

The Protean Identity of English-medium Writing Centers in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Literature Review¹

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Abstract

This paper addresses how the Writing Center, a common writing support service originated in the USA, takes shape and evolves as it finds new homes in universities in the Asia-Pacific Region. Using the available literature on existing writing centers in scholarly databases, the paper explores the motivations behind the establishment of these institutional writing centers, their roles in supporting the programs of their host university, their organizational operation, types of services provided, as well as innovative programs (i.e., bilingual support during consultation and the addition of tutors who are content experts). Taken together, the findings offer a sketch of how these Writing Centers takes on different shapes to match the local realities and make them more relevant to the community they serve. Consequently, it may offer guidance to other universities outside North America (e.g., other regions of Asia and Latin American regions) planning to conceptualize or initiate a Writing Center.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el Centro de Escritura universitario. Este es un servicio común de apoyo a la escritura originado en los EE. UU, que toma forma y evoluciona a medida que encuentra nuevos hogares en las universidades de la región de Asia y el Pacífico. Utilizando la literatura disponible sobre los centros de escritura existentes en bases de datos académicas, el artículo explora las motivaciones detrás del establecimiento de estos centros de escritura institucionales, sus roles en el apoyo a los programas de su universidad anfitriona, su operación organizacional, los tipos de servicios brindados, así como los innovadores programas que ofrece (es decir, apoyo bilingüe durante la consulta y la incorporación de tutores expertos en contenido). En conjunto, los hallazgos ofrecen un bosquejo de cómo estos Centros de Escritura adoptan diferentes formas para adaptarse a las realidades locales y hacerlas más relevantes para la comunidad a la que sirven. En consecuencia, puede ofrecer orientación a otras universidades fuera de América del Norte (por ejemplo, otras regiones de Asia y regiones de América Latina) que planean conceptualizar o iniciar un Centro de Escritura.

Introduction

Globalization has raised the position of English as the primary language of global scholarship (Lillis et al., 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2013). In fact, English has nearly become “the main lingua franca for research networking and scientific communication across different cultural contexts and different languages” (Pérez-Llantada, 2012, p. 2). The previously non-English medium universities are robustly positioning themselves as English-speaking institutions offering English-taught programs both in the undergraduate and graduate programs, a strategic move to attract international mobility of students and faculty members (Coleman, 2006; Botha, 2016). In addition, premium is also placed on publishing research outputs in internationally recognized journals, often in English, which has become an increasingly important benchmark for gauging university’s international standing by third party firms such as the QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), World University Ranking, and Academic Ranking of World Universities (Mok, 2007). Consequently, this trend in higher education exerts pressure on students and academics to use English for teaching and scholarly activities (Altbach & Umakoshi, 2004; Byun et al., 2010; Feng et al., 2013; Lee & Lee, 2013; McKay, 2002) and creates a demand for developing academic writing skills in English in ESL/EFL students and to some extent, even leading some established non-English speaking professors to publish studies in high profile journals, the majority of which are published in English (Cargill et al., 2012; Keranen, Encinas Prudencia, 2012; Huang, 2010; Mur-Dueñas, 2013; Uzuner, 2008). The pressure to publish in English among professors outside their non-English speaking countries are also tied to their goal of reaching a wider audience and gaining “formal recognition within the international community” (Curry & Lillis, 2004, p. 672).

However, academic writing is a complex skill and a challenging task to master even for first language speakers, more so, for second/foreign language speakers (Casanave, 2003; Silva, 1993; Tan, 2011). The writing process is tied to a multitude of linguistic, rhetorical, cognitive, political, and cultural factors (Hyland, 2019). Additionally, academic writing is one component of the wider skills of academic literacies (Leki, 2017). To some extent, learners require some writing support along the way as they progress to become

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independent writers. It is more so if the writing demands required in higher education did not match the training in writing received by the students in their pre-university schooling (Ferris & Thaiss, 2011; I-Tremblay, 2017; Matsuda & Silva, 2014). For instance, I-Tremblay (2017) states that many Japanese high school students, unlike their American counterparts, lack the opportunities to engage in critical thinking activities in the form of academic writing in the classroom. Although Japanese students are familiar with the concept of *sakubun* (composition), these are more of personal essays which appeal to the emotions (I-Tremblay, 2017).

In the USA, the declining writing skills of undergraduate students led to the creation of writing labs which became popular in the late 20th century (Boquet, 1999; Boquet, & Lerner, 2008; Carino, 1996). At their conception, these writing labs were described as a method of instruction rather than as a place for conversation about writing (Boquet, 1999). Rather than listening to their instructors' talk about writing, students were given the opportunities to write and work on improving their draft via self-correction, and afterwards, instructors performed a line-by-line correction of the students' works (Boquet, 1999). Later, the writing labs evolved from an instructional method to an autonomous space for consultation about writing and have become known today as "writing centers" where they are conceived as a heuristic programs, assisting students develop into of independent and/or better writers (Boquet, 1999, p. 467; Farrell, 1989; North, 1984). The (re)conceptualization of the writing center paves the way for their familiar presence in universities where academic writing is a must skill to be developed, and their reach has even extended to the high school system (Jackson et al., 2016; Tobin, 2010). These writing centers tend to employ trained peer or graduate student tutors to assist students in their writing needs, often in-class assignments, through conferencing in which writing center tutors help identify the weaknesses of the written works and help students improve them (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2018). The role of writing centers in the universities was further increased with the significant rise in the enrolment of multilingual speakers of English and requiring assistance in their course writing requirements (Williams, 2002). However, the writing centers distanced themselves from faculty members and students' expectations that their purpose was to spot and fix potential errors in a written draft (Denny et al., 2018). Instead, the writing centers aimed to project and promote a discursive, collaborative nature of writing consultations between the writers and the writing tutors (Boquet, 2002).

The immense popularity of the writing center scholarship consequently led to its adoption outside the North American context, mostly by US-based scholars working overseas or returning foreign scholars in Asia, Europe, South America, and the Middle East (I-Tremblay, 2017; Ronesi, 2009; Tan, 2011;). According to the Writing Center Directory (<https://web.stcloudstate.edu/writeplace/wcd/>) the concept of a writing center was welcomed and operationalized by scholars and practitioners in about 65 countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, the popularity of writing centers saw a surge in the early 2000's with Japanese institutions, backed by financial support from their government, leading the way (Johnston et al., 2008). Yet, there has been a dearth in writing center scholarship in this Asian region with only a few scholar-practitioners engaged in the conversation and the very limited number of such centers existing outside the periphery of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (McKinley, 2011; Nakatake, 2013; Tan, 2011; Turner, 2006). However, the future seems bright as the Writing Centers Association of Japan has started to establish a network among the writing centers in the Asia-Pacific region towards increased connectivity and collaboration by maintaining a listserv and spearheading regional conferences (Johnston et al., 2009). In other regions of Asia, there is a growing presence of writing centers, especially in Middle Eastern universities (see Barnawi, 2018). Writing centers are reportedly present in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Barnawi, 2018). A professional forum called Middle East-North African Writing Center Alliance is also in place.

Accordingly, these initiatives could lead to a sustained intellectual inquiry as writing centers have begun to find new homes and evolve in the context of Asian universities both in the developed and developing nations. With the growing interest in the adoption of writing centers in Asian higher education institutions, this study aims to survey these writing centers previously reported in the literature to provide a glimpse into their creation and operation which could initially inform administrators and faculty members interested in such writing service. As such, the current research addresses the following questions:

1. *What are the motivations for establishing the writing centers?*
2. *What are the roles of these writing centers in their host institutions?*

3. How are these writing centers staffed? Who are the writing tutors employed and how are they trained for the job?
4. What are the services offered in these writing centers which are not typically offered in North American contexts?

Methodology

This study adapted the protocol of Ziegler (2016) in identifying and retrieving studies related to the research problem not only in established research databases but also in a dissertation database, specific journals, and forward searches and citation chaining through an online search engine. The choice of expanding the search area to include dissertations, specific journals and online search engine is to find articles about the topic which are not indexed in major research databases owned and operated by Western companies. Considering the narrow scope of the project, the traditional Western-based research database system resulted only to a handful of studies. The first step in retrieving study was conducted using a comprehensive search in the following online databases: Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA), Education Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) and JSTOR. The second step involved online search of journals which focuses on writing center scholarship and L2 writing: *The Writing Center Journal* (International Association of Writing Centers), *Journal of Second Language Writing* (Elsevier), and *Praxis* (University of Texas at Austin). The first one is the primary journal on writing center scholarship while the second is the leading journal in research about L2 writing. Meanwhile, *Praxis* is an open-access journal dedicated to articles on the intersection of writing center theory and practice. The choice of these journals is guided by their scope and demographics of contributors (i.e., participation of scholars based in the Asian/Asia Pacific region). To expand the search, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global was also included in the database search. To locate potentially relevant research in the above-mentioned sources, a keyword search using "writing center, Asia" and "Asian Writing Center" was conducted. Additional keyword search strategy included names of some Asian countries/territories where English is used as a medium of instruction in selected higher education institutions (e.g., "writing center, Japan," "writing center, Korea," "writing center, India," "writing center, Singapore," "writing center, Hong Kong," "writing center, China," "writing center, Malaysia," "writing center, Thailand," and "writing center, Philippines"). As the search using the above-mentioned process resulted to less than 30 studies, these were all considered based on the proposed research questions which primarily aim to look at the motivations for establishing these writing centers, roles in the academic operation of their host university, the organizational operation, services provided to the users and innovative programs.

Motivation for Establishing the Writing Centers

The declining quality of students' written outputs or the low proficiency skills generally creates the exigency for English-medium writing centers in most Asian institutions except for Singapore where English is an official language and the most common home language. On the other hand, some universities have established a writing center as a strategy to boost the research productivity of the institutions by assisting professors in their scientific writing needs in English, a move to increase research citation of papers (Okuda, 2018; 2019).

For instance, the writing center initiative at Hong Kong Baptist College was established as a response to faculty complaints about the students' performance in the academic papers they turn in (i.e., term papers and terminal research papers) despite going through the mandatory first-year English for Academic Writing, a course described as heavily concentrated on the development of writing skills (Hayward, 1994). Upon its establishment, the writing center employed four tutors, three in English and one in Mandarin, to assist students in their writing concerns, both early-order and later-order concerns such as narrowing down a topic to going over the final drafts for errors. While envisioned as an independent support agency for students, the writing center had its share of misconceptions and abuses from the stakeholders whose writing center ideologies conflict with its North American models. Hayward (1994) also reported that some students either see the center as a proofreading service, a private tutorial lesson or go-to place for assistance with other communication skills such as reading and speaking, or even worse, some faculty members turn it into a "dumping ground" for students with limited English language proficiency.

With a big cohort of un(der)prepared college students needing assistance both in language and academic writing skills, the writing center at Parvatibai Chowgule College of Arts and Science in Goa, India was organized with the technical assistance of the University of Ottawa in Canada (Kunde et al., 2015).

According to Kunde et al. (2015), the goal of this writing center was to be a support unit to prepare the students for the rigorous demands of academic writing in the higher education. Although the center distances itself as a proofreading center, it reports that, among the core problems of students, are those related to the areas of grammar, spelling, sentence structuring, and presentation. Despite English as being one of India's official languages and widely used as a medium of instruction in most schools in the state of Goa, the university also caters students who are educated in schools that use regional languages. However, the report does not clarify whether the students from the English-medium high schools also experience problems in spelling and grammar, the concerns that give the writing center a "fix-it shop" image.

In Singapore, the writing center at the National University of Singapore (<http://usp.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/index.html>) was established as a support unit for its highly selective University's Scholar Program (USP) (<http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg>) and has focused on catering to higher order concerns in writing such as thesis statements, motive, structure, evidence, and analysis as well as critical thinking (Tan, 2011). The competitive nature of the program assumes that the majority, if not all the students, have high English proficiency considering the role of English in Singapore's educational system. According to its website, the USP admits only 200 incoming undergraduate students from its seven faculties and schools to undergo a special, rigorous and intensive interdisciplinary curriculum and thus require critical paper assignments from module papers to honors' thesis (See links above to University Scholars Programme – NUS and The USP Writing Center).

In the case study of a Japanese university, Okuda (2018) reported that the establishment of a writing center was a move to strengthen the research function of the university by providing assistance to the research writing needs of its professors, especially in the humanities and social sciences, to produce papers in English, a strategy to boost research citation outside Japan and help propel the research status of the university. Although initially, the idea of the writing center was to assist international students in their Japanese writing assignments, this has become a secondary function.

Taken together, the main motives for establishing the writing centers in Asia from the papers reviewed range from helping struggling undergraduate students in their writing assignments, assisting proficient undergraduates to develop higher order writing concerns, and boosting the research capacity of non-English speaking professors to disseminate their publications in English-speaking media. The third motive is context-specific in some Asian countries (e.g., Japan) where English is not the major language of instruction and there is a strong faculty scholarship in the local/national language. However, the hegemony of English as the language of international scholarship has pushed the institutions to oblige their faculty members to publish in English, especially in non-science areas (e.g., humanities and social sciences), in order to boost the institution's international standing, often measured through publications and citations.

Roles of the Writing Centers

While some writing centers are generally intended to help students from different curricular programs (e.g., Kunde et al., 2015, Tan, 2011), some centers have specialized service offered as a support unit for a specialized program to assist select students in their course-related writing assignments. The USP Writing Center at the National University of Singapore (discussed above) and the Komaba Writers' Studio at the University of Tokyo fall into this category. Komaba Writers' Studio was launched in 2008 under the university's Active Learning of English for Science Students (ALESS) Program, a scientific academic writing course required for first-year undergraduate students majoring in science (Nakatake, 2013). Under the ALESS program, students design and conduct a scientific experiment, write a paper about the study, and present the paper orally (Terashima & Brien, 2016). Both the written report and the oral presentation are in English.

In other cases, some of these writing centers serve an extra-curricular role in the institutions (Chang, 2013; Johnston et al., 2008; Nakatake, 2008; Tan, 2011). These extra-curricular roles include conferencing for all types of writing tasks, be it course-related or not, such as preparing graduate school or study-abroad applications, reviewing for standardized writing tests, or even drafting personal letters. Some other writing centers are active in organizing year-round academic writing workshops such as the writing center at Sophia University in Japan (McKinley, 2011) and the National Tsinghua University (<http://language.site.nthu.edu.tw/p/412-1212-15892.php?Lang=zh-tw>).

In other universities, the writing center has some specific institutional role. For instance, a writing center at one Japanese university is primarily tasked to develop the skills of the faculty researchers to “disseminate their findings globally,” that is to present and publish their findings in English (Okuda, 2018, p. 12). As such, the writing center is tasked to offer faculty researchers, especially those from the humanities and social sciences, with a one-on-one tutorial on academic scholarly writing, assistance in “English-izing” the research articles produced by the faculty members, and even providing subsidized manuscript editing service (Okuda, 2018). The inherent role of this writing center is tied to the fact that funds used to finance its operation came from a “research university grant” from the Japanese Ministry of Education. In a similar manner, a writing center in South Korea is also tasked to assist faculty members in preparing their manuscripts for submission to English-medium journals (Turner, 2006)

In summary, the roles of writing centers in Asia include curricular support to students’ writing assignments in their courses; to some extent some centers exclusively support a specialized program of an institution with a major writing component; extra-curricular support beyond the scope of in-class writing assignments such as preparing for a standardized writing examination; and institutional support in helping non-English speaking faculty to publish their research in English-medium journals. Similarly, writing centers in the USA perform the role of supporting students in their curricular writing assignments (Williams, 2002; Wang & Mechado, 2015). Some American universities also offer similar support to a specific discipline such as engineering (e.g., Walker, 2000). In terms of faculty consultations, US-based writing centers usually offer support in the form of creating rubric for classes, integrating writing assignments in courses and coordinating writing consultations of their students (e.g., Garner, 2005; Shannon, 2002). In contrast, one writing center in the region heavily focuses on faculty publication manuscripts especially intended for English-medium journals (Turner, 2006). Extra-curricular supports offered by some writing centers in the Asia-Pacific region are virtually non-existent in the US context.

Operations of the Writing Centers

Depending on the availability of resources, the organizational structures and operations of Asian writing centers vary greatly from a one-person model to the traditional staffing organization of the North American writing centers which include a top management and tutors (Chang, 2013; Johnston et al., 2009; Kunde et al., 2015; Tan, 2011; Turner, 2006).

At Hanyang University English Writing Center in South Korea, Adam Turner is the director and only native English speaker in his department, as well as the only tutor, who edits and organizes conferences sessions based on submitted papers, mostly scientific drafts of graduate students and faculty members for journal submission in English-medium journals (Turner, 2006). Additional human resource support comes in the form of an aide who assists in the preparation of materials and organizational support from his department during workshops. Considering its limited tutorial capacity, the Hanyang University English Writing Center operates uniquely. Consultation starts with the user emailing Turner with the writing draft (in Microsoft Word) and a sample published article from the user’s target journal. The sample journal article helps the tutor to examine the structure and the rhetorical moves of the articles published in those journals. The received draft is returned to the author with marginal comments and notes (using Microsoft Word’s comment feature) for revisions via email and is followed by a face-to-face conference. The draft usually undergoes two or more subsequent revisions before turning it to the proofreader or the journal. The tutor also assists users in understanding the peer review comments of the draft. The only other center which accepts e-mail conferencing is the Writing Center at the National Tsinghua University in Taiwan (Tan, 2011). Tutors return the submitted drafts with comments to the user within 48 hours of receipt.

Except for Hanyang University, most conferences in other writing centers are conducted face-to-face from 15 minutes up to one hour (Note: The spread of Covid-19 beginning first quarter of 2020 could have changed the guidelines on face-to-face conference of writing centers. As precautions against the spread of Covid-19 through close physical contact, social distancing was or have been enforced in different places). The writing center at Osaka Jogaquin College offers the shortest conference time of 15 minutes to cater to more students (Johnston et al., 2008). Run by a faculty-director and four part-time native English-speaking tutors, the center opens after classes from 6:00-8:00 in the evening during weekdays and an additional afternoon session during Saturdays. The students’ heavy workload during the day created the need for this evening operation schedule. The rest of the writing centers open from late in the morning until the afternoon with the exemption of the University of Tokyo’s writing center which has no publicized operating hours and works only by appointment (Nakatake, 2013). The National Tsinghua University in Taiwan offers the longest

reported consultation time of 60 minutes; however, students are limited to a maximum of three visits only per month (Chang, 2013).

In sum, the operations of writing centers in Asia in terms of staffing, conference time, and operating hours vary. While most writing centers employ a director and a tutor similar to the existing ones in the US universities (Lerner, 2000), one writing center has only one person (i.e., the lone international faculty in the department) running the entire operation from planning to actual conferencing with the user, albeit conducted mostly via email. This unique set-up of a one-person writing center is virtually unheard of in the US context. In terms of the length of conference time, a writing center in Asia caps the conference time at a maximum of 15 minutes and some centers set the limit of the frequency of visits. Consequently, such tight restrictions on consultation time may have some unproductive effect on addressing the writing needs of the users.

Tutors, Tutoring Style, and Tutoring Training

Graduate students or other professionals are preferred over peers or undergraduate student tutors in Asian writing centers. Tan (2011) argues that tutoring in English might be a difficult skill to master for non-native speakers. Kunde et al. (2015) concur on the difficulty of training peer tutors but also offer two other reasons for choosing faculty members for their writing centers – first, lack of senior peer tutors and second, resistance to the advice offered by peer tutors who are considered “friends and not experts,” a concern also reported in US undergraduate writing centers (Park, 2014). Only two writing centers employ undergraduate tutors. For example, the National University of Singapore hires peer tutors, but only those students who excel academically in their academic writing courses are accepted and who have been trained (Tan, 2011). Meanwhile, Waseda University employs only undergraduate tutors with “experience tutoring abroad” (Johnston et al., 2008).

Nakatake (2013) explains that in Japan a tutor and a teacher are viewed to have the same authority. The political equality of both terms generally creates friction among student users who see the role of their tutors as authoritative figures. With the cultural concept of reverence to teachers’ expertise, students tend to play a passive role during the conference session and expect to follow the teachers’ order with no questions asked. This interpersonal climate poses a challenge to tutors in encouraging the user to participate actively in the conferencing. I-Tremblay (2017) differentiates the adjustments in this cultural belief between students with lower proficiency skills and students with higher proficiency skills. The former tends to subscribe to the notion of the tutors’ authoritative role, expect tutors to proofread their work, and assume a more passive role in the conferencing. However, the latter shows more flexibility toward the tutors’ role. They see these tutors either as the knowledgeable peers or parental figures who assist them and they are more active during the session.

Turner (2006) of the English Writing Center at Hanyang University adopts a directive model of tutoring as opposed to the ubiquitous non-directive approach and defends its relevance to the Korean context where he works using Harbord’s (2003) points. He explains that the collaborative nature of producing the technical scientific paper by the people working in the science laboratory and its goal (i.e., to submit for publication in English-language journals) necessitate a more directive approach which he describes as between “editing and conferencing”, but he maintains that he still does not proofread the drafts and leaves that matter either to an external proofreader or the journal’s editor. Harbord (2003) asserts that in some contexts tutors also need to be trained as facilitators which run against Brooks’ (1991) view that a tutor has no inherent role as paper editor. Using his experiences in a European institution, he explains that their students, the majority of whom are in the graduate program, seek assistance on academic papers such as articles for journal publication, theses, and dissertations for their graduate programs. Such unique situations create an exigency for genre-tutoring to facilitate students’ mastery of the specific conventions of each genre and require some degree of expertise on the part of the tutor in recognizing these features. Okuda (2017) provides an empirical backing to the claims of Turner (2006) and Harbord (2003) on the need for tutors, especially in discipline-based writings, to become writing specialists or knowledgeable to some extent in the tutees’ research genre in his study of a writing center in a Japanese university.

Training for tutors at the writing centers varies from institutions to institutions. Waseda University runs one of the most extensive training programs for tutors (Johnston et al. 2008). Tutors meet for two hours every Tuesday for a joint conference where they present an analysis of their tutorial session based on a transcript of the session. They are also asked to do mock tutorials with their peers and read materials from US-based

writing centers. At the University of Tokyo, prospective writing tutors, who are usually graduate students in the English program, undertake a semester-course in second language writing pedagogy (i.e., teaching and tutoring academic writing in English) before they can be taken in (Nakatake, 2013). In Taiwan, Chang (2013) expressed concerns about the very short six-hour training required for prospective tutors at National Cheng Chi University.

In summary, the tutors at Asian Writing Centers that were examined for this paper were composed largely of faculty members. A few universities, however, employed carefully selected undergraduate peer tutors with tutorial training or international experience in tutoring. In contrast, the American writing centers were found to be mostly staffed by undergraduate and graduate students, only around 10% were staffed by faculty (Isaacs & Knight, 2014). The difference in the proportion of writing tutors could be traced to the availability of competent peer tutors especially in a context where English is spoken as an additional language (e.g., Japan) or from a place where a large group of underprepared students enter the university. Going against the predominant non-directive approach in the American context (Clark, 2001), one writing center explicitly adopted a directive model of tutoring due to the nature of assistance needed by the students or researchers in their writings (i.e., submitting or editing a paper for publication). In connection, the non-directive approach may be problematic especially in cases where there is a high reverence for teachers as authority figures and the student may choose to become a passive participant during the conference session (e.g., in Japan). In terms of providing tutoring training to non-teacher consultants, the data available showed that some writing centers provided only 6-hour training while some offered a standard semester class, and that some used materials from writing centers based in the USA.

Proofreading concerns

Asian writing centers in general have adopted the concept of no proofreading policy from North American writing centers but apparently some writing centers struggle to maintain this position especially as users reportedly expect the tutors to assist them in sentential level concerns (i.e., grammar and mechanics) and this situation can produce tension between the writing center's operational philosophy and users' expectations (Carter-Tod, 1995; Johnston et al., 2009; Tan, 2011). Students greatly praise tutors who help them in grammar, mechanics, and conventions of writing in English, and believe that helping them work in these concerns are the most beneficial part of the tutoring (Chang, 2013; McKinley, 2011). In an end-of-semester survey given to students at a Japanese writing center, student feedback asked that the tutors attend to their grammatical concerns (Nakatake, 2013).

To address the perennial grammatical concerns in writing centers, a situation also prevalent even in the North American settings (Kim, 2018; North, 1984), the Chinese University of Hong Kong strategically placed its writing center under the University's Independent Learning Center where learners were provided with access to models for different genres, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) grammar lessons, and other resources which were expected to help them become independent learners (Hayward, 1994). However, in other universities, the writing center also provided in-house editing services aside from consultation. For instance, Okuda (2018) reported that one Japanese university wrote in their proposal for funding the writing center that it would also provide a "subsidized editing fees" for editing papers written in English by local professors (p. 11)

Taken together, most Asian writing centers have distanced themselves from proofreading similar to their North American counterparts. However, users especially the undergraduate students appreciate and request some assistance on linguistic concerns. This situation can be understandable as some bi/multilingual writers are still building their linguistic knowledge of English at the university level and their need for language assistance has to be addressed. One helpful perspective on making the writing center a site for learning both the writing and second language writing skills is the application of insights from second language acquisition (Williams, 2000). Applying the principles of corrective feedback, the tutors can also pay attention to the non-target English form by scaffolding the learners rather than supplying the target form directly without any explanation (Ellis, 2009). The one-on-one setup in a writing center consultation could even provide better environment for the students to improve their skills in English than in the traditional classroom.

First language support during conferences

Compared to the North American writing centers, some Asian writing centers offer bilingual consultation services and users have the option of receiving the feedback in their first language which could promote

more engaged discussion (Chang, 2013; Johnston et al., 2008). I-Tremblay (2017) reports a writing center in Japan which provided consultation in Nihonggo for local students and Mandarin for international Chinese students. However, there was no report from the literature whether the native English speakers hired in some of these writing centers have the speaking proficiency in the users' first language and whether they codeswitched during conferencing.

Other than English, some of the writing centers investigated in Asia, particularly in Taiwan and Japan, also accepted conference sessions for papers written in either Mandarin or Nihonggo, such were as the cases of National Tsinghua University and Waseda University. In this example, the global concept of writing centers was localized to fit into the context of institutional needs and motives. Okuda (2017) reports a case of an "internationalizing" Japanese university which offered conferencing to local and international students for papers written in Nihonggo, especially in the humanities programs, besides offering services to papers written in English in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs.

The possibility of offering a bilingual consultation support in some Asian writing centers was due to the availability of writing tutors who shared the first language with the users. Consequently, this could have offered greater benefits to users who were not yet fully confident conversing in English. Providing such language accommodation could lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) and could lead more fruitful conference sessions as the users could ask their questions without fear of a language barrier. In terms of offering consultation services in languages other than English, some US-based writing centers were moving in the direction of multilingual writing centers by tapping into the expertise of their faculty members from their foreign language departments to tutor writers in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish among others (Lape, 2020).

Online Writing Laboratories (OWL)

In North American context, the online writing laboratory (OWL) is an online service provided by an on-site writing center where self-access resources are provided for writers, teachers, and tutors at the writing centers (Paiz, 2018). Tan (2011) reported that majority of the webpages of Asian writing centers offer only information on the operation, appointment scheduling, and workshop events. However, some also provide additional resources for independent learning.

The Writing Center at the National University of Singapore offers a link to resources in writing academic essays, research or working with sources, online dictionaries and concordances, and writing centers of Harvard University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Purdue University Online Writing Lab (see <https://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/resources>).

In the case of the University of Hong Kong, instructional materials for writers are provided through the "English Language Self-access Centre" which fulfills the functions of a writing center as it caters also to the other language skills. With its goal of developing independent learners, the center's website hosts self-access instructional modules to assist students in their academic writing needs. Prior to the revamp of its website in 2015 (Choi, 2017), the self-access center offered locally developed instructional modules which are still accessible up to present. Its Writing Machine offers ten self-help modules to help students "develop and master the process of writing academic essays" which include developing each essay part, editing and proofreading, and referencing skills (see <http://www4.caes.hku.hk/writingmachine/bin2/default.htm>). The second web tool, Turbo Writing, helps the student to maximize the use of their computers in working for their academic papers such as electronic file management, using online resources, and Word processing formatting and proofing features (see http://www4.caes.hku.hk/writing_turbocharger/faq/default.htm). Since 2015, the self-access center has started holding workshops and other events to attract more students to use the resources at the center and to foster independent learning (Choi, 2017). Compared to the resources found at the website of the National University of Singapore, the ones at the University of Hong Kong are designed and organized into self-access modules.

Taken together, some writing centers in the Asia-Pacific region also provide a parallel online writing laboratory as in the US context (e.g., the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University, <https://owl.purdue.edu>). Resources provided in this web-based support service are locally developed or a combination of locally developed and adapted service from US-based writing centers.

Hiring Content Experts

Aside from writing consultants, some Asian writing centers also provide content consultants. For instance, the Komaba Writers' Studio at the University of Tokyo in Japan which catered to a group of first-year undergraduate science students employed not only writing tutors, but content tutors as well (Nakatake, 2013). Science tutors with specialization in biology, chemistry, and physics, advised students on technical matters on their experiments and provide workshop sessions. With two cohorts of tutors, joint tutorial sessions with the writing and the content tutors were occasionally arranged. While the writing tutors handled paper organization and linguistic concerns, the content tutors assisted the users in data analysis. More so, tutors got online access to the instructors' course, giving them the opportunity to tailor-fit their suggestions to the user, especially when technical scientific papers followed specific conventions.

Clearly, the strategy of bringing in content experts together with the writing consultants in the writing center creates a synergy to be able to better serve the needs of students in terms of communicating their ideas clearly and reporting accurate information especially on high stake writing assignments, i.e., scientific papers required in their program. This kind of collaborative conferencing provides scaffolding to undergraduate students as they start to develop their content knowledge and explore the writing genres of their field.

Conclusion

The emerging body of literature about writing centers in the Asia-Pacific region paints a Protean image of this writing support service as they assumed different forms to fit their respective home environments. Due to socio-cultural and political factors, the writing and language proficiency levels of the users, political agendas of the universities, and access to resources are all contributory factors shaping the identities of these writing centers in their local contexts. Even those located within the same countries and perhaps cater to similar demographics differ largely in the operations and organizational structures to fit into the specific institutional needs although the structures of these writing centers are still largely based on North American writing center models and philosophies.

The limited number of existing writing centers in the Asia-Pacific region dispersed in a few countries and the limited literature available suggests the need for more empirical reports on the actual tutoring process between the tutor and tutee to explicate which approach would work better for different types of users and tutors. The writing centers claim to avoid proofreading concerns, but these could be supported by empirical studies based on actual conferencing transcripts to provide a more accurate picture on this ideal is put into the actual practice. The call for tutors to provide feedback on errors about grammar and mechanics especially for tutees with lower language proficiency, who need explicit assistance in surface level errors, deserves more attention regarding how it could be possibly addressed especially in contexts where students have limited exposure to the L2 and reengineer these writing centers toward performing a two-pronged functions – assisting users to become independent writers and providing support to their L2 development.

The Asian writing centers have also tried to introduce some innovations to better assist their users, especially the undergraduate students, by providing an option to do the conferencing in the students' first language and the addition of content consultants for scientific papers. The availability of bilingual writing consultants enables some centers to offer bilingual support to the writing center users. Meanwhile, the need to improve the students' writing skills in some content areas (e.g., STEM) resulted in hiring of content experts in the pool of writing consultants and collaborative tutoring rules (and thereby socialize their tutors) to access the support they need. Consequently, these investigations offer fresh insights into the writing center scholarship as universities seek to expand their international student body and boost their international stature.

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