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**THE APPLICABILITY OF THE WRITING CENTER AND  
ONLINE WRITING LAB TO MALAYSIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English  
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of writing ability cannot be overstated, be it writing in the first or second language. Yet, students' lack of writing skills remains a constant complaint, especially in the contexts of English as a second language (ESL). In the quest for an intervening mechanism, Writing Centers (WCs) and Online Writing Labs (OWL), originating in North America, have proved effective. The success of Writing Centers seems to lie in their pedagogical approach of "improve the writer, not the writing" and the practice of non-directive and non-judgemental individualised student-centered one-on-one tutoring.

This, then, motivated the present research to focus on the applications of WCs and OWLs in ESL tertiary education. The main research question examined is: in what ways are the theory and praxis of the WC and OWL applicable to ESL tertiary contexts of Malaysia?

In establishing the applicability of WCs and OWLs to ESL tertiary students in Malaysia, this study conducts a series of thematic investigations on WCs and OWLs in North America, ESL students and writing in English for Academic Purposes and innovations in tertiary education, a case study on the status of English in Malaysia, and a survey on the writing needs and writing support in English at a Malaysian university. A comparison is also made among North American, European and Asian WCs and OWLs. The five investigations culminate in the formulation of a conceptual framework for the ESL WC approach and an action plan to implement the approach. The essence of the WC approach is in the application of writing centers as writing pedagogy, learner support and immersive language learning environments.

The present research contributes towards the critical development and application of WCs and OWLs in universities in the Asian region where English functions as a second or foreign language. The initiative is also a pioneer innovation study in the field of WCs and OWLs for its application in Malaysian universities. Hence the study may contribute toward improved writing instruction, a new and comprehensive learner support system in the proposed WC framework, and the relevance of an immersive language learning environment.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ALL    | Australian Language Learning (Project)  |
| AASCU  | American Association of State Colleges and Universities   |
| ASEAN  | Association of Southeast Asian Nations  |
| BA     | Bachelor of Arts  |
| CAC    | Communication Across the Curriculum   |
| CAI    | Computer-Assisted Instruction   |
| CALL   | Computer-Assisted Language Learning   |
| CEVU   | Collaborative European Virtual University   |
| CCC    | College Composition and Communication   |
| CCCC   | Conference on College Composition and Communication   |
| CD-ROM | Compact Disk Read Only Memory   |
| CUHK   | Chinese University of Hong Kong   |
| CUP    | California University of Pennsylvania   |
| EAP    | English for Academic Purposes   |
| ECAC   | Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum  |
| EFL    | English as a Foreign Language   |
| ELT    | English Language Teaching   |
| ESL    | English as a Second Language  |
| ESP    | English for Specific Purposes   |
| EWCA   | European Writing Centers Association  |
| FAQs   | Frequently Asked Questions  |
| FC     | Freshman Composition  |
| FYC    | First Year Composition  |
| GI     | Government Issue  |
| GPA    | Grade-Point Average   |
| HTML   | Hyper Text Mark-up Language   |
| ICQ    | 'I Seek You'  |
| ICT    | Information and Communication Technology  |
| IELTS  | International English Language Testing System   |
| ILC    | Independent Learning Centre   |
| INSEAD | Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires<br>(European Institute for Business Administration) |
| INSET  | In-Service English Teachers Training  |

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| IRPA  | Intensified Research Priority Areas             |
| IT    | Information Technology                          |
| IWCA  | International Writing Centers Association       |
| MA    | Master of Arts                                  |
| MOO   | MUD, Object-Oriented                            |
| MOSTI | Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovations |
| MUD   | Multi-User Dimension or Dungeon                 |
| MUET  | Malaysian University English Test               |
| NAEP  | National Assessment of Educational Progress     |
| NCTE  | National Council for Teachers of English        |
| NWCA  | National Writing Center Association             |
| PDA   | Personal Digital Assistant                      |
| PDF   | Portable Digital File                           |
| PELT  | Philippines English Language Teaching (Project) |
| PPT   | Power Point                                     |
| RTF   | Rich Text Format                                |
| SALL  | Self –Access Language Learning                  |
| SILL  | Strategy Inventory for Language Learning        |
| SCOT  | Social Construction of Technology               |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language           |
| UK    | United Kingdom                                  |
| UPM   | Universiti Putra Malaysia                       |
| USA   | United States of America                        |
| USM   | Universiti Sains Malaysia                       |
| USP   | University Scholars Program                     |
| OWL   | Online Writing Lab                              |
| OWLL  | Online Writing and Learning Lab                 |
| VWC   | Virtual Writing Center                          |
| VLE   | Virtual Learning Environment                    |
| WAC   | Writing Across the Curriculum                   |
| WC    | Writing Center                                  |
| WCA   | Writing Centers Association                     |
| WID   | Writing In the Discipline                       |
| WIOLE | Writing Intensive Online Learning Environment   |
| WPA   | Writing Program Administration                  |