

Multilingual, Middle-Eastern Students' Varied Responses to Directive and Non-directive Strategies in Peer Tutoring

Maria Eleftheriou*

American University of Sharjah, UAE

Abstract

This article presents the findings of a qualitative study examining the tutorial experiences of English as an additional language (EAL) tutees and their peer writing tutors in a Middle-Eastern university where the language of instruction is English. Data from stimulated recall activities, written observations, and interviews were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which type of tutoring approach (e.g. non-directive vs. directive) do EAL tutees find most effective?
2. Which type of tutoring approach (e.g. non-directive vs. directive) do tutors of EAL tutees find most effective?

The findings revealed that both tutors and tutees preferred the directive approach for lower order concerns (LOCs) and a non-directive approach for higher order concerns (HOCs). This study shows that diverse tutoring models that accommodate the background and experiences of Middle Eastern students, and their particular strengths and weaknesses, should be considered. Based on these findings, the author recommends tutorial training that emphasizes flexibility and recognizes the unique nature of each tutorial situation. These findings may signal a direction for the development of writing center pedagogy that focuses on the linguistically and culturally diverse students in the Middle East.

Key Words: Writing Center; EAL students; non-directive strategies; directive strategies; peer tutoring

Introduction

Writing center scholarship has developed in Western contexts and promotes a non-directive, collaborative approach, so writing centers in North America typically eschew directive approaches to peer tutoring. While a directive approach attempts to transfer the tutor's presumably superior language knowledge to the tutee through explicit explanations, a non-directive approach is intended to promote a sense of responsibility in students, teaching them to recognize and correct their own errors by eliciting knowledge rather than transmitting it. The orthodoxy of this non-directive peer tutoring perspective has been challenged in recent scholarship that analyzes tutor-tutee interaction to assess the effectiveness of different tutoring strategies. Tutors assisting tutees with English as an additional language (EAL) in writing centers have been found to use more directive approaches with their EAL tutees than with English as a first language (L1) tutees, because their EAL tutees require more language support and expect tutors to engage in directive instruction. The influence of the orthodox model extends to the Middle East, where a purely non-directive approach may be even less suited to address the particular challenges experienced by students working to develop their English writing skills. Students in the Middle East who seek help in English-language writing centers will typically be EAL, may not have had prior experience with the style of teaching involved in non-directive, collaborative tutorials, and they may not share the cultural assumptions implicit in the approach.

Little previous research has been done on English language writing centers in the Middle East, and most studies of EAL writers have been conducted in North American contexts. The present study thus seeks to examine tutors' and tutees' experiences of the effectiveness of directive and non-directive strategies of instruction with EAL students at MEU, a pseudonym for a university located in the Middle East. The findings of this study suggest that a mixed and context-sensitive approach to the use of directive and non-directive strategies would be most effective in this environment. These insights could eventually provide guidance for language instruction more

Email: meleftheriou@aus.edu, College of Arts and Sciences, Sharjah, UAE, 97165153353

generally in other multilingual or multicultural environments.

EAL Students in the Writing Center

In the mid-1990s, research on writing center pedagogy began to take into account the growing number of EAL students using English-language writing center services (Williams & Severino, 2004). Such research began to raise questions about the peer relationship and the effectiveness of a strictly non-directive approach for tutorials (Harris & Silva, 1993; Powers, 1995; Thonus, 2004; Williams & Severino, 2004). Some studies have indicated that EAL students might benefit from a more directive tutoring approach (Blau & Hall, 2002; Shamoon & Burns, 1995; Thonus, 2001, 2004; Williams & Severino, 2004), particularly with respect to lexical, syntactical errors (Mousse, 2013; Myers, 2003; Nakamaru, 2010; Nakatake, 2013; Rafoth, 2015; Weigle & Nelson, 2004). Studies focusing on EAL students have indicated that these students exhibit problems with morphology, lexical mastery, and syntax (Myers, 2003; Williams & Severino, 2004). They may lack the vocabulary to clearly articulate their ideas and may also require significant feedback on their word choice (Cogie, 2006; Minnet, 2009). Williams's (2005) research has indicated that EAL tutees and their English L1 tutors engage in more extensive diagnosis of the tutee's writing challenges (e.g. grammar, lexical issue) than is typically reported with English L1 tutees. Furthermore, compared with their English L1 peers, EAL tutees tend to elicit greater directive instruction from their tutors. The non-directive strategy of focusing on higher order concerns (HOCs) rather than lower-order concerns (LOCs) may be difficult to implement when students are still struggling with basic elements of a new language. Williams and Severino (2004) have noted that this focus on HOCs is intended to increase student agency and ownership of the text. Grammar and syntax improvement is assumed to occur naturally; improvements that do not come naturally are thought to be more easily learned once the student establishes the necessary connection to the text.

Though some scholars maintain that tutors should resist giving feedback on sentence-level concerns (Staben & Nordhaus, 2009), attitudes about error feedback and correction for EAL tutees have changed recently. The close link between rhetorical proficiency and linguistic proficiency in the development of EAL writing ability has been recognized (Blau & Hall, 2002; Myers, 2003; Nakamaru, 2010; Williams, 2004). Rafoth (2015) has claimed that adhering to a strictly non-directive approach "has opened writing centers to criticism for succumbing to the monolingual bias that treats errors the same way for native speakers, who can fall back on their intuitions about what sounds correct, and non-native speakers of English, who cannot" (p. 109). Blau and Hall (2002) have argued "that sentence-level errors can create global concerns, such as "errors in a student's thesis statement that make his or her central point confusing" (p. 36). Myers (2003) has recommended using a more traditional approach to tutoring EAL students, such as rephrasing students' sentences, inserting corrections into students' texts, and even offering practice exercises that target specific areas of weakness. She has argued that tutors must relinquish the attitude that giving EAL students the assistance they need amounts to appropriation and is therefore "unethical" (p. 66).

Despite concerns about tutor appropriation of student texts, most practitioners believe tutors can be good language resources for students without taking ownership of the text. Severino (2009) has argued that appropriation does not take place if tutors offer reasons for the changes they suggest to their tutees. Reid (1994) has also suggested that "intervening" by offering phrases and options to students to "provide [them] with adequate schemata (linguistic, content, contextual, and rhetorical)" (p. 286) is not appropriation; rather it "demystifies the writing process" (p.286). Pyle (2005) has suggested that tutors be given "more leeway to... give the L2 students... more robust feedback in the arena of expression [e.g. grammar and word choice], as well as training... in how best to do so" (as cited in Kastman Breuch & Clemens, 2009, p. 134). Myers (2003) has argued that combining rhetorical and linguistic feedback is essential and in keeping with the commonly accepted role of the tutor as cultural informant. There is a consensus among writing center researchers that some combination of non-directive and directive practices may provide the best solution to the variety of learning challenges faced by EAL students (Blau & Hall, 2002; Mousse, 2013; Williams, 2004; Williams & Severino, 2004).

While EAL students may lack the intuitions for correct English writing that L1 students can rely on, EAL students have another resource that many English L1 students lack: native mastery in a

language other than English. The native language that EAL students speak is often treated merely as an impediment to good English writing, as a source of interference errors. While it would be a mistake to deny or minimize the effect of interference errors, it is reductive to treat the native language of EAL students solely as a source of errors when it is also a potentially rich source of language knowledge upon which EAL students may draw in their English writing. The English language is highly adaptable, and its vocabulary and grammar are in constant flux. Its role as the lingua franca of the modern world results in an incredible diversity among its speakers, and the EAL speakers among them are a significant source for innovation. Accordingly, although it may be necessary to adopt a more directive approach with EAL tutees, non-directive strategies remain important for EAL tutorials, if students are to maintain agency over their texts, and if their non-English native languages are to be allowed to inform their writing in English. Horner, Lu, Royster and Trimbur (2011) have argued persuasively for a translingual approach to writing, one that addresses “how language norms are actually heterogenous, fluid and negotiable” (p. 305). They have proposed “a new paradigm that sees difference in language not as a problem to overcome or as a barrier to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading and listening” (p. 303). According to Canagarajah (2013), the translingual approach opens language pedagogy to the possibility of multiple languages producing “synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars” (p. 41).

In the context of a writing center, within the translingual approach, “a tutor’s job is no longer just about pointing out textual “divergences” from a singular notion of American academic English and then instructing a multilingual writer on how to “fix” that “mistake” (Olsen, 2013, para. 15). Although scholars advocating a translingual approach also call “for more, not less conscious and critical attention to how writers deploy diction, syntax, and style, as well as form, register and media” (Horner et al., 2011, p. 304), this attention will occur within a framework that does not view writing instruction as a search for errors to correct. Horner et al. are writing within a North American context, but this insight may be especially relevant for MEU, where the language of instruction is English, and tutors and tutees are EAL speakers. Adopting insights from the translingual approach, tutors could be trained to anticipate the possibility that the other languages spoken by EAL speakers could be an asset, a source of novel ways of expressing meanings in English.

Possible Challenges Facing Arabic L1 Tutees in the Writing Center

Researchers have suggested that some Arabic L1 students do not respond positively to non-directive teaching methods because the pre-university education of Arabic L1 students emphasizes passive learning and rote memorization (Gardiner-Hyland, 2014; Martin, 2006). Although the UAE government and UAE educational institutions have attempted to encourage active learning methods, teacher-centered, behaviorist methods with a focus on rote learning and memorization are still prevalent in many of the school systems in the country (Hall, 2011; Nunn & Langille, 2016; Sperrazza & Raddawi, 2016). Martin (2006) has pointed out that teachers in the UAE are seldom challenged, and students are not expected to be active participants in their learning. Mynard (as cited in Martin, 2006) has noted that students from Arab societies may not challenge rules or take initiative or risks in learning situations because they fear shame. Secondary school teachers may be trained in constructivist methods, but confronted by student resistance to these methods in their classrooms, they fall back to the traditional behaviorist methods that were used during their schooling (Gardiner-Hyland, 2014). The highly hierarchical and directive methods of teaching English experienced by most Arabic L1 speakers in their pre-university education is coupled with a related traditionalist approach to language learning that focuses on grammar instruction as the main route to language fluency. While an increased focus on grammar for Arabic L1 students is advocated by some scholars (Al-Buainani, 2006; Al-Jamhour, 2001; Al-Khasawneh, 2010), other researchers argue that a focus on grammar instruction and outdated approaches to English language instruction are to blame for Arabic L1 students’ low English proficiency levels. Al Hamzi (2006) has observed that a commitment to sentence level construction and grammar consideration is one of the central drawbacks of EAL writing instruction for Arabic L1 students. A narrow focus on grammar is often “in the service of the institution and at the expense of multilingual writers” (Olson, 2011, para. 9).

In the UAE, the majority of universities are Western and mostly American, and at the core of their liberal arts curriculum is critical thinking (Hall, 2011; Sperraza & Raddawi, 2016). Incoming students are required to complete courses in academic writing intended to develop critical thinking

skills. However, coming from primary and secondary school systems that follow traditionalist teaching methods, these students are often ill-prepared to meet the expectations of their professors because they “are not used to being in charge of their own learning and text creation, and they struggle to cope with the demands of critical thinking and independent learning” (Hall, 2011, p. 430). For Arabic L1 students who have been conditioned to believe that progress in language learning comes from learning rules of grammar and correcting errors in their application, the non-directive and collaborative process employed in the writing center may seem useless or even obstructive.

Another challenge for the non-directive methods used in the writing center may result from Arabic diglossia (Hall, 2011; Rivard, 2006). The written form of Arabic that students learn in school is the classical Arabic of the Qur’an, which is quite different from the variety of spoken dialects of Arabic that function as the vernacular. Written mastery of Arabic is quite distinct from the ability to speak clearly or even eloquently in demotic Arabic. Consequently, Arab L1 students may lack writing mastery in their native language, which will in turn make it difficult “for them to achieve competency in second language (L2) writing” (Hall, 2011, p. 428). If the issue of Arabic diglossia is considered together with the insight of Rafoth (2015) that EAL students may have problems with non-directive methods because of their inability to draw on intuitions about what sounds correct, we can see that the problem Rafoth has noted could be compounded in the case of Arabic L1 students, who may be unaccustomed, even in their native language, to relying on speech-based intuitions when writing.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand tutors’ and tutees’ experiences with the use of directive and non-directive strategies in peer tutoring sessions with EAL tutees and tutors in a Middle Eastern university where the language of instruction is English. Given the specific nature of writing center work, as well as the wide range of potential factors that may influence tutors’ and tutees’ experiences, an interpretive approach was deemed appropriate to address the research questions. This approach attempts to identify how individuals construct meaning through their experiences, and it allows for examination of interaction authentically (Thonus, 2002) and within its natural environment (Kim, 2003; Rowlands, 2005). The following research questions were addressed:

1. Which type of tutoring approach (e.g. non-directive vs. directive) do EAL tutees find most effective?
2. Which type of tutoring approach (e.g. non-directive vs. directive) do tutors of EAL tutees find most effective?

Methodology

Research Context and Participants

MEU, located in the United Arab Emirates, enrolls thousands of international students annually. The university curriculum is modeled on the curriculum of American universities, and it has received American accreditation. The population for this study is drawn from a multilingual, multicultural, and polydialectal context. While most students enrolled at MEU are Arabic speakers, they form a significantly different mix from Arabic speakers in other Middle Eastern countries: they attend a university where the language of instruction is English, many of them speak more than two languages and use English as their language of commerce. Students at MEU, including tutors and tutees, have high levels of what Byram (1997) describes as “intercultural communicative competence and intercultural awareness” (p. 3). Tutors are students themselves and share this common ground with their tutees. A tutorial session may include tutors and tutees with various nationalities and ethnicities; for instance, an Iranian tutor could be working with an Indian tutee, an Afghani tutor with a Sudanese tutee, or a Syrian tutor and a Lebanese tutee.

Despite the diversity of the students’ language backgrounds, the writing they produce for their courses at MEU is expected to conform to, and is graded on the basis of proficiency in, Standard American English (SAE). All students at the university are required to take 15 credits of writing courses as part of their major programs, and many other courses have assessment components that require writing, as part of a university wide effort to include writing across the curriculum. Students with lower levels of initial English proficiency face serious hurdles, not merely

in comprehending course content in English classrooms with English textbooks, but in conveying what they have learned in papers, tests and other types of assessment that are expected to conform to SAE. The effect of this disparity in English proficiency upon student academic performance is a serious concern for faculty members and students. The faculty of the Writing Studies department, responsible for the teaching of writing to students in all disciplines, is aware of the cultural and linguistic challenges that EAL students face, particularly when they first arrive at MEU. The instructors use a variety of approaches to negotiate the institutional requirement for SAE. For example, instructors may offer individualized attention to students who are not able to meet the expectations for SAE in their classrooms. Additionally, in courses that are not focused specifically on academic writing, instructors may tolerate or even encourage regional or translated idiomatic expressions, and syntactic and organizational structures that may sound odd to the Western ear, but that allow students to express their points. The ability of Writing Studies instructors to adopt a broader translanguaging approach that would endorse the legitimacy of hybrid forms of English is limited, however, by the fact that MEU has no major in Writing Studies, and therefore, the primary function of Writing Studies courses is to prepare students for the writing requirements in the courses of their chosen discipline, where SAE is expected.

Following the American writing center model, both in the use of the term “peer tutoring” and in the organization of the Writing Center, the MEU Writing Center offers one-on-one tutoring sessions by appointment or on a drop-in basis to all students throughout the university. Most of the clients at the Writing Center are EAL students who are seeking help with their writing assignments. Instructors teaching writing-intensive courses often encourage or even require their students to visit the Writing Center for supplemental help. Students can also self-refer. Peer tutors are recruited from undergraduate composition courses at the recommendation of their instructors, who attempt to identify the most competent and confident English writers. Frequently, tutors are multilingual, and occasionally, they are even unable to identify their native language. They are employed for 6-15 hours a week and paid 30 dirhams an hour. They have fulfilled the requirements for tutoring at the Center: a credit-bearing course on peer tutoring and writing. The peer tutoring course is designed to help students become familiar with and to think critically about writing and peer tutoring issues and to develop a practical approach to peer tutoring in writing. Tutors are required to participate in in-service training activities throughout the academic year to discuss issues and concerns that arise during tutorial sessions.

Participants

Tutee and tutor participants were solicited at the beginning of the academic semester. Participants were selected based on the time they arrived for their tutorials. Tutees who arrived earliest for their appointments were recruited first. Fifteen tutees and 15 tutors participated in the study. The 15 tutees were seeking assistance with writing assignments for their writing composition courses. Both these tutees and the tutors who were paired with them were asked to participate in the study.

Tutees

For the purposes of this study, the stimulated recall interviews and the interviews of 15 tutees and 15 tutors were separately examined. Nine of the tutees were female; 10 tutees were freshman, two were juniors, two were sophomores, and one was a senior. Fourteen of the tutees were Arabs, and one student was Pakistani. Most tutees spoke only Arabic at home (13), eight were taught in both Arabic and English in high school, and six were taught only in Arabic. Twelve tutees spoke Arabic as a first language. Tutees had a variety of academic majors (i.e., electrical engineering, mass communication, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, international studies, design management, chemical engineering, computer science, marketing and management, and architecture).

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Tutees' English Fluency Ratings

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Written Score	15	2.27	0.88	1	4
Oral Score	15	2.47	1.13	1	4

Table 1 shows the tutees' fluency in oral and written English. Tutees were asked to rate their written and oral language skills on a scale ranging from 1 = Strong to 5 = Weak. The average tutee fluency for both written and oral English was rated as moderate. The average and standard deviation for English fluency represents a typical sample of Writing Center clientele in a given semester.

Tutors

Most tutors were female (13) and seven were 21 years of age. As with the tutees, the tutors had a range of academic majors (i.e. mass communication, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, marketing and management, international studies, architecture, finance and management, visual communication, as well as English literature). Tutors had a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and they spoke a variety of languages (e.g., Arabic, English, French, Bengali, Farsi, Konkani, Tamil, Pashtu, Malayalam).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Tutors' English Fluency Ratings

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Written Score	15	1.07	0.26	1	2
Oral Score	15	1.13	0.35	1	2

Tutors were also asked to rate their English fluency on a scale ranging from 1 = Strong to 5 = Weak. Although the languages spoken at home were diverse, the average tutor English fluency in both written and oral was rated as strong. The average and standard deviation for tutors' English fluency represents a typical sample of Writing Center staff in a given semester (see Table 2).

Tutees are referred to as E1 through E15, while tutors are referred to as U1 through U15, in each case according to the order in which the tutorials took place.

Data Collection

The study took place over a six-month period. In an effort to enhance the validity of my findings, I employed three methods for gathering data: observation, stimulated recall, and interviews.

Data collection methods	Timeline	Purpose
Observation	Concurrent with tutorial session	Noted elements of tutorial session Identified tutorial strategies
Stimulated recall	Within 24 hours of tutorial session	Prompted recall of thoughts during tutorial sessions
Interviews	Within 72 hours of stimulated recall	Asked questions to gather perceptions of tutorial effectiveness

Observation

Tutorials were video recorded. Video recordings of tutorials were then watched in order to (1) take extensive notes on all elements of the tutorial (e.g., communication and dynamics between tutors and tutees, effectiveness of tutorial strategies, reactions of tutees, overall effectiveness of tutorials, and any other relevant factors) and (2) identify strategies later discussed by tutors and tutees during their stimulated recall activity. To address the possibility of researcher bias, a colleague who taught the tutor training course watched the videos with me. We then compared notes and discussed our observations, finding no significant discrepancies.

Stimulated Recall

As recommended by previous researchers (e.g., Gass & Mackey, 2000), stimulated recall using video recordings was conducted immediately after tutorial sessions for tutees and within 24 hours for tutors. During stimulated recall sessions, participants were asked to pause the video when they wanted to comment about a particular segment. The researcher also paused the video to ask tutors/tutees what they were thinking or feeling during certain interactions of interest (e.g. if a tutee seemed confused, annoyed, frustrated, satisfied, or pleased), or if the video had not been stopped for some time.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants within 72 hours of the stimulated recall. Interviews were based on a prepared set of questions asking tutees and tutors which tutoring strategies they found effective or ineffective; however, I allowed emerging circumstances to guide the interview process, asking for clarification or additional information and encouraging participants to elaborate on their answers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

I adopted a theory driven approach in order to examine the discourse about the non-directive and directive strategies. Once collected, I examined the data in order to identify references to non-directive and directive strategies. When the type of strategy being referred to in the stimulated recall was unclear, my research assistant, a tutor with two years' experience in the Writing Center, watched sections of the tutorials with me to help identify the directive/non-directive moves used in tutor talk. Strategies such as negotiating the tutorial agenda with tutees, discussing writing with tutees, and encouraging tutees to think critically and independently were considered non-directive. Strategies such as telling tutees how to rephrase a sentence, taking notes for tutees, and identifying and correcting tutees' errors were considered directive. The research assistant and I had minor disagreements about the labeling of a number of the tutoring moves, but these were typically when a combination of directive and non-directive strategies were employed. In these cases, comments were labeled "non-directive and directive." When there was insufficient information from the comment or the videotaped tutorial to label the strategy being referred to as "directive or non-directive," the strategy was left unlabeled.

Once the non-directive and directive labels had been added to the transcriptions, an independent rater and I began the coding. At the time, I was an advanced doctoral student in TESOL and Applied Linguistics and had over 10 years of experience working in and directing writing centers. The rater had an MA in Education and experience with coding and analysis, but she did not have experience with writing centers. Guidelines offered by Hycner (1985) on analysing data phenomenologically were followed. First, the rater and I looked for patterns in the use of non-directive and directive strategies from both tutors and tutees. Having completed the process of identifying patterns, the next step was to combine and catalogue related patterns into sub-themes. In addition to identifying patterns in the data, I calculated the frequency of themes and subthemes, non-directive and directive comments, and positive and negative comments. I then compared the notes I had taken while watching the tutorials with the themes/subthemes and frequencies that were generated through the study.

Limitations

My status as Director of the Writing Center meant that I was responsible for hiring and supervising tutors and overseeing daily operations of the Center. As Lerner (2002) has noted, such insider status may bias results but does not necessarily invalidate assessments by writing center directors. Following his recommendations, I attempted to bring a sense of neutrality to the process of participant observation and to balance the roles of insider and outsider. I took measures to reduce anxiety and ensure authentic responses (making participation voluntary, assuring tutors that their responses would not impact their positions). Furthermore, the tutors are accustomed to my observing their tutorials and discussing them with me as part of their work. They indicated that my observation did not make them nervous during sessions or throughout the study, that they understood the study's objectives, and that our discussions were based on trust and mutual respect. I also used triangulation to acquire data to test the veracity of

my interpretations and consultations with colleagues unaffiliated with the Writing Center to double-check my conclusions.

Results and Discussion

The stimulated recall (SR) and the interviews (I) of 15 tutees and 15 tutors were analyzed separately. The themes that emerged from the data were used to answer the research questions related to directive and non-directive tutoring strategies. Themes related to the more general tutoring experience will be addressed in a future article.

Tutees' Perceptions of Non-Directive and Directive Approaches

Fourteen tutees mentioned non-directive strategies as being effective 43 out of 55 times, and directive strategies as being effective 35 out of 55 times. The interview data yielded slightly different results, but the number of differences was too low to be considered significant. Patterns emerged that show that tutees found each approach effective for specific concerns and in particular contexts.

Tutees favored a directive approach when discussing LOCs: they reported that they appreciated clarity and directness when their tutors addressed issues such as verb tenses, punctuation, and word choice. E2 paused the recording as her tutor explained how to identify and correct a run-on sentence to say:

She made it very simple, she was direct. She wasn't trying to give me another example. No, she just sticks to the material, and she said 'this is what's wrong, and this is how you fix it'...and that was good.

(SR, E2)

Some tutees mentioned not having the knowledge necessary to identify and correct their grammatical errors and therefore appreciated a more directive approach. In the video of Tutorial 15, the tutor pointed to the word "discriminate" and instructed the tutee to use "discriminate against."

The tutee paused the tape at this instance to say:

I was not English educated, and sometimes, I feel I have some problems in my writing like I don't know the correct way of using a certain word, so... I really appreciated how she told it and explained it to me.

(SR, E15)

These reports are consistent with findings with EAL tutees in North American contexts (Blau & Hall, 2002; Mousse, 2013; Myers, 2003; Rafoth, 2015; Thonus, 1999, 2001; Williams, 2004) who point out that EAL tutees may indeed require the directive approach of an informed tutor. Mastery of LOCs is critical to both reading and writing texts, and while English L1 learners often have some operative understanding of these functions, EAL learners must learn these elements before proceeding to fuller text comprehension (Williams & Severino, 2004). Williams (2004) has observed that deciding whether to use a directive or non-directive approach with EAL students is "not a yes/no question. There is much that no amount of questioning, indirect or otherwise, could ever elicit from these writers because there is so much that they simply do not understand about their L2 and academic writing" (p. 195). Williams explained that tutor attempts to use non-directive strategies with their EAL tutees sometimes resulted in "almost absurdly circuitous interactions, in which the writer engaged in a sort of guessing game" (p. 195). In Tutorial 15, U15 said she attempted to elicit the correct answer from her tutee, but that it led to "a guessing game," so she decided to switch to a directive approach. Her tutee said that she appreciated the more directive approach because her high school education had left her unfamiliar with idiomatic expressions or nuanced meanings.

Although most tutees preferred a directive approach when dealing with LOCs, some tutees, even those with low English proficiency, also complained about this approach, especially if it entailed line-editing or corrections without instruction. In Tutorial 4, the tutor asked the tutee to rewrite his thesis statement, providing the tutee with the words to rephrase his sentence. E4 expressed his dissatisfaction with this method by pausing the recording during this section of the tutorial to say:

I believe that the main goal or aim of the Writing Center is to help students be better in writing, try to find their mistakes...without any tutor...But here...she's just... telling me to write down the sentence, and this is not useful.

(SR, E4)

Tutees frequently requested additional explanations so that they could understand where they had

erred and how they could improve. In North American contexts, it has been observed that EAL tutees may require more rules, explanations, and illustrations than English L1 students to make sense of the language (Mousse, 2013; Rafoth, 2015; Williams & Severino, 2004). Perhaps our tutees, who are predominantly EAL learners, sometimes require a similar style of instruction. Drawing on Shamoan and Burns's research (1995), Myers (2003) has claimed that the directive approach is most valuable when it includes rhetorical strategies such as modeling and imitation. In the recordings, tutors can be seen employing these types of traditional directive strategies: explaining rules relating to the particular errors while correcting them, illustrating how errors can be avoided and fixed in other writing contexts, and modeling different ways of writing sentences. Tutees were particularly responsive to situations when the tutor used examples to illustrate their errors. When discussing comma usage, for instance, U3 not only mentioned the grammatical rule for comma placement, she wrote a sentence on a notepad and explained where one would place the punctuation. She then asked the tutee to address the comma issue in his writing, and he was able to identify the position of the misplaced comma. The tutee identified this strategy as effective, thereby illustrating Myer's (2003) claim that "showing is better than telling" (p. 66).

It was observed in many instances that tutees seemed to want their tutors to be authoritative, confident, and knowledgeable, but they still wanted to retain a level of control over the session. In Tutorial 12, the tutor used a directive strategy by pointing to the word "expressions" and recommended that her tutee change it to "words and actions." It is clear from the video that E12 seemed hesitant to make the change: she was silent, paused for a few seconds before finally scratching out her own word to make the suggested change. E12 said during her stimulated recall that she was not convinced and did not understand the tutor's reason for this change: "I didn't like that she told me to change it. I thought it just made the sentence longer." It is interesting to note that tutees with higher English proficiency, such as E12 above, rejected tutors' suggestions and questioned the tutors' advice more often than tutees with lower English proficiency. E5, the other tutee who rated her English proficiency as strong and who was instructed in English in high school, felt confident rejecting her tutor's suggestions as well. Throughout the tutorial, the tutor and tutee had a relatively egalitarian relationship: it was a highly interactive tutorial with both tutor and tutee taking turns leading the tutorial session. The tutor suggested that the tutee combine two of her ideas into one paragraph rather than discuss the ideas in two separate paragraphs. E5 did not challenge her tutor's suggestion during the tutorial, but during the stimulated recall, she paused the tape to tell the researcher she had ignored her tutor's suggestion because "essay writing is all about opinions."

Both the stimulated recall and interviews revealed that there were more instances of the lower level EAL students accepting the tutor's advice in instances where they did not completely agree with the recommendations. In Tutorial 6, the tutor recommends that the tutee change the word "religion" in his text to "Islam" to make it more specific. During the stimulated recall, Tutee E6 stated that he did not agree with his tutor's suggestion: "I not want like to mention the name of the religion. Want to just to write religion, but she told me to write Islam. I write Islam but not completely agree. She know correct." The tutor's suggestion, and the tutee's unfortunate belief that the suggestion was "correct," appears to have distorted, rather than revealed, the tutee's intention. The tutor was not in a productive dialogue with the tutee and failed to recognize the importance of word choice (LOC) and its relation to the tutee's argument (HOC). Had the tutor explored the word choice with the tutee, rather than defaulting to the assumption that the tutee had made a mistake, had she considered "what the [writer] [was] doing with language and why" (Horner et al., 2011, p. 305), the student would not have had his meaning distorted.

Instances when tutees expressed discomfort with the degree to which their tutors altered their texts, or complained they did not understand the rationale for these changes, illustrate the risk to student agency in the use of the directive approach by tutors. Instances of compromised agency can be seen primarily in situations where tutors suggest modifications without explanation. The translanguaging approach may provide insights that would help tutors to avoid employing the directive approach in ways that compromise the writer's agency. This approach stresses the importance of "discussing with multilingual writers the various reasons behind a question or suggestion about language use" (Olsen, 2013, para. 15). With a translanguaging approach, writing tutors do not focus on removing errors from tutee writing; rather, they help "multilingual writers draw from their different discourses and make active decisions about utilizing various features from them" (Olsen, 2015, para. 12). Canagarajah (2006) has noted that "not every instance of nonstandard usage by a student is an unwitting error; sometimes it is an active choice motivated by important cultural and ideological considerations" (p. 609), and that to assume otherwise denies multilingual students agency. This

observation would have been valuable guidance to the tutor in Tutorial 6 above.

While tutees tended to find the directive approach more effective in addressing LOCs, both sets of data revealed that they found a non-directive approach most effective when addressing HOCs such as structure, organization, argument, and coherence. Strategies such as negotiating an agenda, asking questions about the assignment, asking tutees for clarification on their intended meaning, outlining with tutees, and asking them to write independently were deemed effective by most of the tutees, even those with low English proficiency. Outlining was mentioned by several tutees as being effective. In Tutorial 2, the tutor told the tutee that she had serious problems with coherence in her essay. The tutor can be seen in the video writing numbers and headings and drawing boxes on a sheet of paper and then asking the tutee to write her idea in each box. Her tutee, E2, paused the tape during this activity to say: “I may look grumpy, but I am really happy. I liked her method, I said so, and it was making sense and boxes really help.” The non-directive strategy of asking tutees to explain or clarify their ideas orally in order to help them rephrase their sentences was similarly effective. Tutors can be seen asking their tutees questions such as “Can you explain what you mean here?” Most tutees responded favorably to this non-directive strategy. E3 paused the tape as his tutor asked him “What do you mean in this sentence?” to say that he appreciated this strategy because his tutor could not know his intended meaning without asking. Interestingly, tutees with lower English proficiency also reported satisfaction with non-directive strategies. In one instance, U1 asks her tutee to create a thesis statement, but he waits with pen in hand for the tutor to provide him with the words to write the thesis. The tutor does not comply and instead gives the tutee a notepad to write the sentence on his own. During the stimulated recall, the tutee said:

I was really comfortable and happy at the same time. She asked me to write something, and then I asked her to do it, and she said, “No you can do it.” I really liked that. (SR, U1)

These results are surprising in one respect: most of our writing center clientele have experienced a traditional, authoritative style of schooling (Gardiner-Hyland, 2014; Martin, 2006; Richardson, 2004). Discovery and critical thinking, important elements in the non-directive approach, are not generally encouraged. Although our tutees have been accustomed to directive approaches, they seem to respond well to non-directive approaches and to the possibility of gaining a higher level of agency and responsibility.

While the non-directive strategies mentioned above were considered effective by most tutees, there were some exceptions with tutees at all proficiency levels. In Tutorial 8, the tutor asked her tutee, a student with moderate English proficiency, to clarify the meaning of her topic sentence and handed her a pad of paper to rephrase the sentence on her own. The tutee paused the recording during this portion of the tutorial to say:

Okay, this part, it was stressful. When I sit at home, I'm relaxed, the words come up. But then, I felt that I looked stupid in front of her. (SR, E8)

Similarly, several other tutees (E2, E11) reported finding their tutor's questions “stressful,” “confusing,” or “unclear,” or indicated that they felt “lost” when the tutor used a non-directive approach, such as trying to engage in a discussion about the logic of their arguments. Interestingly, for first-time users of the Writing Center like E8, E2 and E11 above, opinions of non-directive strategies seemed to change as their tutorials progressed. While their comments were more negative at the beginning of the stimulated recall sessions, they became more positive toward the end of these sessions and during their interviews. They became more adept at handling the tutor's non-directive methods and even realized the value of these techniques. For example, during the stimulated recall, E11 first reported that he did not like being asked about the problems in his writing but then later said:

Over here, when he told me ... “what the wrong here?” ... He gave me a chance to try to... to know what my mistake and not to tell me what my mistake, so it's help me.

While studies conducted in North American contexts with EAL tutees indicate that they expect directive approaches and perceive their tutors as representatives of the academic institutions (Blau & Hall, 2002; Thonus, 2001, 2004), the findings of this study suggest that our tutees prefer non-directive approaches under certain circumstances, perhaps because, as Ronesi (2009) has observed, MEU students are “multicultural and multilingual, and often multidialectal” (p. 77). The tutees may respond well to non-directive approaches because they are more adaptable, having had years to develop high levels of intercultural communicative competence. Although these tutors and tutees come from families, educational institutions and societies that are largely hierarchical and patriarchal, they respond well to the egalitarian nature of peer tutoring relationships. Not only do they have a tacit understanding of each other, they appreciate the opportunity to engage in

discussions about their writing where they are able to generate insights and ideas rather than just to receive them. Their ability to "decentre" (Byram, 1997, p. 3) and understand how messages will be perceived in another cultural context has been tested and developed in ways that may not be characteristic of many EAL students in the US. The students at MEU, living as they do in a multilingual community, may enjoy the benefit that Canagarajah (2007) has described from "the constant interaction between language groups" and how different languages can "overlap, interpenetrate, and mesh in fascinating ways" (p. 930).

All tutees responded positively when their tutors used a combination of directive and non-directive strategies. Several tutees mentioned that a switch from a non-directive to directive approach worked well because they did not have the necessary knowledge to work independently. In Tutorial 8, the tutor noted that the tutee had not included topic sentences in her paragraphs. She started by asking her tutee to summarize and write down the main idea for each paragraph, but her tutee responded negatively to this request. At this point, U8 changed her approach, explaining the function of topic sentences and suggesting various methods of phrasing one. E8 paused the video at this point to say:

I liked this way more than the other one when she asked me to come up with the points. I liked it when she suggested the points that I should write, and I expressed it in my own words. This way I learned topic sentences.

Similarly, E6 stated in both his stimulated recall and interview that he appreciated how his tutor asked him to identify and correct his own errors first but then became more directive when it was clear he did not have sufficient knowledge to self-correct. In his interview, E6 stated that he found his tutor's strategy effective: "She told me read sentence first, then after I finished, she asked me if that's right. Find mistake yourself first, then if I can't, she will say it. This is good." Although tutees appreciated having a role in the discussion of their writing, they acknowledged the value of having tutors assume more authoritative roles as language informants.

Tutors' Perceptions of Non-Directive and Directive Approaches

The tutors felt positively about both non-directive and directive strategies; however, there was a stronger preference for non-directive strategies. The preference for the non-directive approach was apparent in both sets of data. Most of the tutors who answered the interview question "Which strategies, if any, did you find ineffective?" felt that the directive strategies they used were the least effective. For example, U12 said the "directive approach just put [her tutee] off" and that she "should have been more facilitative because this is someone that clearly would have been very co-operative with [her]" (I).

Tutors were more critical of a directive approach in the interview data than in the stimulated recall session with 17 out of 22 comments on the directive approach being negative; nevertheless, both sets of data show that different tutors displayed consistency in their preference for a combination of directive and non-directive approaches. Like the tutees, tutors favored a directive approach when discussing LOCs, particularly in cases where rules were not obvious and a native-like fluency was required. U4 reported that she used the directive approach when correcting her tutee's prepositions: "It becomes very difficult to explain to the tutees when to use a certain preposition...so, you tend to just say 'it's just like this,' and you have to remember it" (SR). U15 can be seen using the directive strategy frequently when addressing LOCs throughout her tutorial. She spoke about her choice to use directive strategies in response to her tutee's incorrect use of a preposition:

I just felt that she didn't know it, that she couldn't know it, you know? I tried to get her to figure it out, but she was not going to, and when I found out that she was not...., I just gave it to her. (SR)

It is interesting to note that many tutor/tutee pairs commented on the same instances when discussing the effectiveness of the directive approach. For example, in one pair, both tutor and tutee (U15 and E15) commented favorably on the tutor's use of the directive approach when explaining the error in "discriminate people." The tutee said that she was not familiar with the expression "discriminate against" and appreciated her tutor's explanation. The tutor said she felt that a directive move such as identifying the error and correcting it for her tutee was appropriate and effective in this situation. Consistent with these findings, Blau & Hall (2002) have proposed "a rethinking of conventional tutoring strategies" (p. 29) for EAL tutees and have suggested that tutors should feel comfortable using a directive approach when addressing LOCs. Similarly, Rafoth (2015) has maintained that students who are struggling with low proficiency may need a tutor who can provide

answers to language questions.

It is worth noting that some tutors mentioned avoiding the directive approach even though they felt such an approach may have been necessary. For example, one tutor (U9) reported that she was unsure how much content-based information she could provide for her tutee because she did not want to overstep boundaries. Another tutor (U1) also worried that she was being “too directive with her tutee and found herself not helping him with vocabulary because she “didn’t want to introduce too many new words into his essay” (SR). Consistent with these tutors’ concerns, Severino (2009) has argued that, while the directive approach can provide tutees with relevant information, it can also compromise tutees’ agency – especially in situations where tutors suggest modifications without explanation. It is especially problematic in this context because tutees with a low to mid-level English proficiency followed their tutors’ advice unwaveringly, even when they were skeptical about the recommendations. The tutors’ concern about text appropriation is reasonable and has been noted in the literature (Bringhurst, 2006; McHarg, 2013). Ethical dilemmas about whether or not to intervene directly or how much to intervene are complex. However, as Bringhurst (2006) has observed, a non-directive approach with struggling writers can present another ethical concern: maintaining a strictly non-directive approach may be depriving tutees of the knowledge-based guidance they require in order to gain new skills.

Like the tutees, most tutors favored a non-directive approach, especially when addressing HOCs. They reported that non-directive strategies such as asking tutees for clarification, outlining, mapping, and asking their tutees to write independently were more effective for addressing issues such as unity and coherence of essay assignments. U9 said that asking for clarification was an effective strategy with her tutee. In the video, U4 can be seen turning the tutee’s paper away and asking “what are you trying to say here?” During her stimulated recall, she explained why this non-directive strategy was effective:

There are some writers who... have a lot of ideas and they made the connections in their heads, and they know exactly where they’re going, but they don’t write that down on paper. So as a reader, I was really, really confused... But when she explained it to me, I understood: ... So I just asked her to sort of like make the connections herself and put them down on paper. And...at this point I felt she did understand.(SR, U2)

Furthermore, tutors found that their tutees were most animated and receptive when they used non-directive strategies and could engage their tutees in discussion and the writing process. This is consistent with the findings from the tutees’ SR and interviews. As mentioned earlier, this finding does not correspond entirely with studies that have been conducted in North American contexts, which report that EAL students elicit more directive strategies from their tutors (Blau & Hall, 2002; Thonus, 2001, 2004), and it is surprising when considering that most students who participated in the study have been through more traditional directive-style schooling. MEU students may be involved in language studies in ways that differ from EAL learners in American universities. Being multilingual, they may be able to relate English grammatical structures to their formal education in other languages. Tutors are in dialogue with tutees, drawing upon structures from the tutees’ backgrounds to highlight aspects of English, relating idiomatic expressions and turns of phrase to SAE, and extending their understanding of writing as a process through which writers collaborate with readers in order to allow meaning to emerge.

Although most tutors reported finding non-directive strategies effective with HOCs, there were some notable exceptions. Several tutors claimed that, despite a tutee’s English proficiency, their lack of knowledge sometimes prevented the use of a non-directive approach. For example, in the video, U2 can be seen trying to use non-directive strategies at the beginning of the tutorial to help her tutee, whose English proficiency is high, organize her ideas; however, she changed her approach when she noticed her tutee was not being receptive. As noted above, it is interesting that, in several such cases, though tutors felt the non-directive strategies were not successful at the beginning of the tutorials, they felt more positively about them by the end. Tutors attributed this change to their tutees’ unfamiliarity with the writing center approach. U2 described her tutee’s reaction:

Initially, she was sort of sensitive. I was new to her, and she was new to the writing center concept, and she really didn’t know how to react or...what to expect. She didn’t even know how to react to criticism, so initially she was defensive, but then she warmed up and then she became more comfortable to asking questions and being more interactive too.(I, U2)

Both sets of data revealed that all the tutors who used a combination of directive and non-directive strategies found this combination effective. Fourteen tutors mentioned non-directive strategies 72 times: 45 comments were positive, 25 were negative, and two were neutral. Fourteen

tutors mentioned directive strategies 50 times: 22 comments were positive, and 15 were negative. Tutors who believed a combination of approaches worked best said that they often started the session with the goal of using non-directive strategies but changed their approach if they noticed their tutees were not receptive to it. Tutors reported that their strategies were most successful when they took into consideration their tutees' personalities and English proficiency. U6 started off using a non-directive approach but felt that her tutee's proficiency was too low to respond to this approach:

I found that there were a lot of times when he wouldn't really understand my question, and he would nod, but then I kind of understood that he's really lost. So then I would be a little directive and try to tell him, "OK, do this," and this worked much better. (I, U6)

U3 said she started off the tutorial using a directive approach because her tutee's spoken English was difficult to understand; however, she switched to a non-directive approach when she noticed that "his written English was better than his spoken English" (SR). She went on to say that this approach suited her tutee much better. Tutorial 8 is another instance where a non-directive approach was ineffective with HOCs. The tutee, a first-time user of the Writing Center, initially responded less positively to the non-directive approach, leading the tutor to change her style and become more directive. As the tutee became more relaxed, however, the tutor reintroduced some of the non-directive strategies toward the end of the tutorial, and the tutee's perception of the non-directive approach became more positive.

As Jane Cogie (2001) has said, "fostering student authority is not a matter of following a single approach and avoiding another" (p. 47). Tutors should use their discretion, which will improve with experience, to determine the appropriate approach for each tutee, each assignment and during each phase of the tutorial. Blau and Hall (2002) have cautioned against treating all EAL students in the same way and advise tutors to consider students' individual differences by assessing each situation as it arises. Likewise, Carino (2003) has advised tutors to try to anticipate when to focus on global issues such as content, when to pay closer attention to LOCs such as grammar, or when to spend time on both. He has argued that tutors need to prepare to deal with both "interpersonal and intertextual" features of tutorials and advises tutors to avoid "all-too tempting sort of rules of thumb" that can lead to "prescriptive dictums that can unintentionally cement a strained social relationship between tutor and tutee" (p. 113). It is not surprising then that tutorials deemed most successful by tutors and tutees were those in which tutors were most self-reflective and self-critical during their stimulated recall and interviews. They demonstrated an ability to take into account tutees' level of ability, their personalities, and their responses to different choices and decisions. These tutors were attuned to the changing needs and levels of confidence of their tutees and navigated between the directive and non-directive approaches as they interacted with their tutees. They were involved in a genuine dialogue with the students, engaging in a shared attempt to find appropriate English expression for meanings that emerged from a confluence of English and another language, or even other languages.

Conclusion and Implications

Although traditional writing center doctrine has insisted that tutors adopt collaborative and non-directive approaches in tutorials, recent literature has explored the potential for more directive strategies when working with EAL students (Bringhurst, 2006; Thonus, 2001, 2002, 2004; Williams, 2004, 2005). Studies conducted in North American contexts (Blau & Hall, 2002; Rafoth, 2015; Thonus, 2001, 2004; Williams, 2004, 2005) have indicated that EAL tutees prefer authoritative tutors who use directive approaches, and an emerging consensus suggests that a combination of non-directive and directive practices may be more appropriate in addressing the needs of EAL students (Blau & Hall, 2002; Carino, 2003; Henning, 2001; Mousse, 2013; Rafoth, 2015). This study's findings are in line with the emerging consensus, in that they demonstrate the value of both approaches in different situations. In contrast to the studies of EAL tutees in North American contexts, however, this Middle Eastern study indicates that while tutors and tutees find directive approaches useful for LOCs, both tutors and tutees prefer non-directive approaches when addressing HOCs. Thus, while directive approaches should be recognized as valuable tools, tutors should not abandon collaborative and non-directive strategies, even when dealing with low proficiency EAL students. The participants in this study may be more responsive to the non-directive approach than EAL students in a North American context because both tutors and tutees are typically EAL students, making it more likely that they interact as genuine peers. Additionally, their knowledge of multiple languages allows them to see languages other than English

as facilitating rather than obstructing effective communication in English, suggesting that insights derived from a translanguaging orientation can inform the teaching of writing at MEU, and writing centers and writing classrooms in the region. It is incumbent upon writing centers to continue to challenge the orthodoxy of dominant theory and to keep asking themselves, “how can we serve writing students better?” The results of this study indicate the dynamic nature of writing center research and the need to be wary of fixed theories and categories that are not responsive to the changing needs of tutors and tutees. This study reveals the importance of recognizing the differences not only between EAL tutees here and EAL tutees in North American contexts, but also among different populations of EAL tutees within our Writing Center to better meet the individual tutee’s particular needs.

The implications of this study may extend beyond writing centers in the region to English language classrooms. Using an appropriate mix of directive and non-directive strategies, in a manner that can flexibly adjust to the particular needs of individual cohorts, could result in a better fit between instruction methods and student needs, potentially improving outcomes in student English fluency. Additionally, treating students as knowledgeable individuals with valuable skills in other languages, rather than merely as failed English speakers, could bolster student confidence in a context where fear of making errors can make students excessively risk-averse and therefore reluctant to express themselves in English.

A more general implication of this study is that a student’s learning history does not determine the student’s learning future. Students who had been educated in a highly directive, authoritarian system have proven to be quite capable of appreciating, preferring, and even demanding non-directive teaching strategies once they have been exposed to them. Teaching English to EAL students, whatever their backgrounds, should proceed as a dialogue with the student, one in which the student is seen as an active participant, contributing to and setting the direction for the ongoing pursuit of clear English writing.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that writing centers could benefit from tailoring tutor training and writing center policy to suit their clientele.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

- Writing centers should employ flexible tutoring models that accommodate the experiences of tutors and tutees and their particular strengths and weaknesses.
- Tutors should be open to the use of the directive approach, especially when addressing LOCs, and with students with low English proficiency. However, tutors should use the approach with caution, being careful to avoid appropriation. Activities such as role playing, stimulated recall or close vertical transcriptions could help tutors to determine when to use the directive approach, and when to stick to non-directive strategies.
- Tutors should be trained in the use of directive strategies such as modeling, asking leading or closed questions, offering suggestions, and identifying and correcting errors. These strategies should be described in detail, and situations where such strategies would be appropriate should be explained. Tutor training should include participation in mock tutoring sessions that simulate difficult tutorial situations, followed by sessions of stimulated recall with the writing center director, in order to enable tutors to develop instincts to guide their use of directive approaches.
- Tutors should be cautioned to be careful when advising lower level EAL students. Lower-level students often accept recommendations they do not agree with or understand because they see their tutors as authorities.
- First time users of the writing center may not be familiar with the non-directive approach and may be more resistant to it than repeat users. The study showed that tutees sometimes warmed to the non-directive approach even later within the first tutorial. If tutors are made aware of this situation, it may help them gain and retain the confidence of new users, without foreclosing opportunities to deploy the non-directive strategies that both tutors and tutees report as the most helpful, especially when dealing with HOCs.

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About the Author

Maria Eleftheriou is an Assistant Professor at the American University of Sharjah. In addition to directing the AUS Writing Center, Maria researches the relevance of established writing center models in contemporary Middle-Eastern contexts. Her research interests include tutor training models, writing center assessment, on-line writing instruction and writing assessment.