one may venture to make a blatant remark about writing centres in the Gulf region, it appears quite clearly that those who have taken it upon themselves the arduous task of establishing these places have, in good faith, put the cart before the horse. Faced with the pressing need to mitigate increasing learners' writing deficiencies, the creation of writing centres was believed to be the antidote to counteract writing shortcomings and weaknesses. However, amidst the momentum that the creation of the centres generated, tutor training has not been accorded the importance it merits. While the IWCA recommends the appointment of tutors and administrators with a background in writing centre work, the current situation of most writing centres in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, reflects a different reality. Most tutors attending to the daily needs of writing centres are regular English faculty or department members who find themselves caught between their core duties and their additional writing centre commitments. As Hamid Ali Khan Eusafzai (in this collection) states, "all tutors have different realisations of their role as tutors. The lack of a uniform understanding of the role of WCs means a lack of uniformity in the tutoring practices of these tutors. This implies that whereas the WCs have tried to import and appropriate the North American model of WC pedagogy, perhaps, they could not impart this model to their tutors or have been able to develop an indigenous model of WC tutoring more in sync with the local needs and students" (see Chap. 1).

Other than the broad mission statement outlining in malleable terms the principles and the policies governing the function of the writing centre, these tutors have only their own expertise to rely on. Lacking proper

tutoring manuals they can fall back on or extensive training in tutoring delivery, writing centre tutors echo the same discourse they perpetuate in their mainstream classroom teaching. When the IWCA postulates that appropriate tutoring should shun proofreading and "address editing and revising through practices consistent with current writing centre pedagogy",[3] it encourages a type of tutor–student rapport that hinges upon a tacit agreement among tutors and learners in which the active engagement of the learner in the writing process is paramount and the role of the tutor is confined to that of a facilitator. But how far is such a minimalist approach grounded in the actual writing centre reality? And assuming that writing centres espouse the principles of the IWCA, is there any mechanism in place that helps us assert or validate any success that can be attributed to them in a way that can grant them legitimacy? In the overall writing centre landscape, two realities are self-imposing: at one fortunate end of the spectrum, there are a number of writing centres, namely that of New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), the American University of Sharjah, the American University of Ras al-Khaimah, and United Arab Emirates University, in addition to Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Weill Cornell Medical College, Carnegie Mellon University, all housed in Qatar. The list is not exhaustive, but the significant fact that all these writing centres are affiliated to American universities or colleges is a hallmark in its own right. Put crudely, these centres, thanks to their affiliation to American universities, do not compromise on resources and qualified manpower in a manner that leaves most of the other writing centres in the region hide in envy.

Given the robust support they enjoy, these centres hire professionally trained and generously remunerated tutors, who, thanks to the variegated means at their disposal, offer writing services beyond what the common writing centres in the region can imagine. Here, learners frequent the centre for a wide range of assignments and meet with tutors who do not leave any stone unturned: from an essay in need of editing, a creative skill that needs to be honed, a science project to be reviewed, an IELTS exam to be prepared, to even an oral presentation that requires tweaking, every wish is fulfilled to the utter satisfaction of learners, who can ask for more. These centres can stage discussion among tutors on canonical pieces of writing where theories of writing are foregrounded. These are writing centres of a high order where it is not only the language that is given prominence, but the metalanguage in the form of reflection on the language itself. Though these findings are hard to substantiate by examples on the

field, it is quite apparent that, by dint of the literature they display, these centres function along the lines of the IWCA and aspire to a level of practice on a par with international standards.

On the other end of the spectrum lie most writing centres of the region. If there is a commonality among these centres, it is undoubtedly their "status" as home-grown, albeit the foreign influence at the heart of their inception. Despite the fact that "home-grown" is oftentimes synonymous with a poor trademark, it is, nevertheless, an expression of a genuine struggle against all odds.

Writing centres in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman, to mention only these, are battling quixotic forces that make the tutoring position they adopt an act of chivalry. Deprived of any training on how to build awareness on collaborative work, tutors welcome learners who, usually, struggle to get a writing task done or learners who need to boost a grade prior to an exam. Tutors may sit for hours on end waiting for a student to show up with a writing problem to be "fixed" and leave the writing centre with a feeling of "mission accomplished". This is the way "collaboration" is perceived, a perception so much out of touch with what the IWCA promotes or what Lunsford (1991, p. 93) staunchly voices:

> [C]ollaboration both in theory and practice reflects a broad-based epistemological shift, a shift in the way we view knowledge. The shift involves a move from viewing knowledge and reality as things exterior to or outside of us, as immediately accessible, individually knowable, measurable, and shareable—to viewing knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, contextualized, as, in short, the product of collaboration.

In the light of the above, what is enacted in these writing centres seems sheer felony, by all means condemnable. But are we not making a hasty judgement for the sake of a utopian writing centre (Harris, 1985) that the region cannot realistically afford? Are we not trying to emulate an exotic model at all costs, to the extent of jeopardizing both the cart and the horse? Any reasonable mind faced with the challenging and, at times, daunting reality of writing centres in the Gulf region will be prompt to notice that patience, appreciation, and recognition are of the essence. Tutors experience the double challenge of not seeing their work recognized, partly on account of the absence of any status ascribed to the writing centre itself. Usually encroaching upon the premises of English-language

departments, writing centres occupy a space not often academically visible and administratively relegated to an auxiliary position whose functions are defined, not by IWCA precepts, but by ill-trained tutors and, paradoxically, by learners themselves. Pure products of a schooling system where rote learning is a sacrosanct norm, learners are baffled to be even asked to write, let alone develop an idiosyncratic or a writerly identity. The natural consequence to a situation enforced on them is demotivation and, its corollary, resistance.

The Invisible Tutor and the Anonymous Tutee

Now that writing centres have become an intrinsic part of a rising number of English as a foreign language (EFL) departments in the Gulf region, a new road map needs to be drafted for these centres to take on a vigorous presence that gives meaning to their existence and accords tutors and learners (or tutees) a sense of empowerment. In the current scheme of things, the tutor remains a shadowy figure lost in the vagaries of administration, themselves stranded between imported ideals and hard, inevitable facts. A decade or so since they have come on the academic scene, writing centres are yet to give any validation to their success. For this to occur, a new writing centre philosophy needs to be proclaimed and in which the learner does not enter and exit the writing centre in utter anonymity. With accountability comes a shared responsibility whereby learners' progress is monitored and accounted for. If need be, a contextualization or even a domestication of the IWCA pedagogy is to be negotiated for the Gulf region writing centre to have any relevance for its users. Today's main challenge is to redefine the writing centre on the basis of tutors' and learners' shared expectations and aspirations. It is a return to basics that precludes any attempt at prescribing a set of practices that, given the current scenario, will only lead to a simulacrum of a writing centre where functions, policies, and roles are ill-defined, blurred, and short-lived. In practice, it is up to the learner to prescribe the rules that he or she deems appropriate to his or her own learning and up to the tutor to deliver accordingly, all in a place where real answers are provided in any way, shape, or form that prioritizes the learner's needs. Whether it is evaluative or non-evaluative, prescriptive or descriptive, teacher-directed or learner-centred, the writing centre has to be a home where tutors and learners engage in a relationship that promotes understanding of learners' deficiencies on the part of the tutor and respect and recognition of the tutor's

commitment on the part of the learner. It is a modus vivendi within which is articulated a deep sense of responsible freedom characterizing the new tutor–learner partnership.

Writing Centres: The Prison House of Neoliberal Economy: A Myth or a Reality?

It is easy to take a tendentious shortcut and stigmatize the rampant neoliberal economy as the scourge of societies that refuse to subscribe to the new order where human relations are governed by fierce competitiveness. But it is certainly true that with regard to this new order of things where the widespread formula is "use English or perish", it is only natural that English is not only the driving force that differentiates between those who aspire to success and those who are destined to remain on the fringes of free-market society, but also a mechanism around which higher education in the Gulf region is undergoing massive restructuring.

In the long-term strategic plans (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030, Oman Vision 2040, UAE Vision 2021, etc.) that GCC countries have embraced, drastic shifts at the level of thinking, processes, and methodologies have to be made to align higher education institutions to the requirements of this crucial phase. In this global paradigm, English is, therefore, naturalized into a medium of academic achievement, a vehicle of a linguistic Darwinism where competence and success in the marketplace are the sole appanage of highly proficient English users. Employability and marketability are today's buzzwords that have secured a comfortable and supposedly innocuous place in academic settings, to the point where they have become an integral part of governments' official discourse. In this regard, Osman Z. Barnawi, the editor of this book, offers a thought-provoking and in-depth analysis of the kind of unprecedented upheavals that have befallen the Gulf region as a direct consequence of drastic neoliberal policies in his book entitled *Neoliberalism and English language Education Policies in the Arabian Gulf* (Routledge Research in Language Education book series).

What about writing centres in this grand design? Shall we perceive them as malevolent instruments in the hands of hegemonic powers lurking in the dark and concocting plots to maintain English as the master language? Are writing centres set up for a higher order where learners will be the future successful agents of neoliberal economy? And, by extension, shall we fatalistically regard English as the only conveyer of progress leading up to market prosperity and without which this prosperity comes to a

standstill? Affirmative answers to the above questions amount to a witch-hunt so dear to the proponents of conspiracy theories. Or shall we reconsider the concept, the status, and the practices of writing centres in a way that is neither subservient to the trappings of neoliberalism and its ramifications nor to the doxa erected as unchanging truth by practitioners out of touch with writing centres' realities? A safe approach, in this respect, is to embrace change whenever needed without compromising our identities as tutors and learners embarked upon the common pursuit of genuine satisfaction of learners' writing needs, irrespective of whether our meeting place is called a fix-it shop, a writing centre, or a support service. Whether we adhere to IWCA precepts or follow our own separate roads, whether we abhor neoliberal principles or condone them, the whole matter boils down to the fact that our path to success cannot be trodden without a constant questioning of our own beliefs and assumptions.

Notes

1. https://www.ets.org
2. efl.com
3. http://writingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/twoyearpositionstatement1.pdf

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Habib Bouagada is Lecturer in English at Yanbu University College of the Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. He received a post-graduate diploma in the Sociology of Literature and a Master's in English Language and Literature from the United Kingdom as well as a Master's in Translation Studies from Canada. Bouagada has been lecturing in English and French for over two decades.