

## EFL Tutors' and Learners' Attitudes and Practices in the Writing Centers at the College of Languages and Translation

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates EFL Saudi male and female learners' and tutors' attitudes and practices in the Writing Centers at the College of Languages and Translation (CLTWCs) at Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University to determine the effectiveness of such centers. In fact, understanding EFL learners' needs is believed to eliminate some of the persistent writing challenges for such learners; and therefore this study seeks to explore the relatively new established CLTWCs to improve their services. Thus, in order to answer the study's two questions regarding the attitudes and practices of both tutors and learners, a cross-sectional quantitative research design was adopted by designing and administering two questionnaires among 29 faculty members ( $F = 18$ ,  $M = 11$ ) working in the centers and 217 students ( $F = 112$ ,  $M = 105$ ) visiting them. These questionnaires addressed demographic information, attitudes, and practices in the form of open-ended and/or closed-ended questions along with five Likert-Scale statements. The results showed that learners expressed a highly positive attitude toward the centers which could be attributed to the tutors. These tutors were reported to have excellent performance and professionalism during the sessions they had with the learners in question. Additionally, the findings cautiously suggest the importance of regular visits and motivation for students in order to obtain the desired and expected benefits of the centers.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing shift at universities to improve learners' writing and employ teaching strategies that develop the writing quality of learners. Such a shift contributes to providing EFL learners with support and assistance. Establishing writing centers (WCs hereafter) is one of the dramatic shifts that is considered a driving force for producing positive change in the area of developing writing (Myatt & Gaillet, 2017). Although WCs were founded more than forty years ago, researchers are still trying to enhance their effective role. In fact, EFL university learners are considered a vocal source of shaping the optimal learning environment (Dafouz & Camacho-Minano, 2016).

Generally, most research on WCs has investigated the role of WCs, the relationship between WCs and libraries, learners' attitudes and the development of WCs (e.g., Galbraith, Merrill, & Kline, 2012; McNatt, 2010). These studies were applied to native English speakers only. Recently, the growth of WC in the EFL environment has become extremely prominent, which has led to the need for more rigorous research on this area (Tiruchittampalam, Ross, Whitehouse, & Nicholson, 2018). Therefore, the aim of this study

is to investigate the attitudes of both tutors and learners, and to explore tutors' practices at the College of Languages and Translation Writing Centers (CLTWCs). While these two issues have been highlighted often separately in different studies, this study examined both tutors' and learners' attitudes and practices in the CLTWCs. Handling such issues is thought to yield fruitful results since the existence of the CLTWCs is considered relatively new. As for the Saudi Arabian context, there is no published study in this regard (Barnawi & Christie, 2018).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Writing Centers: Theoretical Background

Blazer (2015) stated that WCs are places where students can investigate confusing or challenging educational issues. This suggests that these centers are places that learners go to when facing educational problems. The idea of WCs is based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and Puntambekar and Hubscher's (2005) scaffolding theory. These two approaches provide a theoretical framework for

understanding how WCs facilitate the process of learning writing. A Vygotskian approach shows that learning is a social process in which learners and instructors communicate socially to attain understanding and learning. As for the second approach, tutors scaffold learners when they begin the session with a purpose and collaboration and examine the writing text which involves ongoing diagnosis through conversation (Vygotsky, 1978).

### The Role of EFL Writing Centers

EFL learners constitute the majority of WC visitors since they learn English as foreign language (McHarg, 2014). Moussu (2013) stated that the biggest challenge EFL learners face is the emphasis on writing where form and grammar are the focus. LaClare and Franz (2013) confessed that this skill, writing, specifically requires learners to seek help from official sources such as WCs which highlights the importance of such centers. In fact, Nakatake (2013) mentioned that EFL learners are in excessive need to learn appropriate writing strategies and resources. Thus, WCs often provide advice regarding the content and organization of writing. Moussu (2013) admitted that what EFL learners learn in their classes is considered insufficient; and therefore, the WC is their main source of writing assistance.

### Assessing Attitudes Towards Writing Centers

A learner's satisfaction with the writing session can suggest how confident the learner is (Harrington et al., 2017). Sommers (2006) acknowledged that teachers usually don't care about students' feedback although it plays an important role; a "social role, especially in large lecture classes, to help students feel less anonymous and to give them a sense of academic belonging" (p. 251). Cooper (1994) discussed the tutor's role in changing learners' attitudes toward WCs and writing as a skill. If tutors in WCs provide useful knowledge, then they create intimate cooperation with WCs visitors.

Harrington et al. (2017) admitted that it is easy to create a friendly relationship between tutors and WCs visitors. If WC administrators accessed both learners' and tutors' attitudes toward the center, it is likely that the WC will improve greatly as a result of feedback and become a source of change. Finally, based on the studies that were conducted on WCs (e.g., Blazer, 2015; Bredtmann, Crede, & Otten, 2013; Palacio, 2010), learners who visited these centers expressed a highly positive attitude toward them.

### EFL Tutors' Role

Tutors can accelerate the process of fostering the advantageous outcomes of the WC. The work they do is completely different from their role as an instructor or professor; they are consultants. This means that tutors do not edit, correct, or tell learners how to fix their mistakes. Instead, WCs are based on the idea that tutors and learners work together to investigate the appropriate writing strategies that benefit learners (McNatt, 2010). Murshidi and Abd (2014) declared that guiding EFL learners in the WC involves knowledge

of some important guidelines that should be stringently followed during the session.

Blau, Hall, and Sparks (2002) offered some suggestions that tutors should adhere to when discussing EFL writing problems in the WC. For them, a tutor should establish a positive relationship, respect cultural differences and other beliefs, elicit learners' expectations, identify problems directly, direct learners to summarize, outline and formulate the thesis, be informative, and be sensitive to learners' emotions. In addition, Ab Kadir (2015) declared that tutors are responsible for developing critical thinking of learners in the WC. Learners, thus, will be logically able to evaluate information, present their own point of view and convince the tutors of their opinions. Recent research (e.g., Blazer, 2015; Condon & Olson, 2016; Ede, 1989; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2018) emphasized the role of tutoring strategies, such as think aloud and outlining; to encourage learners to activate their minds while formulating their ideas in the text.

### Writing Centers in Saudi Arabia

WCs were originally established in North American educational institutions to assist native and non-native writers in the institution. The idea of WCs then became popular worldwide (Raforth, 2012). A number of WCs were opened in higher education institutions. Saudi Arabia is among the top Gulf region countries that established some WCs at several universities (Koch, 2014). Barnawi and Christie (2018) initiated a study to investigate the history of WCs in the region. In particular, the purposes of the study were to determine the factors that led to the emergence of WCs in Saudi Arabia and to explore how such centers worked. Data were collected from various sources such as WCs' manuals, websites, mission statements, newsletters, and tutors working there. The results of the study showed that not only are there four WCs (two in Riyadh and two in Jeddah and Yanbu), but what also led to their establishment are the shifts in the economic and educational situation of Saudi Arabia. However, the researchers suggested developing the role of these WCs by adopting a suitable writing methodology that is appropriate to the needs of Saudi learners. Table 1 is a detailed list of these WCs in Saudi Arabia.

**Table 1.** List of WCs in Saudi Arabia

	Name of the WC	Host institution	City	Established
1	Writing Studio	Princess Nourah	Riyadh	2011
2	The WC in English	King Saud University	Riyadh	2012
3	WC	King Abdulaziz University	Jeddah	2012
4	WC	Royal Commission Yanbu	Yanbu	2014

### College of Languages and Translation's Writing Centers

The College of Languages and Translation (CLT) at IMSIU (Imam Mohamed Ibn Saud Islamic University)

has recently established a WC (split into two for gender separation) under the assumption that “writing skills help the learner to become independent, comprehensible, fluent and creative in writing” (Ariana, 2010, p. 134). The center is open to all the university students with different proficiency levels and with any type of writing: academic, personal, or professional. The writing session is a dialogue-based, one-on-one consultation with about 25 minutes for each student. With the aim of developing EFL learners’ writing strategies, tutors focus on higher-order concerns (focus, organization, development, argumentation) over lower-order concerns (grammar, punctuation, mechanics, spelling, usage). According to Missakian (2015), WCs in general should provide different models (services) to their students; most of which have been provided by CLTWCs (Table 2).

**Table 2.** CLTWCs services

Service	Availability
Workshop instruction	√
Mandatory design	
Voluntary design	√
Walk-in conference (face-to-face conferencing)	√
Appointment needed	√
Peer tutor	
Instructor	√
Online component	√

CLTWCs have employed different models to facilitate tutoring. The available services are establishing workshops and tutor training. In addition, it offers voluntary visits in which students can visit the center in their free time and meet tutors face to face (walk-in conference). Though the centers are open during all work hours, students should make online appointment to ensure their reservations.

### Research Questions

1. What are the EFL Saudi male and female tutors’ and learners’ attitudes toward the CLTWCs?
2. What are the EFL tutoring practices in the CLTWCs?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research adopts a cross-sectional quantitative research design.

### Settings

This research was undertaken at the College of Languages and Translation at IMSIU during the second semester of the Academic year 2018-2019. Specifically, at that time, the college has been running a writing center in the female section for three years whereas it has just established one for the male section. The duration of the research lasted for one whole semester (almost 16 weeks).

### Participants

The participants were 29 faculty members (females = 18 and males = 11) working in the CLTWCs, as well as 217 students (females =112 and males=105) who visited the CLTWCs. The demographic information of all such participants is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Participants demographic information

Participants types	Gender and number	Age range	Academic ranks	Number	
Faculty Members	Female (N= 18)	---	Teaching Assistant	Female (0)	
		26-45		Male (2)	
		36	EFL Instructor	Female (1)	
			31		Male (1)
		27-50	Lecturer	Female (15)	
			---		Male (0)
		42-50	Assistant Professor	Female (2)	
	37-62	Professor	Male (7)		
	EFL Students	Female (N= 105) Male (N= 112)	---	Associate Professor	Female (0)
			49		Male (1)
			19-23	Level One	Female (10)
			18-26		Male (15)
			19-22	Level Two	Female (17)
			20-24		Male (12)
20-23			Level Three	Female (15)	
20-25		Male (15)			
20-33	Level Four	Female (11)			
21-26		Male (15)			
20-23	Level Five	Female (16)			
21-26		Male (16)			
20-25	Level Six	Female (10)			
21-28		Male (14)			
21-29	Level Seven	Female (11)			
21-29		Male (11)			
21-24	Level Eight	Female (15)			
21-25		Male (14)			

### Instruments

#### Students’ and tutors’ questionnaires

Because of the specificity of the topic, and the fact that - based on the researchers’ knowledge - it was not investigated in such settings (context and time) before, tutors’ questionnaire and students’ questionnaire were written and designed by the two researchers. The formulation of the questionnaires’ questions was not only short, direct to the point, and easy to understand, but they also elicited participants’ demographic information, age, gender and some general information about the CLTWCs. They were then followed by a number of items (26 items for students and 5 items for tutors) using Likert Scale that required participants to mark their level of agreement with questionnaire statements by

checking one of five response categories: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The students' questionnaire was categorized into three domains: pre-visit attitude (5), during-visit attitude (10), and post-visit attitude (11). However, before transferring these questionnaires into electronic versions (i.e., via Google Forms), some reliability and validity statistical tests were undertaken.

**Questionnaire reliability**

In order to determine the reliability of the two types of questionnaires, they were piloted on 20 students and 20 tutors before conducting the experiment. The measure of reliability known as Cronbach's Alpha was used (see Table 4). The values can be between 0 and 1. An acceptable value of an alpha ranges from 0.70 to 0.95 (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2010).

**Table 4.** Cronbach's alpha

Type of questionnaire	Domains	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
The students' questionnaire	Pre-visit attitude	5	0.640
	During-visit attitude	10	0.897
	Post-visit attitude	11	0.938
	General reliability for the students' questionnaire	26	0.937
The tutors' questionnaire	Tutors' Practices	5	0.670

As shown in Table 4, the general reliability coefficient of the students' questionnaire was 0.937 while the reliability coefficient of the tutors' questionnaire was 0.670. Thus, it can be safely said that both questionnaires are reliable, as the alpha scores for all of the questionnaires are considered acceptable.

**Questionnaire validity**

Validity is a crucial measure that depends on the degree to which "a measurement instrument actually measures what it purports to measure" (Oliver, 1998, p. 91). Valid-

ity depends largely on the context in which a measurement is used and on the inferences that can be drawn from the results (Jaeger, 1990). In this research, face validity was achieved for both questionnaires. For Gravetter and Forzano (2012), face validity "refers to the transparency or relevance of a test as it appears to test participants" (p. 30). Therefore, the two questionnaires were thoroughly evaluated by professors in the field. Their comments, suggestions, and corrections were taken on board to improve the quality of the questionnaires.

Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficients of each item of the students' questionnaire and the total score of the domain are significant at 0.01 or 0.05. This indicates that the internal consistency coefficients of the questionnaire items are high. It can be safely said that the correlation coefficients are highly reliable and the questionnaire can be used in this study.

**Table 6.** Correlation coefficient of the students' questionnaire between each domain of the questionnaire and the total score

	Domain	Correlation coefficient
1	Pre-visit attitude	0.705**
2	During-visit attitude	0.869**
3	Post-visit attitude	0.877**

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level of significance or less

Table 6 shows the that correlation coefficients between each domain of the questionnaire and the total score of the students' questionnaire are significant at a significance value of 0.01. This indicates that the internal consistency coefficients of the questionnaire domains are high. It can be safely said that the correlation coefficients are very reliable.

Table 7 reveals that the correlation coefficients between each item of the tutors' questionnaire and the total score are significant at a significance value of 0.01 or 0.05. This indicates that the internal consistency coefficients of the questionnaire items are high.

**Table 5.** Correlation coefficient of the students' questionnaire between each individual item and the total score of the domain.

Items	Correlation coefficient	Item no.	Correlation coefficient	Items	Correlation coefficient
Pre-visit attitude		During the session		Post-visit attitude	
1	0.575**	1	0.816**	1	0.606**
2	0.612**	2	0.797**	2	0.817**
3	0.708**	3	0.571**	3	0.760**
4	0.653**	4	0.756**	4	0.809**
5	0.702**	5	0.737**	5	0.797**
-	-	6	0.757**	6	0.818**
-	-	7	0.816**	7	0.825**
-	-	8	0.839**	8	0.778**
-	-	9	0.766**	9	0.825**
-	-	10	0.695**	10	0.820**
-	-	-	-	11	0.784**

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level of significance or less, \* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance or less

**Table 7.** Correlation coefficient of the tutors' questionnaire between each individual item and the total score of the questionnaire

Item	Correlation coefficient
1 You listen to students carefully	0.470*
2 You are usually receptive to what students say	0.845**
3 You usually talk more than students do	0.458*
4 You usually encourage students to speak and ask questions	0.777**
5 You frequently ask students what they think	0.743**

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level of significance or less, \* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance or less

### Procedures

At the beginning of the semester, each of the researchers met with the faculty members assigned to work in the CLTWCs. They received detailed instructions regarding when, how and for whom the questionnaires were designed. Moreover, two laptops were put in both CLTWCs sections, and the instructors were asked to allow the students to use them to fill in the questionnaire after they finished their private tutoring session. The completion time of such a task amounted to 10 to 15 minutes. On the other hand, at the end of the semester, the EFL tutors' questionnaire was administered to all tutors

working in the WC. The completion time for this questionnaire was 10 to 15 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS in terms of means, standard deviation, ranks, frequencies, and percentages. However, some of the tutors' and students' demographic variables such as age, academic ranks and levels were deemed ineffective and, therefore, were disregarded in the analysis.

### RESULTS

The results of the study are described in terms of tables. They included the required information for analyzing the findings of the study.

Table 8 shows the following:

1. It was found that 67.8% of female tutors and 18% of male tutors had taught writing courses three times or less. The rest had taught writing courses four or more times.
2. All male tutors taught writing at different levels, while 44% of female tutors taught at only one level, and 56% of female tutors taught at different levels.
3. 54.5% of male tutors and 38.9% of female tutors are interested in teaching writing skills. The rest of the tutors showed no interest in teaching writing.
4. The majority of male tutors, 63.6%, and some female tutors, 44.4%, enjoy teaching writing whereas the other tutors did not enjoy teaching writing.

**Table 8.** Tutors' qualifications

Questions		Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
How many times have you taught writing skills courses?	Three times or less	2	18	12	67
	Four times or more	9	82	6	33
	Total	11	100.0	18	100.0
How many academic levels have you taught writing skills courses for?	One level	-	-	8	44
	Two or more levels	11	100	10	56
	Total	11	100.0	18	100.0
Are writing skills one of your teaching interests?	YES	6	54.5	7	38.9
	NO	5	45.5	11	61.1
	Total	11	100.0	18	100.0
Do you enjoy teaching writing skills?	YES	7	63.6	8	44.4
	NO	4	36.4	10	55.6
	Total	11	100.0	18	100.0
Have you ever attended any writing teaching workshops, online courses, conferences, and/or websites to help you with the tutoring?	YES	6	54.5	5	27.8
	NO	5	45.5	13	72.2
	Total	11	100.0	18	100.0

5. 54.5% of male tutors and 27.8% of female tutors had attended some writing teaching workshops, online courses, and/or used websites as an assistance tool for tutoring. The remaining tutors had not received any training.

Table 9 shows that all male tutors worked in the CLTWCs once only. On the other hand, 39% of female tutors worked once, 50% worked twice, and 11% worked three times or more in the CLTWC. As for students, 60% of male students visited the CLTWC once, 7% visited the CLTWC twice, and 33% visited the CLTWC three times or more. Furthermore, 26% of female students visited the CLTWC once, 28% visited the CLTWC twice, and the majority, 47%, visited the CLTWC three times or more.

Table 10 revealed that 36% of male tutors think that research and study strategies are the most important reasons for visiting the CLTWCs, while 28% of female tutors agree that critical thinking and critical reading are both important reasons. However, proofreading assignments occupied the lowest position in tutors' priorities (male= 0, female = 11%). As for students, the majority (male = 46%, female = 34%) agree that understanding writing and other courses assignments are the most important reasons for visiting the CLTWCs. On the contrary, the lowest percentage is for critical thinking and reading (male = 4%, female = 2%).

Table 11 revealed learners' pre-visit attitudes towards the CLTWCs. The male learners' responses (i.e., strongly agree and agree) fell on the agreement continuum of the scale in which a general mean score is 3.66. The means for the items range between 4.14 and 2.89 and that indicates *agree to natural* for the Likert scale responses. Item (1) *I expect the tutors to edit, correct (grammar and spelling) and paraphrase* has the highest mean score (4.14), followed by item (2) *I expect the tutors to provide assistance regard-*

*ing writing strategies* (4.09), followed by item (3) *I expect the tutors to rewrite odd sentences* (3.63), followed by item (4) *Writing is a difficult task* (3.56), whereas item (5) *My teacher required me to visit the writing center* has the lowest mean score (2.89).

As for female responses, they also fell on the agreement continuum of the scale with a general mean score (3.77). Their means ranged between 4.44 and 3.10. Item (1) *I expect the tutors to edit, correct (grammar and spelling) and paraphrase* has the highest mean score (4.44), followed by item (2) *I expect the tutors to provide assistance regarding writing strategies*, (4.33), followed by item (3) *I expect the tutors to rewrite odd sentences* (3.74). Item (4) *Writing is a difficult task* has the lowest mean score (3.10), followed by item (5), *My teacher required me to visit the writing center* (3.25).

Table 12 shows that male learners' responses (i.e., strongly agree and agree) fell on the positive continuum of the scale in which their mean ranged between 4.03 and 3.66. Item (5) *The tutors are flexible and friendly* has the highest mean score 4.03, followed by item (1) *The tutors usually listen to me* (3.98), followed by item (4) *The tutors usually encourage me to speak and ask questions* (3.97), followed by item (6) *The tutors frequently ask me what I think* (3.70). The mean for other items continues to be lower until it reaches (3.66) for item (3) *The tutors usually talk more than I do*, which has the lowest mean of all items.

In the same vein, female responses reported positive attitudes towards tutors' practices in the WC with an overall mean of 4.20. The means for the item ranged between 4.46 and 4.36. As seen in the table, item (1) *The tutors usually listen to me* has the highest mean score (4.46), followed by items , that have the same mean (4.41), (5) *The tutors are flexible and friendly* and (9) *I feel comfortable when discuss-*

**Table 9.** Learners' knowledge

Questions		Tutors				Students			
		Males		Females		Males		Females	
		Freq	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
How many times have you worked at/visited the writing center?	Once	11	100	7	39	67	60	27	26
	Twice	-	-	9	50	8	7	29	28
	Three times or more	-	-	2	11	37	33	49	47
	Total	11	100	18	100	112	100	105	100

**Table 10.** Tutors' and learners' priorities

Question	Item	Tutors				Students			
		Males		Females		Males		Females	
What are the most important reasons for visiting the writing center by students?	Critical reading and thinking	2	18	5	28	4	4	2	2
	Learning and practicing writing mechanics and strategies	3	27	4	22	9	8	7	7
	Proofreading assignments before submitting them	-	-	2	11	7	6	33	31
	Research and study strategies	4	36	3	17	34	30	26	25
	Understanding writing and other course assignments	2	18	4	22	52	46	36	34
	All of the above	-	-	-	-	6	5	1	1
Total		11	100	18	100	112	100	105	100

**Table 11.** Pre-visit attitudes of male and female learners

Item		Freq. %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree
1. I expect the tutors to edit, correct (grammar and spelling) and paraphrase.	M	Freq. %	45 40.2	40 35.7	25 22.3	2 1.8	0 0	4.14	0.826	Agree
	F	Freq. %	55 52.4	41 39	9 8.6	0 0	0 0	4.44	0.649	Strongly Agree
2. I expect the tutors to provide assistance regarding writing strategies.	M	Freq. %	40 35.7	47 42	20 17.9	5 4.5	0 0	4.09	0.844	Agree
	F	Freq. %	50 47.6	43 41	9 8.6	3 2.9	0 0	4.33	0.755	Strongly Agree
3. I expect the tutors to rewrite odd sentences.	M	Freq. %	29 25.9	30 26.8	40 35.7	8 7.1	5 4.5	3.63	1.08	Agree
	F	Freq. %	25 23.8	43 41	26 24.8	7 6.7	4 3.8	3.74	1.01	Agree
4. Writing is a difficult task.	M	Freq. %	29 25.9	30 26.8	31 27.7	19 17	3 2.7	3.56	1.12	Agree
	F	Freq. %	12 11.4	31 29.5	33 31.4	13 12.4	16 15.2	3.10	1.22	Neutral
5. My teacher required me to visit the writing center.	M	Freq. %	20 17.9	20 17.9	28 25	16 14.3	28 25	2.89	1.42	Neutral
	F	Freq. %	29 27.6	29 27.6	11 10.5	11 10.5	25 23.8	3.25	1.54	Neutral
Mean	M							3.66	0.739	Agree
	F							3.77	0.658	

ing my writing problems because there are no evaluation or marks. On the contrary, item (3) *The tutors usually talk more than I do* has the lowest mean score (3.46), followed by item (10) *The tutor guided me with all the writing tasks: planning, brainstorming, writing, proofreading and final drafts* (4.08).

Learners' positive attitudes toward the center are reflected in the above Table 13. Their satisfaction is expressed in their agreement with tutors' practices and the center's services. The general male learners' mean score of this domain is 3.98. The mean scores for the items ranged between 4.19 and 3.89. Item (1) *Students should visit the writing center weekly to get the most effective assistance* has the highest mean score (4.19), followed by item (5) *The session was useful and helpful* and item (7) *I advise my friends to visit the writing center* (4.04), whereas item (10) *I feel confident after the writing session guidance* and item (11) *I will visit the writing center regularly because I benefit from its services* have the lowest mean score (3.8).

Similarly, the female responses reveal their positive attitude toward the center with a general mean score of 4.26. The mean scores for the responses ranged between 4.38 and 4.17. Item (7) *I advise my friends to visit the writing center* has the highest mean score (4.38), followed by item (5) *The session was useful and helpful* (4.35), and item (4) *I'm satisfied with the support I received at the center* (4.35). Item (3) *As a result of the session, I have a plan for the next step in my writing process* has the lowest mean score (4.17), followed by item (9) *Visiting the writing center changed my attitude positively toward writing* (4.18).

The Table 14 shows tutors' agreement regarding successful tutoring practices. Male tutors marked their approval of all the items in the questionnaire with a general mean score of 3.78. The mean range for the items was between 4.45 and 3.45. Item (1) *You listen to students carefully* has the highest mean score (4.45), followed by item (4) *You usually encourage students to speak and ask questions* (3.82), followed by item (3) *You usually talk more than students do* (3.64). Item (5) *You frequently ask students what they think* has the lowest mean score (3.64), followed by item (2) *You are usually receptive to what students say* (3.55).

Female responses are in line with the aforementioned male responses with a general mean score of 4.27. The mean range for the items fell between (4.67) and (3.50). Item (1) *You listen to students carefully* has the highest mean score (4.67), followed by item (2) *You are usually receptive to what students say* (4.50), followed by item (4) *You usually encourage students to speak and ask questions* (4.33). However, item (3) has the lowest mean score (3.50), followed by item (5) *You frequently ask students what they think* (4.33).

**Table 12.** During-visit attitudes of male and female learners

Item		Freq. %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree
1. The tutors usually listen to me.	M	Freq. %	42 37.5	37 33	25 22.3	5 4.5	3 2.7	3.98	1.013	Agree
	F	Freq. %	66 62.9	25 23.8	11 10.5	2 1.9	1 1	4.46	.832	Strongly Agree
2. The tutors are usually receptive to what I say.	M	Freq. %	37 33	42 37.5	27 24.1	5 4.5	1 0.9	3.97	.915	Agree
	F	Freq. %	54 51.4	36 34.3	13 12.4	1 1	1 1	4.34	.807	Strongly Agree
3. The tutors usually talk more than I do.	M	Freq. %	25 22.3	35 31.3	43 38.4	7 6.3	2 1.8	3.66	.954	Agree
	F	Freq. %	23 21.9	24 22.9	39 37.1	16 15.2	3 2.9	3.46	1.083	Agree
4. The tutors usually encourage me to speak and ask questions.	M	Freq. %	40 35.7	39 34.8	24 21.4	8 7.1	1 0.9	3.97	.972	Agree
	F	Freq. %	49 46.7	30 28.6	19 18.1	4 3.8	3 2.9	4.12	1.026	Agree
5. The tutors are flexible and friendly.	M	Freq. %	46 41.1	31 27.7	30 26.8	2 1.8	3 2.7	4.03	1.000	Agree
	F	Freq. %	60 57.1	31 29.5	12 11.4	1 1	1 1	4.41	.805	Strongly Agree
6. The tutors frequently ask me what I think.	M	Freq. %	29 25.9	33 29.5	41 36.6	5 4.5	4 3.6	3.70	1.021	Agree
	F	Freq. %	49 46.7	32 30.5	18 17.1	4 3.8	2 1.9	4.16	.972	Agree
7. The tutors are qualified to help students with their writing problems.	M	Freq. %	41 36.6	33 29.5	30 26.8	7 6.3	1 0.9	3.95	.985	Agree
	F	Freq. %	52 49.5	34 32.4	14 13.3	3 2.9	2 1.9	4.25	.928	Strongly Agree
8. I communicate freely with the tutor.	M	Freq. %	36 32.4	38 33.9	30 26.8	7 6.3	1 0.9	3.90	.958	Agree
	F	Freq. %	57 54.3	29 27.6	16 15.2	2 1.9	1 1	4.32	.872	Strongly Agree
9. I feel comfortable when discussing my writing problems because there are no evaluation or marks.	M	Freq. %	44 39.3	31 27.7	25 22.3	8 7.1	4 3.6	3.92	1.108	Agree
	F	Freq. %	62 59	27 25.7	14 13.3	1 1	1 1	4.41	.829	Strongly Agree
10. The tutor guided me with all the writing tasks: planning, brainstorming, writing, proofreading and final drafts.	M	Freq. %	34 30.4	42 37.5	29 25.9	5 4.5	2 1.8	3.90	.949	Agree
	F	Freq. %	44 41.9	35 33.3	19 18.1	4 3.8	3 2.9	4.08	1.007	Agree
Mean	M							3.90	.740	Agree
	F							4.20	.622	

**Table 13.** Post-visit attitudes of male and female learners

Item		Freq. and %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree
1. Students should visit the writing center weekly to get the most effective assistance.	M	Freq. %	51 45.5	37 33	18 16.1	6 5.4	0 0	4.19	.896	Agree
	F	Freq. %	51 48.6	35 33.3	13 12.4	4 3.8	2 1.9	4.23	.943	Strongly Agree
2. I have a better understanding of my writing task after the session.	M	Freq. %	40 35.7	38 33.9	28 25	6 5.4	0 0	4.00	.910	Agree
	F	Freq. %	51 48.6	31 29.5	18 17.1	4 3.8	1 1	4.21	.927	Strongly Agree
3. As a result of the session, I have a plan for the next step in my writing process.	M	Freq. %	37 33	39 34.8	30 26.8	4 3.6	2 1.8	3.94	.952	Agree
	F	Freq. %	48 45.7	33 31.4	19 18.1	4 3.8	1 1	4.17	.925	Agree
4. I'm satisfied with the support I received at the center.	M	Freq. %	39 34.8	37 33	25 22.3	11 9.8	0 0	3.93	.984	Agree
	F	Freq. %	55 52.4	37 35.2	10 9.5	1 1	2 1.9	4.35	.843	Strongly Agree
5. The session was useful and helpful	M	Freq. %	44 39.3	35 31.3	27 24.1	5 4.5	1 0.9	4.04	.948	Agree
	F	Freq. %	58 55.2	33 31.4	10 9.5	1 1	3 2.9	4.35	.909	Strongly Agree
6. I discover my common mistakes after the writing session	M	Freq. %	42 37.5	33 29.5	32 28.6	4 3.6	1 0.9	3.99	.944	Agree
	F	Freq. %	53 50.5	33 31.4	15 14.3	1 1	3 2.9	4.26	.941	Strongly Agree
7. I advise my friends to visit the writing center	M	Freq. %	41 36.6	40 35.7	25 22.3	6 5.4	0 0	4.04	.900	Agree
	F	Freq. %	62 59	25 23.8	15 14.3	2 1.9	1 1	4.38	.870	Strongly Agree
8. The writing center helped me with all what I want	M	Freq. %	38 3.9	35 31.3	33 29.5	5 4.5	1 0.9	3.93	.946	Agree
	F	Freq. %	58 55.2	26 24.8	17 16.2	3 2.9	1 1	4.30	.911	Strongly Agree
9. Visiting the writing center changed my attitude positively toward writing.	M	Freq. %	38 33.9	36 32.1	30 26.8	7 6.3	1 0.9	3.92	.969	Agree
	F	Freq. %	47 44.8	35 33.3	19 18.1	3 2.9	1 1	4.18	.896	Agree
10. I feel confident after the writing session guidance.	M	Freq. %	35 31.3	39 34.8	30 26.8	7 6.3	1 0.9	3.89	.953	Agree
	F	Freq. %	47 44.8	41 39	15 14.3	1 1	1 1	4.26	.809	Strongly Agree
11. I will visit the writing center regularly because I benefit from its services.	M	Freq. %	42 37.5	28 25	32 28.6	8 7.1	2 1.8	3.89	1.051	Agree
	F	Freq. %	53 50.5	30 28.6	15 14.3	6 5.7	1 1	4.22	.961	Strongly Agree
Mean	M							3.98	.734	Agree
	F							4.26	.714	

**Table 14.** Male and female tutors' practices in the CLTWCs

Item		Freq. %	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree
1. You listen to students carefully	M	Freq.	6	4	1	0	0	4.45	0.688	Strongly Agree
		%	54.5	36.4	9.1	0	0			
	F	Freq.	13	4	1	0	0	4.67	0.594	Strongly Agree
		%	72.2	22.2	5.6	0	0			
2. You are usually receptive to what students say	M	Freq.	4	3	1	1	2	3.55	1.57	Agree
		%	36.4	27.3	9.1	9.1	18.2			
	F	Freq.	10	7	1	0	0	4.50	0.618	Strongly Agree
		%	55.6	38.9	5.6	0	0			
3. You usually talk more than students do	M	Freq.	5	2	1	1	2	3.64	1.62	Agree
		%	45.5	18.2	9.1	9.1	18.2			
	F	Freq.	4	5	5	4	0	3.50	1.098	Agree
		%	22.2	27.8	27.8	22.2	0			
4. You usually encourage students to speak and ask questions	M	Freq.	6	1	1	2	1	3.82	1.537	Agree
		%	54.5	9.1	9.1	18.2	9.1			
	F	Freq.	9	7	1	1	0	4.33	0.840	Strongly Agree
		%	50	38.9	5.6	5.6	0			
5. You frequently ask students what they think	M	Freq.	4	2	1	3	1	3.45	1.508	Agree
		%	36.4	18.2	9.1	27.3	9.1			
	F	Freq.	8	9	0	9	0	4.33	0.767	Strongly Agree
		%	44.4	50	0	5.6	0			
Mean	M							3.78	1.00	Agree
	F							4.27	0.423	

**DISCUSSION**

This study is intended to enrich the limited bank of empirical studies that analyze the role of WCs, tutors' and learners' practices and attitudes. Data collected from both tutors and learners were investigated in light of the following issues.

**Learners' Knowledge**

In this paper, the discussion focuses on learners' attitudes and expectations and tutors' practices for the sake of developing the CLTWCs services and tutorial strategies. Data gathered showed that most learners admitted that they visited the CLTWCs once or twice only, which is considered insufficient to obtain the desired benefits of the CLTWCs. Pfrenger, Blasiman and Winter (2017) claimed

that much of the current debate revolves around the number of visits and required visits. Gordon (2008) noted that visiting the center regularly, at least three or four times a month, would be fruitful, and not to do so would be a dereliction. He added that learners need to understand the fact that regular visits to the WC would provide them with the support they really need. Barnawi and Christie (2018) acknowledged that teachers may encourage learners to use the center "by offering some incentives, such as extra credit for regular visits" (p. 34). This belief is fostered by educators and researchers in the field who conducted a number of studies to examine the effectiveness of frequent visits to the WC (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Bredtmann, Crede, & Otten, 2013; Clark, 1985; Gordon, 2008; Irvin, 2014; Pfrenger, Blasiman, & Winter, 2017).

Pfrenger, Blasiman, and Winter's study (2017) concluded that "those students who showed greatest success had multiple required writing center visits," (p. 25) which reveals that frequent visits can impact other measures such as academic success and writing performance.

They added that those learners continue to visit the center more often and advise their friends to use the center. There is a claim along similar lines in Williams, Takaku and Bauman's (2006) study. They investigated the effect of frequent WC visits on ESL students' writing performance. Results showed that students with regular visits achieved higher grades on writing tests.

**Learners' and Tutors' Priorities**

Learners come to the WC to obtain help, seek advice, and search for solutions to their struggles and frustrations. Tutors are available in the WC to support learners and offer assistance (Barnawi & Christie, 2018). A key point of emphasis here concerns how both learners and tutors prioritize different features of writing. The purpose of asking learners about the goal of visiting the WC is to understand learners' needs and, hence, to equip them with the optimal support. Analysis of the tables revealed that learners care most about learning and practicing writing mechanics and understanding writing and other courses assignments. As categorized by Missakian (2015), these writing features, writing mechanisms and assignments, are related to the actual writing process stage because they include elements associated with final composition mechanics. The following Table 15 is designed by Missakian (2015) for pre-writing and actual writing features. On the other hand, it was found that female tutors in the CLTWC expected learners to read texts critically and organize ideas while male tutors expected learners to edit research strategies and develop ideas. In the same vein, learners preferred tutors to work both on pre-writing and writing stages. On a broad interpretation, learners value both stages, which reflected their extreme need for assistance.

**Table 15.** Writing features

Pre-writing (early stages of the writing process)	Writing (actual writing process)
Understanding the prompt	Introduction
Free-writing	Thesis statement
Pre-writing	Idea development
Outlining	Evidence
Invention	Documenting
Clustering	Organization
Mapping	Commentary
Drafting	Analysis
Conferencing	Paraphrasing
Proofreading	Summarizing
Editing	Subjective/Objective voice
Web research	Points of view/Critical thinking/ Conclusion

### Learners' and Tutors' Expectations

A thorough examination of learners' pre-visit attitudes revealed that most learners preferred tutors to fix their writing problems, primarily grammar and spelling. Barnawi and Christie (2018) confirmed that learners come to the WC with the intention to edit, rewrite or formulate their texts, which contradicts the mission of the WC as well as goes against the duties of the tutor. In fact, tutors in the WC are not editors or grammar checkers. Goeller and Kalteissen (2008) believed that it is the job of "students to solve their own problems under the supervision of a tutor who acts as a coach, a more experienced peer, rather than an editor" (p. 44). Archer (2008) stated that the task of the tutor in the WC is to focus on the "macro issues," such as planning, writing strategies and organization and not to waste time working on "micro issues," such as working on syntax and spelling. He added that improvement in L2 writing is not confined to "micro issues," only but included more important higher elements as "macro issues" (p. 248). As for tutors' expectations, the data yielded by this study provided convincing evidence that tutors exhibited a positive attitude before joining the center. Some promised to be good tutors and most of them were happy to "help students overcome their writing problems."

Analysis of learners' expectations showed that 55% of female learners and 35% of male learners were required to visit the center. Many studies (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Clark, 1985; Gordon, 2008; Pfrenger, Blasiman, and Winter, 2017) have provided an ample support for the assertion that requiring students to visit the WC is correlated positively with academic writing success, willingness to visit the center in future and recommending to their friends to visit the WC. Clark (1985) admitted that some learners avoid visiting the WC because they are very busy and Bishop (1990) noted that learners expect their teachers to encourage them to visit the center frequently with some incentives such as grades.

As a rebuttal to this point, it might be convincingly argued that requiring learners to visit the center without sufficient

intrinsic motivation would prevent learners from obtaining the intended benefits of the WC. There have been dissenters to the view regarding requiring students to visit the WC (e.g. Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2015; Tiruchittampalam et al., 2018). Recent studies have frequently resulted in conclusions that support the belief that motivating learners to visit the center is more superior than requiring them. For example, Bielinska-Kwapisz's (2015) study concluded that students should be sufficiently motivated to visit the center without requiring them to do so. He added, WC staff should encourage learners to visit the center voluntarily which would greatly improve learners' writing. Also, Tiruchittampalam et al., (2018) observed that learners who were required to visit the WC showed lower levels of engagement, were not willing to socialize and participate, and exhibited low motivation compared to those who attended the WC voluntarily. For them, the issue of whether to require students to attend or not is conditioned by motivation. If students visit the WC with intrinsic motivation, complete satisfaction, and are encouraged enough, requiring the students to visit the center is not an issue. Hamidun, Hashim, and Othman (2012) provided that feedback and positive comments are among the top procedures that enhance students' motivation to improve their writing proficiency. For them, feedback is a powerful tool to develop writing skills of EFL learners. In fact, learners in the WC receive feedback from tutors which is considered one of the vital factors to motivate students to visit the center. In this study, there is overwhelming evidence corroborating the notion that motivating students to visit the CLTWCs allowed them to benefit from its valuable consultations. This appears to be clearly reflected in their satisfaction with the CLTWCs services and their positive attitudes.

### Tutors' Qualifications

Examining tutors' knowledge in this study revealed that most tutors, both female and male, are experienced in teaching writing as most of them have taught different levels at least three times. Additionally, most male tutors were interested in teaching writing while some female were not and such a fact could affect writing products of learners. As for their experience in the CLTWCs, most tutors worked there for at least one semester. These results provide confirmatory evidence that most tutors are qualified to guide learners in the CLTWCs. According to Missakian (2015), "tutors with more experience may have more strategies for modeling, scaffolding, and diagnosing writing tasks, and may or may not be as available as less experienced tutors at certain times" (p. 13). Goeller and Kalteissen (2008) and Mackiewicz and Thompson (2018) affirmed that experienced tutors activate the adoption of useful strategies and introduce meaningful interaction. Babcock and Thonus (2018) stated that more experienced tutors "use sufficient cognitive scaffolding strategies," to direct learners in the WC (p. 154).

### Institutional Support

The administration at the CLT has constantly provided different academic support for the CLTWCs as they are con-

sidered as an extension of academic services offered in the college. The CLTWCs supervisors provided daily, weekly and year-end reports to college administrators. Such reports delivered rich data showing CLTWCs' visitors, learners' reflections, learners' needs and learners' and tutors' evaluations of the session. Moreover, different workshops were held to acquaint tutors with how to lead the WC session. Analysis of the data gathered in this study showed that most male tutors tried to equip themselves with a variety of tutoring strategies to interact actively with learners in the center either by attending writing workshops, online courses, conferences or tutoring. However, the majority of female tutors appeared not to increase their knowledge about tutoring even though the college constantly encourages attending free workshops in the field. Hence, it is advisable for college administrators to assign mandatory workshops for tutors as a kind of training before joining the CLTWCs. The foregoing discussion implies that experience and training are two important factors for active tutoring. Experience and training are two sides of the same coin; they complement each other to produce a highly proficient tutor. There is a rapidly growing number of studies examining the effectiveness of the WC (e.g., Hall, 2001; Ronesi, 1995; Ryan & Kane, 2015). These studies encourage tutor training on how to choose the optimal strategies for EFL learners as training which is proven to be an important tool for preparing EFL tutors.

### **Tutors' Practices**

Data gathered in this study enhances the notion that tutors in the WC supported learners academically, socially and cognitively. The role of the tutors in the WC is not confined to dealing with writing problems only, but it extends to affording solace, insight, and essential support for students. Ackerman (2007) noted "[t]heir roles as tutors of writing reach beyond simple matters of proofreading, editing, grammar, or mechanics" (p. 12). Hence, teachers' practices in the WC are interpreted from the perspective of learners and tutors under the umbrella of academic support, with a social role, positive relationship and cognitive thinking.

A closer look at the data indicated that tutors diagnosed, supported and provided appropriate assistance regarding writing problems by offering suitable strategies and optimal tutoring which are implemented in their practices. Additionally, it is evident that tutors encouraged learners to interact socially by creating a positive relationship. Ackerman (2007) confirmed that, during the process of exchanging questions and answers, learners' social interactions develop significantly. Also, the data collected in this study demonstrated that, as tutors engaged in a conversation discussing academic matters, they improved essential conversation strategies, expressed positive relationships with learners, and simplified a much more complex relationship.

During the WC session, learners discuss different writing strategies and problems with their tutors. As stated by Ackerman (2007), learners are responsible for some writing problems related to lower-order levels such as grammar and syntax. Other problems involve complex issues such as text organization, the audience, the purpose of the text, formulat-

ing others ideas on their own, thinking critically and decision making. He confirmed that WC intervention develops "critical thinking and reasoning abilities," (p. 13) as tutors discuss different writing strategies and problems. Data obtained from this study revealed credible evidence that tutors were aware of learners' needs and helped them to formulate their ideas. Such evidence is expressed in learners' agreement with statements such as Tutors encourage me to speak and ask questions, tutors guided me with all the writing tasks such as brainstorming, tutors ask me what I think, and so on. There is rapidly growing research on the role of tutoring strategies in developing learners' ideas as a form of critical thinking (e.g., Blazer, 2015; Condon & Olson, 2016; Ede, 1989; Mackiewicz & Thompson 2018).

### **Learners' Attitudes Toward the Center**

The data gathered revealed that all students expressed a positive attitude toward the CLTWCs regardless of their gender. Items investigating students' attitudes to post-visit interventions uncover learners' understanding of the required writing strategies, realization of their common mistakes and commitment to regular visits to the CLTWCs. A closer look at the data points to the students' perceived awareness of the importance of the CLTWCs, as they expressed their readiness to encourage their friends to visit the center to benefit from its services. On a more intimate level, such a realization of the CLTWCs consultation is manifested in student satisfaction, expressing positive attitudes, communicating effectively, and confidence and a friendly relationship with the tutor.

Considerable research has been conducted in the field of learners' attitudes toward the WC. The findings from this study are generally in line with previous studies (e.g., Babcock & Thonus, 2012; Bredtmann, Crede, & Otten, 2013; Davis, 1988; Schmidt & Alexander, 2012; Tiruchittampalam et al., 2018). These researchers have confirmed that WC consultations have a positive effect on learners' attitudes to writing as a skill and the WC as a tutoring place. Thus, evidence for the effectiveness of the WC is borne out by these studies that were supported by the positive attitudes of learners.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

We approached this study with the belief that visiting the WC is profitable for EFL learners on the condition that, if they use it regularly, it is capable of widening their awareness of the mission of the WC. Two main conclusions were drawn from this study: first, the conversation that takes place in the CLTWCs tutorials, teachers' practices and CLTWCs services are all factors working together to shape learners' attitudes toward the center; second, the relation between gender and CLTWCs consultations has not yielded any conclusive evidence. Data analysis from both learners and tutors has not revealed any major distinction between male and female' expectations, CLTWCs tutorial practices, knowledge, qualifications and attitudes.

As a result of deep conviction, the current study suggests that expectations of the students should dovetail with the

expectations of tutors and the college standards for WC consultations in order to shape a fruitful pedagogical and tutorial environment in the WC. Though the legitimate concern for students is to fix their lower level writing problems, tutors negotiate a focus on more important higher-level writing problems. Further research is recommended to address this issue to confirm the results of this study. Furthermore, the question of whether to require students to visit the center has caused much debate over the years. Taking a middle-ground position, the choice of adopting voluntary or mandatory design depends to a large extent on motivating students. To clarify, if students visit the center highly motivated and satisfied, requiring them to visit the center is not a big deal. There is insufficient EFL research on this issue to draw any firm conclusions about the effects of mandatory and voluntary designs. The results of this study suggest that intrinsic motivation by providing feedback and positive comments is critical to successful consultations as well as to increased levels of students' satisfaction and expressing positive attitudes. Faculty and tutors should encourage students to utilize these services either by extrinsic or intrinsic motivation.

The data collected in this study raise further questions about learners' cognition and critical thinking. The available evidence recorded signs of activating learners' cognitive thinking by examining the tutors' practices. Further research is recommended to address the different strategies used by tutors to activate learners' cognitive thinking during the session. As a matter of fact, tutors need to reinforce their contribution to the development of college writing programs and WCs which can be attained through attending writing workshops and programs. Thus, it is incumbent on tutors to widen their knowledge about appropriate academic, cognitive and affective WCs tutoring strategies.

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