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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

TAN BEE HOON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
 CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Identification of the Research Problem	2
1.3 Purpose of the Study	4
1.4 Methods and Procedure	5
1.5 Significance of the Study	7
 CHAPTER II WRITING CENTER AND ONLINE WRITING LAB	 10
2.0 Prologue	10
2.1 Writing Center Evolution: From Writing Lab to Online Writing Lab	11
2.1.1 Early Writing Centers: Pre 1970	11
2.1.2 Middle Stage Writing Centers: 1970-1990	14
2.1.3 Current Writing Centers: Post 1990	17
2.2 Defining a Writing Center.....	19
2.2.1 Generic Features of Writing Centers.....	20
2.2.2 Basic Models of Writing Centers.....	22
2.2.3 Metaphors and Definitions	24
2.3 Defining an Online Writing Lab	26
2.3.1 Online Writing Labs and Technologies	29
2.3.2 Basic Models of Online Writing Labs.....	30
2.4 Theory and Practice	35
2.4.1 Writing Center Theory and Practice	36
2.4.2 Online Writing Lab Theory and Practice	41
2.5 Writing Centers and Writing Programs	49
2.5.1 First Year Composition	49
2.5.2 Writing Across the Curriculum.....	51
2.5.3 Critical Concerns relating to Writing Centers and Writing Programs	54
2.6 Efficacy of Writing Centers	56
2.6.1 Qualitative Evidence	57
2.6.2 Quantitative Evidence	60
2.7 Current Issues in Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs	65
2.7.1 Tutoring and the Notion of Help.....	65
2.7.2 Generalist versus Specialist Tutoring.....	67
2.7.3 Peer Tutoring and Peer Review	68
2.7.4 Tutoring ESL Students: Directive or Non-Directive.....	71
2.7.5 Should Grammar be Taught in Writing Centers?	72
2.8 Epilogue	74
 CHAPTER III ESL UNDERGRADUATES, ACADEMIC WRITING, AND LEARNER SUPPORT.....	 79
3.0 Prologue	79

3.1	ESL Students: Characteristics and Needs	79
3.1.1	Characteristics of Asian ESL Tertiary Students.....	80
3.1.2	Writing Difficulties and Needs of ESL Students	84
3.1.3	Character Types, Learning Styles and Strategies.....	88
3.1.4	Learner Autonomy.....	92
3.2	ESL, EAP and Academic Writing.....	95
3.2.1	The Development of ESL Academic Writing	95
3.2.2	Pedagogical Approaches of ESL Academic Writing	97
3.2.3	Research in ESL Academic Writing.....	102
3.2.4	Pedagogical Issues in ESL Academic Writing	103
3.3	ESL Learner Support beyond Classroom Instruction	105
3.3.1	Self Access Language Learning.....	107
3.3.2	Language Advising	110
3.3.3	Computer-Assisted Language Learning.....	112
3.3.4	Online Language Learning.....	115
3.4	Efficacy of ESL Learner Support.....	122
3.4.1	Findings from Self Access Language Learning.....	123
3.4.2	Findings from Language Advising	126
3.4.3	Findings from Computer-Assisted Language Learning	127
3.4.4	Findings from Online Language Learning.....	129
3.5	Epilogue	131
CHAPTER IV INNOVATIONS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION		133
4.0	Prologue.....	133
4.1	Defining Innovation and Change.....	134
4.2	Rationale for Innovations	135
4.3	A Typology of Innovations	139
4.4	Attributes of Successful Innovations	140
4.4.1	The Nature of the Innovation	140
4.4.2	Organization Structure and Culture	143
4.5	Resistance to Innovations	144
4.6	Implementing and Sustaining an Innovation	145
4.6.1	The Innovation Process.....	145
4.6.2	Innovation Diffusion Theory	149
4.6.3	Needs Analysis.....	151
4.7	Innovation Transfer in Asian Universities	155
4.8	Innovating Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs outside North America..	158
4.8.1	Writing Center Innovations in Asia.....	159
4.8.2	Writing Center Innovations in Europe.....	163
4.8.3	Comparing North American and Non-North American WCs and OWLs	166
4.8.4	Lessons from Asian Writing Centers	168
4.9	Epilogue	174
CHAPTER V ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA		176
5.0	Prologue.....	176
5.1	Malaysia and Writing Center Innovation	176
5.2	Malaysia in Brief.....	178
5.2.1	Geography and Demography	178
5.2.2	The Past.....	180

5.2.3	The Present	184
5.3	English Language in Malaysia: Past and Present	186
5.3.1	The Peak	186
5.3.2	The Decline.....	188
5.3.3	The Resurgence.....	190
5.4	Initiatives in Improving English Language Proficiency	193
5.5	Epilogue: Imperatives for Change	196
CHAPTER VI WRITING NEEDS SURVEY		198
6.0	Prologue	198
6.1	English Language at Universiti Putra Malaysia	198
6.2	Background to the Writing Needs Survey.....	203
6.3	Survey Instruments	205
6.4	Data Collection	210
6.5	Analysis and Results	213
6.5.1	Lecturer Questionnaire	214
6.5.2	Student Questionnaire	229
6.6	Discussion	248
6.6.1	Findings relating to English Language in Malaysia.....	248
6.6.2	Findings relating to Innovations in Tertiary Education.....	250
6.6.3	Findings relating to ESL Learners and Learner Support.....	251
6.6.4	Findings relating to WCs and OWLs	252
6.7	Limitations of the Survey	253
6.8	Epilogue	256
CHAPTER VII WRITING CENTER APPROACH: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN		258
7.0	Prologue	258
7.1	Rationale for a Conceptual Framework	258
7.2	A Conceptual Framework for the Writing Center Approach.....	259
7.3	ESL Learners as Impetus for the Curricular Innovation	260
7.4	The Writing Center Approach as Writing Pedagogy	264
7.4.1	One-to-one Tutoring.....	265
7.4.2	Peer Tutoring.....	266
7.4.3	Student-Centered Pedagogy	267
7.4.4	Guided Learning and Writing	268
7.4.5	Dialogic Pedagogy	269
7.4.6	Small Group Pedagogy	270
7.4.7	Collaborative Pedagogy	270
7.4.8	Pedagogy of Belonging and Inclusiveness.....	271
7.4.9	Whole Language Pedagogy.....	272
7.4.10	Online Pedagogy for Tutoring and Writing.....	273
7.5	The Writing Center Approach as Learner Support	274
7.5.1	Peer Writing Tutoring	275
7.5.2	Self-Access Language Learning	276
7.5.3	Language Advising	277
7.5.4	Learning Advising.....	278
7.5.5	Guidance for Editing and Proofreading	280
7.5.6	ICT Support.....	281
7.5.7	Fostering a Writing Community	282

7.6	The Writing Center Approach as Language Learning Environment	284
7.6.1	Accessibility.....	286
7.6.2	Exposure to English	286
7.6.3	Authenticity.....	287
7.6.4	Updated Reference Resources	287
7.6.5	Risk Free	288
7.6.6	E-Learning and Online Writing	288
7.6.7	Learner Development.....	289
7.7	Summary of the Writing Center Approach	289
7.8	An Action Plan for Innovating the Writing Center Approach.....	291
7.8.1	Knowledge and Awareness.....	292
7.8.2	Conceptualization and Persuasion	295
7.8.3	Decision and Planning	299
7.8.4	Implementation and Maintenance	302
7.8.5	Evaluation, Revision, Routinization and Diffusion.....	303
7.9	Epilogue.....	304
CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSION		305
8.1	Summary.....	305
8.1.1	Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs	305
8.1.2	ESL Undergraduates, Academic Writing, and Learner Support.....	307
8.1.3	Innovations In Tertiary Education.....	308
8.1.4	English Language in Malaysia	309
8.1.5	Writing Needs Survey.....	310
8.1.6	The Writing Center Approach: Conceptual Framework and Action Plan	310
8.2	Limitations of the Study.....	311
8.3	Future Directions and Recommendations	313
8.4	Conclusion.....	315
WORKS CITED.....		317
APPENDICES		
Appendix 3.1	Myers-Briggs Character Types.....	358
Appendix 3.2	Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).....	359
Appendix 4.1	Malaysian University Websites.....	366
Appendix 4.2	Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs in Asia	367
Appendix 4.3	Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs in Europe	368
Appendix 5.1	Malaysian University English Test (MUET)	369
Appendix 6.1	English Proficiency Courses and Placement Levels at UPM.....	370
Appendix 6.2	Lecturer Questionnaire.....	371
Appendix 6.3	Student Questionnaire	379
Appendix 7.1	Learning Style Questionnaire	390

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 FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1 The Study Framework	6
Figure 2.1 Writing Center Epistemologies.....	41
Figure 2.2 Theories for OWL Praxis	48
Figure 3.1 Willing's Model of Two-Dimensional Learning Styles	90
Figure 4.1 Sundbo's Innovation Process Model	146
Figure 4.2 Goodman's Innovation Process Model	146
Figure 4.3 Markee's Curricular Innovation Process Model	147
Figure 4.4 The Innovation Process Model of Zaltman et al.	148
Figure 4.5 The Innovation Cycle	149
Figure 4.6 Transitional Stages in Innovation Adoption	151
Figure 4.7 Levels and Areas of Needs	152
Figure 4.8 An Innovation Means Analysis Model	154
Figure 5.1 Peninsular (West) Malaysia and East Malaysia	179
Figure 5.2 Malaysia and Neighboring Countries in Southeast Asia	179
Figure 6.1 The Survey Procedure	206
Figure 6.2 Likert Scale and Semantic Differential	210
Figure 6.3 Teaching Experience: Collated Categories	215
Figure 6.4 Percentages of Undergraduates by Faculties	230
Figure 6.5 Gender and Attitude towards Computer Use	232
Figure 6.6 Highest English Qualification	234
Figure 6.7 Comparison of Perceived Writing Abilities among Three Proficiency Levels	239

Figure 6.8	Travel Convenience to Campus.....	241
Figure 6.9	Feeling toward Computer Use	244
Figure 7.1	A WC with OWL Conceptual Framework.....	261
Figure 7.2	Learning Pyramid.....	265
Figure 7.3	The Writing Center Approach	290
Figure 7.4	Relationship of Collaboration, Community and Learning Environment...	291
Figure 7.5	An Action Plan for Innovating the WC Approach.....	293

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.3 Potential Effects of Computer-Assisted Writing on ESL Students.....	129
Table 4.1 Four Types of Innovations	140
Table 5.1 Structure of MUET	195
Table 6.1 Respondents by Faculties	215
Table 6.2 Average Teaching Load per Semester	216
Table 6.3 Percentage of Lecturers Requiring Students Write in English	217
Table 6.4 Lecturers and English Requirement Cross-tabulation	217
Table 6.5 Percentage of Lecturers' Opinions on Writing in English	219
Table 6.6 Perception of Lecturers on Students' Writing Ability	221
Table 6.7 Faculty and Writing Performance Cross-tabulation	221
Table 6.8 Lecturers' Rating on Students' Common Writing Problems in English.....	222
Table 6.9 Lecturers' Ranking on Writing Support Options	223
Table 6.10 Lecturers' Rating on Instructional Methods for Writing	225
Table 6.11 Lecturers' Rating on On-site and Online Writing Support Options	226
Table 6.12 Lecturers' Rating on Online Writing Support Options	227
Table 6.13 Percentages of Students by Semesters.....	231
Table 6.14 Gender and Internet Time Cross-tabulation	227
Table 6.15 Language Background and Language Use	234
Table 6.16 Performance on MUET	235
Table 6.17 Grade Distribution of SPM English	235
Table 6.18 Student Opinions about Writing in English.....	237

Table 6.19	Student Writing Ability	238
Table 6.20	Writing Tasks Students Wished to Perform	240
Table 6.21	Common Difficulties of Writing in English	240
Table 6.22	Strategies of Sourcing Information	242
Table 6.23	Internet Time per Week	242
Table 6.24	Internet Venues	243
Table 6.25	Strategies for Writing Improvement	245
Table 6.26	Effective Instructional Methods	245
Table 6.27	Helpful On-site and Online Support.....	246
Table 6.28	Students' Perception of Online Writing Support	247
Table 7.1	Basic Specifications of the WC and OWL	301

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 (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

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading maketh a full man; conference maketh a ready man; and writing maketh an exact man. ~Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

1.1 Background to the Study

The impetus to this research is the belief that writing is an essential skill for academic, vocational and professional purposes in the Knowledge (K) economy. And, the ability to write well in English has become an imperative in the increasingly globalized world in all native English, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) societies (Warschauer and Ware, 2006). Yet writing has often been labeled as the neglected “R” (The National Commission of Writing, 2003). The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) of the USA on writing assessment showed that “16% of fourth and eighth graders, and 22% of twelfth graders, have not mastered even basic writing skills” and only a handful of American students “can write precise, engaging, and coherent prose” (Manzo, 1999, p.1).

The declining writing ability had also been picked up by popular media when Newsweek published *Why Johnny Can't Write?* This cover story on Newsweek was an alarming wake up call to the ‘great’ literacy crisis in the USA in 1970. However, mediocre writing of high school and post high school students and even university graduates continued to be a problem. The concern has been reflected in more of such similarly themed articles, for example, *Why Johnny Still Can't Think* (April 15, 1993), *Why Can't Johnny and Janie Write English Anymore* (1999¹), *Why Johnny Can't Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton* (January 3, 2003), *Why Johnny Still Can't Write* (August 31, 2003), and *Why Johnny (and Jane) Can't Write* (February 7, 2005). Certainly, this deterioration in writing is not confined to North America.

In the quest for the cause of the writing crisis and also a ‘cure’, North American institutions experimented with various writing programs and writing curricular reforms

(Blythe, 1995; Carino, 1998; McLeod and Soven, 1992; Russell, 1991). These reforms in writing programs included revision of First-Year (or Freshman) Composition, Writing Across the Curriculum, and Writing in the Discipline.

While introducing these writing programs, practitioners found that the classroom or lecture method of writing instruction produced neither good writers nor good writing (Barnett and Blummer, 2001; Mullin and Wallace, 1994; Murphy and Law, 1995; Orson, 1984). Also, developments in learning theories and writing instruction continued to affirm the social constructionist approach to learning and writing, and that writing is a recursive process more effectively achieved through interaction and collaboration with a more experienced peer (Harris, 1995). As a result, writing centers (WCs) mushroomed to provide complementary tutorial support to student writers and the implemented writing programs. Today, the non-directive and non-judgmental individualized student-centered one-on-one tutoring conducted by WCs has been proven effective in nurturing better and more confident writers (Bruffee, 1984; Carino, 1998; Harris and Kinkead, 1993; Lunsford, 1991). The qualitative and quantitative evidence for the efficacy of WCs will be elaborated in Section 2.6 in the next chapter.

Following the birth of the first WC (called Writing Lab then) at the University of Iowa in 1934, various models of WCs have been developed in North America. From the 1990s, WCs expanded into the cyber space to offer various services online. This virtual component of the WC is called Online Writing Lab (OWL). Since then, various models of the WC and OWL have been created in meeting the needs and demands of the institutions they serve.

1.2 Identification of the Research Problem

With the cyber presence of the OWL, the WC has extended its capabilities and usefulness across time and space. The cyber presence has also made WCs more visible and conveniently accessible to a global audience. With the increased popularity of virtual education and online training, many institutions of higher learning in most parts of the world are looking at the uniqueness of WCs and OWLs in enhancing writing instruction. Towards the end of the 20th Century, more and more WCs and OWLs were

being developed outside North America such as the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and some European countries (Hobson, 1998; Inman and Sewell, 2000; Inman and Gardner, 2002).

However, despite the abundant literature on the apparent leading edge of WCs and OWLs in improving writing literacy (Hobson, 1998; Inman and Sewell, 2000), surprisingly the theory and practice were generally not being applied by most Asian universities when the present research project started in 2000. It seems logical that if writing is a difficult skill to acquire in countries where English is used as the first language, it would be more difficult for Asian students who learn English as a second or foreign language to acquire. And, if the WC approach has been proving useful in native English countries, it may be equally if not more useful for Asian ESL students. This observation led to the present project: an inquiry into the viability and applicability of WCs and OWLs in Asian ESL contexts.

In the past few years of working on this project, the rising interest of WC and OWL development outside North America brought forth a new challenge: what constitutes an ideal WC. One cannot talk about the ideal WC without specifying the users or audience because what is ideal for a specific community may not be ideal for another. So, the subsequent challenge is: ideal for whom? As most if not all of the North American pioneer WCs and OWLs were developed with native English learners in mind, the subsequent challenge to this study is to cater for the writing needs of the non-native English learners. A survey conducted some 13 years ago estimated the population of native English speakers was about 350 million, but that of ESL or EFL speakers was 700 to 750 million (Streven 1987, cited in Connor 1996). With the advancement of English as the language of science and technology, commerce and the Internet, the number of ESL and EFL speakers is expected to rise more than double that of the native speakers. Therefore, based on these challenges, this study explores themes and issues pertaining to WC development and practice, and determines features and practices for the formulation of a conceptual framework for developing a WC/OWL for ESL tertiary learners.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The overall aim of this research study is to identify the type of WC and OWL theory and practice that is applicable to Asian ESL contexts in general and to Malaysian tertiary education in particular. Before this can be achieved, the WC practice in the country of origin, North America, must be studied and understood. Since the proliferation of WCs in North America from the 1970s, various models of WCs and OWLs have been created. The multitude of models might baffle the novice, especially non-North American practitioners, in deciding a suitable model to follow in developing a WC for individual institutional use. Hence, the present study has undertaken to explore the applicability of WCs, and to formulate a conceptual framework of a WC that is applicable to Asian ESL contexts.

The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To trace the development of WCs and OWLs in North American universities.
2. To identify the roles and functions and the underpinning theories of WCs and OWLs.
3. To discuss issues pertaining to the theory and praxis of WCs and OWLS.
4. To discuss the characteristics of ESL tertiary learners that impact on character types, learning styles and learning strategies.
5. To trace the development of ESL academic writing.
6. To propose learner support options for ESL learners.
7. To explore the notion and significance of innovation in tertiary education.
8. To investigate innovation transfer and WC innovations outside North America.
9. To explore the applicability of WCs and OWLs to Malaysian tertiary education.
10. To identify the writing needs in English at a tertiary ESL setting, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).
11. To establish the notions of WCs and OWLs as writing pedagogy, learner support and language learning environment.
12. To propose a conceptual framework for an ESL WC Approach.
13. To illustrate how the innovation, that is, the WC approach, can be implemented at a specific ESL tertiary setting (UPM).

14. To recommend the WC approach as the way forward for ESL learner support and ESL writing instruction in the new millennium.

1.4 Methods and Procedure

The research design of this study is hybrid, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative inquiry comprises a critical review of related literature in three thematic areas: WCs and OWLs, ESL undergraduates and Academic Writing, and Innovation in Tertiary Education. As the study aims to investigate how the institutionalized Western innovation, that is, WC and OWL, can be adopted and implemented in an Eastern context, concepts and issues pertaining to innovations and innovation transfer in tertiary education were examined. As WCs and OWLs are concerned with providing support to writing development especially academic writing among tertiary students, the formulation of an ESL WC conceptual framework must also be informed by the thematic study on ESL learner characteristics and ESL academic writing. An overview of each thematic area was conducted before relevant topics were identified and critically examined. Definitions of key terms are presented in context in each thematic discussion, organized under three chapters: II, III and IV.

The quantitative inquiry comprises a survey study on the writing needs in English at a specific ESL tertiary context, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Two survey instruments were designed for this purpose. A more detailed discussion on the formulation of the questionnaires and data collection procedure is presented in Chapter V. Qualitative data such as the status of English in the national and institutional contexts were critically reviewed and interpreted before the quantitative data were collected and analyzed.

The research was necessarily broad based, as the design of the WC conceptual framework, and the adaptation and adoption of the curricular innovation needed to be informed and grounded in the theory and praxis of each related thematic area.

The three thematic analyses, together with the survey study, culminated the conceptual framework for the ESL WC approach, and the blueprint for the initiation and

implementation of the approach in UPM (see Chapter VI). Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the study framework.

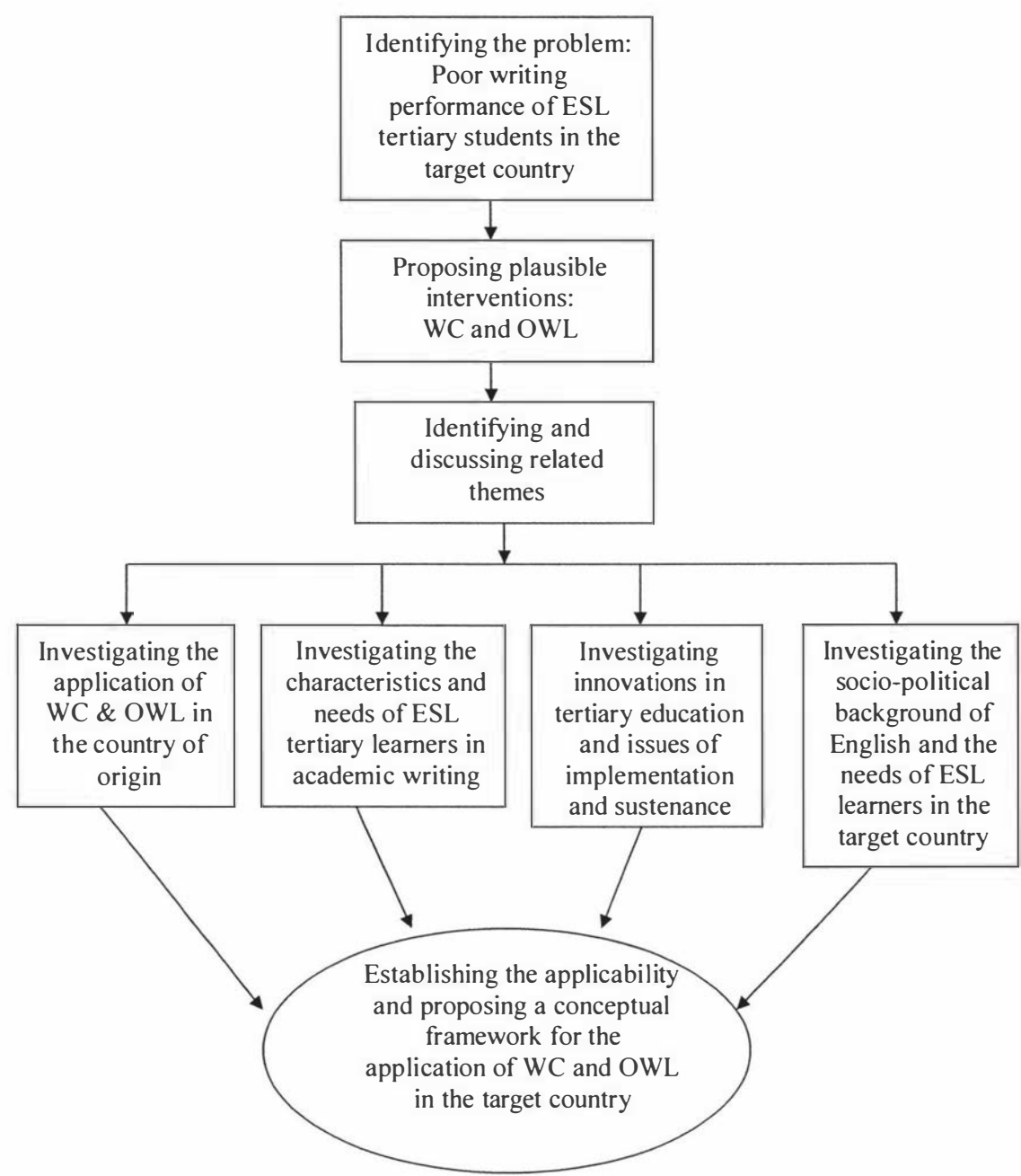


Figure 1.1 The Study Framework

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of writing ability cannot be overstated be it writing in the first or the second language. Students generally demonstrate the extent of their learning through writing. Faculties too primarily evaluate students through students' writing. Hence students who are poor with written expression are often at serious risks of failure in a study program. Writing is also an important mode of communication, and it helps to close the distance between people who are apart. It also helps to foster understanding between people of the same or different cultures. Furthermore, letters, faxes, phone messages and e-mails are all possible with writing.

Through writing too, permanent records are kept: we get to know our ancient civilization and great discoveries of the sciences, and by the same token we leave behind our modern legacy for future generations. Law and legislature and contracts and agreements must be written and signed for them to be binding. When words are written, they also give more lasting impressions due to the permanency (Kelly, 1999). On top of all the above, most universities regard writing and publication the main activity, illustrated by the maxim *publish or perish*. Academic credibility often relates to the ability to impart knowledge through the ability to write.

Yet, despite all the aforesaid advantages of writing, students' writing remains a constant complaint in both English as the first and the second language situations. The series of articles on *Johnny or Jane Can't Write* and the concrete data for the NAEP's writing assessment (Manzo, 1999) (see Section 1.1) affirm the predicament in the context of English as the first language. The empirical study in an ESL context (see Chapter VI) attests the same adversity of undergraduates' writing in English. Causes of students' poor writing abilities are also as numerous as the practical reasons for writing well. In addition to the ineffective lecture method in teaching writing mentioned earlier, other causes are traceable to bigger class sizes especially in the ESL/EFL contexts (Warschauer and Ware, 2006) hence inadequate teacher attention, a reductionist approach to writing that treats writing as separate from reading, speaking and listening skills, writing pedagogy that is teacher-centered so that students do not have the chance to select their interested writing topics, and surface errors in writing being overly emphasized (Clippard, 1998). One more reason may be the disintegration of the print

culture and the onset of the visual TV and popular music from the 60s (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967), video games, multimedia computers and movie on CD-ROMs from the 80s. The new media of the audio-visual society may have shifted the attention of students from focused reading and writing, leading to a decline in their writing ability.

Against this backdrop of the writing crisis, WCs in North America have contributed to improved writing and positive attitude towards writing of most students (Griswold, 2003; Langston, 1997; Ronesi, 1995). Consequently, the use of WCs as an intervention approach to writing problems of student writers has sparked interest of many education institutions, domestic and international alike, into developing a WC for individual institutional use (Mullin, 2000). As the application of WC and OWL is relatively new in most Asian countries, it will be a waste of resources if each and every developer has to go through the same tedious research process of identifying suitable WC structures and features to follow. Therefore, the present study is significant in formulating a conceptual framework for the applications of WC and OWL in ESL tertiary contexts. This study may contribute toward 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 the 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.

Also of significance, the study highlights the need to take a renewed look at learning and writing, as learners, learning purposes, learning contexts, micro and macro environments are different from before the new millennium, with ICT advancement accelerating changes in all facets of life. On top of the proposed WC approach framework, the comprehensive issues discussed in this study may provide the knowledge base, and provoke education providers and practitioners into thinking and hence realizing the best pedagogy and the best support system in nurturing and engaging a new generation of proactive all-round ESL learners.

Inspired by the attested significance to writing in English and the imperative for improved writing instruction, this research critically investigated the applicability of the WC and OWL in the next chapter.

Footnote

1. Personal communication with Professor William Harris on January 13, 2006, who confirmed that the article was web-published in 1999.

CHAPTER II

WRITING CENTER AND ONLINE WRITING LAB

What distinguishes writing centers in academe is their willingness and ability to engage student writers sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word, comma by comma, one to one, face to face. No one else in the academy can or wants to do this work, but everyone wants it done—now. ~Kail (2000, p. 25)

2.0 Prologue

In order to consider the applications of WCs and OWLs in the Malaysian context, this chapter discusses the generic features and concepts of WCs and OWLs, and traces their history and development in North American tertiary institutions. The chapter also discusses the various roles and functions of WCs and OWLs, and their theories and practices that impact on tertiary student writing processes and instruction. The investigation of these WC and OWL fundamentals may then inform the application of WC and OWL in an ESL context in Asia.

As WCs and then OWLs have been in existence for over a century, the field has abundant literature and research on various aspects and concerns. The aim of this research is to introduce the WC and OWL innovation to an Asian ESL context; therefore, the priority of this chapter is to cover the breadth of the field, instead of engaging in in-depth discussion of only a few aspects.

The chapter begins with a historical account of the development of WCs and OWLs, presenting WCs and OWLs in the context of origin, that is, the USA. This historical account will provide readers who are interested in WCs and OWLs but may not be familiar with the field the necessary background to follow the discussion on the definitions, basic models, theory and practice, the relationship of WCs and WAC, current issues of the field, and the efficacy of WCs.

2.1 Writing Center Evolution: from Writing Lab to Online Writing Lab

The history and development of WCs have been detailed by WC practitioners such as Robert H. Moore (1950), Muriel Harris (1975, 1982, 1993), Judith Summerfield (1988), Ray Wallace (1991), Peter Carino (1995, 1996, 1998), Joyce Kinkead (1996), Neal Lerner (1998, 2003), and Elizabeth H. Boquet (1999). Based mainly on the historiography of these writers, this discussion organizes the WC history and development into three phases: before 1970, 1970 to 1990, and after 1990. The following discussion begins from the early 20th century when the laboratory approach to writing instruction was popularized leading to the creation of the first WC (known as a writing lab (WL) then) in 1934, to the present 2004.

Before 1970, WCs were generally known as writing labs or clinics, adopting mostly the laboratory approach to writing (Carino, 1995; Moore, 1950). These early writing labs or clinics generally focused on remediation, helping students in reducing or eliminating errors in writing (Harris, 1975; Moore, 1950; Wallace, 1998). The 1970 to 1990 period saw a shift of focus in WCs, from the written product to the writing process, influenced by the process movement and social constructivism. This was the period when WCs mushroomed, and battled for institutional acceptance and professional recognition. It also saw WCs experimenting and identifying strategies that work, fitting theories with practice, forming networks, promoting scholarship through conferences, publications and research, and engaging in human resource training (Kinkead, 1996). The post 1990 period saw the expansion of WC services into the cyber space - the establishment of the online writing lab (OWL) (Brown, 2000), and the emergence of more and more WCs and OWLs outside North America (see, for example, the website of European Writing Centers Association at <http://www.ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/>).

2.1.1 Early Writing Centers: Pre 1970

Early writing labs or clinics originated from an instructional method for teaching composition in the classroom. A high school teacher named Philo Buck was possibly the first writing instructor to use the term *laboratory method* in 1904 (Carino, 1995,

p.105). After the initiation by Buck, more reports on the laboratory method appeared in College English (e.g. Cady, 1915; Walker, 1917; Horner, 1929; Grandy, 1936). The laboratory method, in essence, emulated the practice of the science laboratory where students were guided in conducting experiments under the personal attention of the instructor. This method, when transferred to a writing classroom, manifested in the teacher guiding individual students in experimenting with writing.

The many advantages of the laboratory method included improved rapport between the teacher and the student; healthy competition among the students as their works were immediately reviewed by and compared to their peers; and improved writing performance as students reacted positively to immediate feedback from an encouraging life teacher and not through lifeless red ink (Walker, 1917). In addition, the laboratory method achieved a little better progress in about half the time (Horner, 1929), and students were less likely to plagiarize (Grandy, 1936) as compared to the whole class method.

In 1934, the laboratory method grew out of the classroom when the University of Minnesota allocated a big room with small anterooms to operate as a writing lab (Grandy, 1936). In the same year, the University of Iowa also set up a writing lab. While the Minnesota lab was part of a classroom curriculum as classes went there for one hour individual consultation per week on top of the usual classroom instruction, the Iowa one was a free-standing lab separated from the classroom instruction and serving both referral and voluntary students. This Iowa practice has been generally followed by most WCs today (Carino, 1995). When the Communication Skills Program started in 1945, the Iowa Lab was assigned the function of providing instruction to students whose placement assessment did not quite meet departmental standards. This kind of teaching to and practicing for the theme exam focused on the organization and correctness of writing and it went on for twenty-five years until the exam was discontinued in 1970.

By 1950, WCs were beginning to be established as part of university writing programs. With the inception of College Composition and Communication (CCC) in 1950, more and more writing laboratory works were presented. The issues that were of

concern then are still of concern even today, for example: WC functions and tutoring methods (Carino, 1992).

An apparent difference between early and current WCs is that early WCs did not use undergraduate peer tutors (Carino, 1995). This fact has also been confirmed by a survey administered by Claude Fiero Shouse in 1952 (reported in Lerner, 2003). Another difference might be that early WCs were more likely to engage in improving the writing and not so much the writer (North, 1984). This could be due to the prevalence of the product approach to writing and the exam-oriented emphasis before the late 1960s.

The establishment of these early WCs from the 1930s was stimulated by several factors. The first was the mass education policy. Towards the end of the 19th century, North America experienced an unprecedented influx of immigrants. Providing them with education was deemed a solution to mould them into law abiding citizens, and to prepare them for the job market. By the early 20th century, tertiary education stopped being a privilege of the elite, and was becoming more egalitarian as more public universities were set up to cater for the increased demand (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). As the immigrants were from very diverse cultural and socio-economical backgrounds, and most were under-prepared for tertiary education, the individualized instruction in the writing lab was seen as a good support system for these students (who were mostly from non-English background) in coping with tertiary academic English.

The second stimulant to the growth of WCs was John Dewey's influential propagation of individualized instruction and active learning (Geiger, 1958). John Dewey (1859-1952), an American philosopher and educator, was a leading exponent of philosophical pragmatism. He propagated a teaching approach based on active practical experience as opposed to passive rote learning (Fieser, 2001). This individualized and ~~active learning approach favored the practice of WC~~, and in a way contributed to the increase of WCs on North American campuses.

The third factor was the implementation of Armed Forces English (Carino, 1995), a preparatory English program designed within a short time for World War II

military officers. The constraints faced by this program included large class sizes, various English proficiencies, and the requirement to master the instructional content within a shorter time than the traditional program, and at the student's own pace. This program was well supported by the individualized instruction practiced at the writing laboratory, which accounted for the increase of free standing writing labs in the early 40s.

The fourth factor was the GI¹ Bill of Rights, also known as the Servicemen Readjustment Act, enforced in the United States in 1944 (GI Bill Website, 2005). This Bill supported about two to three million returning soldiers from World War II in attending tertiary education.

The fifth impetus to the founding of more writing labs or clinics was open enrollment or admission to tertiary institutions in the late 1960s. This was a policy that allowed high-school graduates who desired higher education into tertiary institutions (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001). Most of these non-traditional students were under-prepared, and thus more writing labs were set up to provide small group or individualized tutorials to help them catch up with tertiary English (Waller, 2002).

2.1.2 Middle Stage Writing Centers: 1970-1990

The 1970s saw the sixth impetus to the sprouting of WCs, in the development of the writing-across-curriculum (WAC) movement in curbing the literacy crisis highlighted by a Newsweek cover story *Why Johnny Can't Write* (Sheils, 1975). Because the classroom method had generally failed to produce good writers, educationists thought the emerging individualized writing pedagogy practiced in WCs (Kelly, 1980) might be a viable alternative. At the same time, a *renaissance* began in WCs (North, 1984, p. 69). This renaissance promoted a paradigm shift in the idea of a WC that writing should be viewed as a process instead of a product, and the writing curricula must be student-centered instead of teacher-centered.

This was the period when WCs proliferated. The increased number strengthened the WC community. The WC practitioners from different parts of North America

united to battle for professional recognition and institutional acceptance (Kinkead, 1996). For example, most WC directors were not on tenure term and they often worked under constrained conditions such as limited institutional support and funding. Realizing their disadvantaged position, the WC practitioners endeavored to raise their status through defining their identities, roles, responsibilities and functions. They experimented with strategies that work, testing theories and fitting theories with practice, and describing practice by relating to established instructional and rhetorical theories. This period also saw WCs forming associations to foster solidarity and unity in diversity, and promoting WC scholarship through research, publications, and conferences. Efforts were also channeled to human resource development such as tutor training through credit-bearing courses, and director training through graduate programs (Grimm, 1999; Olson, 1984).

The major events of this period have been chronicled by a few writers as they wrote their personal history as WC directors or coordinators (Harris and Kinkead, 1993; Summerfield, 1988; Yahner and Murdick, 1991). In the 70s, two important surveys related to WC history were conducted (Kinkead, 1996). The first was conducted by a CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication) committee in 1973 to investigate whether learning skill centers were only concerned about the mechanics of writing, and whether teachers would be replaced by mechanized programs. The findings of the survey indicated that since 1971, presentations at the NCTE (National Council for Teachers of English) conference and CCCC had shifted from discussing grammar and syntax to writing process pedagogy, and from classroom writing instructors to writing lab tutors; indirectly showing that there was increasingly reduced use of programmed instruction in WCs (CCCC, 1976). The second survey conducted in 1978 by College English Association on writing programs found several hundred schools listed writing labs as part of their writing program and pedagogy (Steward and Croft, 1982).

During this period too, several major events of WC concerns took place (Kinkead, 1996). The first was the birth of the Writing Lab Newsletter in 1977 initiated and edited by Muriel Harris. The second was a special interest group of WC directors in 1979 that became an annual event organized for the CCCC. At the CCCC, a resolution for equality in salary and tenure for full time composition instructors was passed. This

year also saw the formation of the Writing Centers Association (WCA), and the publication of two more writing journals: *Journal of Basic Writing*, and the WPA (Writing Program Administration) Newsletter. In 1980, the *Writing Center Journal*, initiated and edited by Lil Brannon and Stephen North was published. Then came May 1983 when the National Writing Center Association (NWCA) was formed at the fifth annual conference of the WCA. The formation of the NWCA was stimulated by the realization that the CCCC did not quite meet the entire needs of the WC community, and the CCCC leadership was not represented by WC professionals. Upon its inception, the NWCA was charged with:

... establishing a network among the regions for sharing of research and conference information, and formulating position statements ... on matters of professional interest to writing centers such as academic freedom, assessment and evaluation, professional status, training and development. (Kinkead, 1996, p.134, quoting McCracken, 1983, p.6)

In 1984, the NWCA's inaugural workshop at the NCTE convention attracted a full-house attendance. Issues such as research, computer use, WAC, teacher education, secondary school WCs, and the professional position statement were discussed (Kinkead, 1996). In the following year, Jeanne H. Simpson (1985) prepared the position statement on professional concerns intended to guide both WC directors and administrators. By 1985, NWCA recorded a membership of 310, and in 1990, the membership increased to 830. Today, there are more than one thousand WCs in North American institutions (Harris, 2004).

In 1978, Kenneth A. Bruffee promoted and emphasized the relevance of peer tutoring through his paper on the Brooklyn Plan. He followed up this effort by another seminal paper, *Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'* in 1984. This year also saw the publication of Stephen North's *The Idea of a Writing Center* where he provokes a critical reexamination of the WC role, pedagogy and practice.

The second decade of this period, from 1981 to 1990, saw an increased use of computers in WCs. In 1983, both the NCTE and CCCC conferences experienced a drastic increase of presentations related to computer and composition. This

overwhelming enthusiasm led to the inception of another newsletter, *Computers and Composition* (Online Writing Record, 2001). During this period, the WC discourse was interspersed with numerous scholarly works on the application of computer in the WC. Unlike the computer use in the WCs in the 1970s that was mainly CAI (Computer-Assisted Instruction) and auto-tutorial on drill-and-skill software, the 80s saw a shift in the computer use as a word processor in text manipulation (Carino, 1998).

Towards the end of the 1980s, WC's "chaotic adolescence" (Olson, 1984, p.vii) was almost over. Despite the diversity in pedagogy, philosophy, and physical make-up, WCs in this period were beginning to evolve into a "recognizable species" (Olson, 1984, p.vii) - generally perceived as a place that provides resources (handouts, guidebooks, computers, printers, etc.) and individual tutoring in helping students master the art of writing. During this metamorphosis into professional maturity, the evolved form of WCs must be grounded in fully articulated theory (Ede, 1989). In addition, another challenge for WC specialists during this period after the formation of the NWCA was not only to support and foster research and scholarship on WCs at conferences and in journals, but also to maintain a profile in the more mainstream conferences and journals such as the *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, and *College Teaching and Change* (Kinkead, 1996).

2.1.3 Current Writing Centers: Post 1990

The post 1990 period has been chosen as the demarcation for the next stage of the WC development, because 1991 was the year the WC community went online through a networked social forum or an e-mail discussion group, called the WCENTER listserv² (Kinkead, 1996). This indicates the beginning of another dimension of WC praxis, and the extension of WC services into the virtual space. The theoretical foundation of the WC during the early 90s too, shifted from expressivism that emphasizes the self-discovery of meaning to social constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative making of meaning (Sherwood, 1998). These two theoretical foundations will be elaborated further in Section 2.4.

The WCENTER listserv also facilitated survey studies on WCs. For example, a questionnaire was posted to WCENTER to survey community college WCs (Jordan-Henley, 1995). The purpose was to create a profile of a typical community college WC through investigating issues such as physical make-up, activities, effectiveness, and funding sources. The survey attracted responses from 27 community college WCs. Briefly, among the more important findings, about half of the WCs surveyed fell under the jurisdiction of an English department, with the rest under developmental studies, a larger learning center, continuing education, or existing as separate entities. The centers opened an average of 42.8 hours a week, and Composition students were the heaviest users compared to developmental or remedial students, and a mixed group. About 23 WCs surveyed served multiple disciplines. Funding originated from diverse sources defying classification. Tutors were trained using diverse methods such as on-the-job training, senior training junior, credit classes, and mock conferencing. Student evaluation was the most popular method in tracking effectiveness. About 23 WCs had computers. The trends seemed to be, among these 27 community college WCs surveyed, merging with learning centers, and supporting emerging computer technology.

Interest in OWLs has been mounting, as evidenced by the scholarship and research. In 1995, Muriel Harris and Michael Pemberton introduced a model of interactive and reactive computer interactions through *Online Writing Labs (OWLs): A Taxonomy of Options and Issues*. In 1998, Eric Hobson's award-winning *Wiring the Writing Center* was published. In 2000, another book on OWL edited by James Inman and Donna Sewell was published. These scholarly publications further promoted the experimentation and the application of computer, telecommunication and network technologies in WCs.

There are two recent initiatives in WC developments of relevance to the development of a Malaysian WC. First, in 1996, National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) went online. This development was significant in promoting its efforts on WC practice, scholarship and networking both nationally and internationally. Many international academics who had never heard about WCs came to know about WC pedagogy through this website (e.g. Tan, 2000).

Second, in the late 90s, the internationalization of WCs began. When NWCA started to recruit members from outside North America, it was subsequently renamed as International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). At present, a number of WCs and OWLs have been developed or are being developed outside North America, for example, in Britain (e.g. TrAce Online Writing Center at the University of Nottingham, see <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/>), Canada (e.g. Writing Center at the University of Ottawa, see <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/>), South Africa (see, for example, Papay, 2002), New Zealand (e.g. Online Writing and Learning Lab at Massey University, see <http://owl.massey.ac.nz/>), and Singapore (e.g. The Writing Center at National University of Singapore, see <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/>). In 2000, the very first international conference on WCs was held outside North America. It was organized by the European Writing Center Association (EWCA), and was held at Sadanski, Bulgaria (see <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/archives.php>).

While these WCs are emerging internationally, there is very limited literature on the practice and theory and WC effectiveness outside North America, and this lack of published research both broadly and in the Asian region is clearly important in considering the development of WCs in Malaysia. The context requires innovations of WCs internationally, to rely on interpretation and transfer of theory and practice from one cultural context to another – the problematics of which are discussed in Chapter IV.

2.2 Defining a Writing Center

The preceding section presents the long history of WC development that saw the creation of more than a thousand WCs in North America (Harris, 2004). The revolution and evolution of WCs have resulted in WCs taking various roles and functions at different institutions. Due to such diversity, WC literature has often discussed the difficulty of establishing a generic definition or a common description to represent WCs (see, for example: Carino, 2001; Harris, 2004; Kinkead and Harris, 1993).

Indeed, WCs in North America can relate to various contexts and specifications. To begin with, there are WCs for different levels of education. The IWCA website (www.writingcenters.org) shows WC links to secondary schools, community colleges

and universities. A WC can be located at various places such as a library, a learning center, at an English Department, or a residential hall; and it may be centralized at just one location or may have several satellite centers, usually found in universities with branch campuses (Haviland et al., 2001). A WC may be used to support various programs, for example, first year composition, writing across the curriculum or writing intensive courses. Funding sources of a WC may come from student fees, an English Department, a provost office, or an external organization/foundation. WCs also serve various clienteles, such as undergraduates, postgraduates, ESL, learning disabled, faculties, local or global communities. Writing tutors serving at a WC can be peers, graduate students, faculty members, retirees, or professional consultants. The tutoring mode can be face-to-face, online, individual, small group, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, or telephone. The size of a WC also varies. It can be as big as a building complex, or just a single room. The services offered by a WC are also different across institutions, for example, it can provide one or all the following services such as reference resources, writing consultation, or writing workshops. A WC can also have various statuses such as adjunct to a department/discipline or free-standing, a remedial center, or an excellence center for writing. The mission or philosophy can be biased toward supporting various types of writers or promoting WC pedagogy (Carino, 2001; Harris, 2004; Kinkead and Harris, 1993). Therefore, given this multifaceted and multifarious nature of a WC, it is indeed difficult to establish a generic definition that is acceptable to all.

The vast diversity of WCs has somewhat limited its generalisability to other WCs. Most WC directors adapt the theory and praxis of WC according to the mission of the institutions they serve and the needs and demands of the clientele they serve.

2.2.1 Generic Features and Functions of Writing Centers

Despite their multiplicity and diversity, WCs do have some common traits that distinguish them as WCs that are either part of a learning center or a writing program (Harris, 2004; Waller, 2002).

The most prominent feature or function of a WC is the practice of tutoring writing to its clientele. This tutoring is one-to-one, individualized, student-centered, non-judgmental, non-directive and non-threatening, be it face-to-face or online (Harris, 1995). The facilitative tutor plays the role of a coach or a collaborator in helping the student writer find his or her own voice in his or her writing. The tutor achieves this purpose by providing feedback as a reader and by asking probing questions very much resembling Socratic questioning. The tutorial is student-centered as it focuses solely on the student's needs. Generally, the tutors are peers of the students, advanced or graduate students, professionals who are writing consultants, retirees, or volunteers who have been trained, but rarely the instructor who sets the writing assignment (Harris, 2004; Waller, 2002). Student writers are encouraged to experiment with different strategies of writing. They are free to work on any writing task for any course or any purpose, for example: lab reports, term papers, job application letters, resumes, dissertations, essays, creative writing, etc. WCs are generally open to all students, and tutors work with students with various levels of proficiency (Harris, 2004; Waller, 2002).

Before tutors begin their tutoring service in a WC, they are usually trained to be sensitive, responsive and supportive to diverse student needs. In general, WCs encourage non-directive and minimalist tutoring (Brooks, 2001) (see Sections 2.6.2 and 2.6.3 for a more detailed discussion). This is usually achieved by asking questions such as: What's your purpose in this paragraph? Do you think you have achieved your purpose? Why do you think so? What can you do to improve this paragraph to bring out the purpose? In a tutorial, the priority is given to higher order or global concerns such as overall clarity, logical organization, coherence and cohesion, before lower order or local concerns such as subject-verb agreement, punctuations and mechanics are attended to. Also, tutors usually avoid proofreading a student's paper. Related tutoring concerns such as generalist versus specialist tutoring, tutoring ESL students, and the practice and difference between peer tutoring and peer review are discussed toward the end of this chapter.

Another common function of most WCs is the provision of reference materials for their clientele such as guidebooks, dictionaries, thesauri, grammar references, style guides, encyclopedias, worksheets on specific skills, essay models, etc. Often, WCs are

also equipped with computers and printers for writers to refine their drafts. Certain WCs also provide coffee and cookies to foster a relaxed and inviting atmosphere (Harris, 2004; Waller, 2004).

In promoting collaboration and social constructionist approaches to writing (see Section 2.4.1 for an expanded description), WCs aspire to foster a community of writers who in turn form their individual discourse communities. In a WC, students have the chance to interact with other students who are novice or experienced writers from the same or different disciplines. Students are also given the chance to interact with tutors who can assist them in writing to a specific community. Students are thus initiated into their own discourse community to practice the specific craft of writing (Harris, 2004).

2.2.2 Basic Models of Writing Centers

Despite the diverse nature of WCs in North American tertiary education, several authors have managed to propose some generic models while recognizing that WC missions and roles are shaped by local contexts (see, for example: Carino, 2001; Hilgers and Marsella, 1992; Lunsford, 1991). A set of often cited WC models are Lunsford's (1991) metaphors of WCs as Storehouses, Garrets and Burkean Parlors. As Lunsford's models are directly related to the practice of three theories of rhetorical epistemology, her models will be discussed in the WC Theory and Practice section (see Section 2.4.1).

A neat and convincing discussion of WC models is found in Hilgers and Marsella (1992) who discussed four models of WC based on their functionality. Somewhat overlapping with Hilgers and Marsella (1992) are the supplementary, complementary and independent WC models proposed by Carino (2001), although his purpose was more to discuss WC's theoretical, pedagogical and political relationships to institutional writing programs than in proposing generic models for WCs per se. Because of the overlapping nature, Carino's models are acknowledged in the discussion of Hilgers and Marsella's (1992) models.

The first WC model proposed by Hilgers and Marsella (1992) is the Extracurricular WC that is independent of the institutional curricula. This is also the

Independent WC model described by Carino (2001). Students use the WC voluntarily out of their own needs and initiatives. The advantages of this model include high staff and user morale because the staff members know that their services have been voluntarily sought after by students who are genuinely in need. However, voluntary use may sometimes be perceived as non-essential and result in limited funding. Also, students may not want teachers to know about their WC visits. When students do not talk about their WC visits, the WC must work hard to publicize its services so that students know when, where and how to get help (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992).

The second model is the Co-Curricular WC that offers supplementary services to curricular courses, for example, tutoring for under-prepared students, or helping content instructors teach the writing component of a content course (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). Carino (2001) named this model as Supplementary WCs. This model helps to individualize instructions in large classes, and WC tutors have more satisfaction in serving this model of WC as their services are required by the curriculum. However, this model may render writing as supplementary to learning, and not as a component of learning. Curricular teachers and the institution may hold the WC responsible if students do not write well. In times of financial constraints, this WC model would also have a budget cut risk as its status is still supplementary and cannot equate with the status of an academic department (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992).

The third model is a Curricular WC where students need to take a course the WC offers, for example a remedial course, as a requirement for a standard academic program, or as a prerequisite for another specific course (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). This WC model is similar to Carino's (2001) Complementary WCs. As the WC is required only by a certain group of students, its funding is ensured. However, students hate the stigma attached to remedial courses, and thus have low morale in visiting the WC (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992).

The fourth model is a Research and Development (R & D) WC (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992) where staff can try out new teaching strategies or collaborate in finding a solution to recurring problems. This model promotes innovative approaches to writing instruction and learning, and is likely to appear more important to the administrators as

it contributes toward teacher training and development. However, as research and documentation is time demanding, staff of this WC model may neglect their tutoring effort at the expense of conducting research (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). This model is not discussed by Carino (2001).

Most WCs today have elements from more than one of these models, in their adaptation to the changing needs of the institution and students they serve. For example, the WC at the Colorado State University started as an Extracurricular WC in serving campus-wide students (Kinhead, 1993). Today, it is also a Curricular WC in offering courses in writing arguments and writing in the disciplines. Moreover, it is also a Co-curricular WC in that it conducts in-class workshops on specific topics, for example: writing essay exams and scientific reports, if requested by faculty members. Furthermore, it functions as a R&D WC too as it conducts a few ongoing research and community projects as part of the National Writing Project and the Young Writers Workshops (Writing@CSU, 2005).

In meeting the diverse student and faculty demography across all disciplines, the WC designed for Malaysia will also need to be modeled after various roles and functions. However, it has also been observed that incremental development ensures survival and uptake. Therefore for the start, a co-curricular WC may have better chance of uptake as writing course lecturers can refer students to use the one-to-one tutorials and the resources provided by the WC. This is discussed further in Chapter VII.

2.2.3 Metaphors and Definitions

WCs have adopted various metaphors to reflect their roles and functions in relation to the requirement of their institutions and the specific needs of their clientele. WC metaphors also reflect the dominant belief about writing and learning at each era.

Because WCs originated from the laboratory method, early centers were generally called *writing laboratories* (WLs) (Moore, 1950). The term WC was not used, or rarely used, before the 70s (Wallace, 1991). However, for the sake of clarity, this discussion uses WC as a generic term for writing center/lab/clinic.

From the 1930s, when WCs were needed to remediate under-prepared students who were mostly immigrants by teaching them the correct forms and mechanics of writing through diagnosing and treating errors, the name *clinic* became quite popular besides the original *lab*. In an often cited 'early' paper titled *The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory* (1950) regarding early WCs, Robert Moore distinguished between the functions of the laboratory and the clinic. The clinic primarily diagnosed the writing difficulties of a student, usually through an analysis of a writing sample or an interview conducted by a clinician, who would then suggest remedial measures for self-help. The laboratory, on the other hand, primarily directed and supervised remediation of students through the laboratory method or extensive tutoring. The name *laboratory* was more commonly used than *clinic*, as the latter had a negative connotation in seeing students as patients with various diseases (Carino, 1992). Also, among the 60 early WCs Claude Shouse surveyed in 1953, 29 had the word *laboratory* in their names while 24 had *clinic* (Lerner, 2003). The clinic metaphor, nevertheless, did not persist, as the 1984 Writing Lab Directory had only one entry of *clinic*, while the 1992 Directory had none (Lerner, 2003). However, a recent check on the website of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) (Pegg, 2001) still showed one entry of *clinic* among a total of 339 WCs online, i.e. the Philosophy Essay Clinic at the University of Toronto (<http://philosophy.utoronto.ca/site/undergraduate/clinic.html>).

In the early 1990s, the term *writing lab* was linked to the Positivist or Current-Traditional pedagogy (see Section 2.4.1 for an expanded description), having drill and practice on discrete grammatical items or formulaic tasks as the focus; while *writing center* was linked to the process-oriented collaborative learning pedagogy (Wallace, 1991; Carino, 1992). From the 1970s, when WC practitioners realized that they had been marginalized by the main stream who perceived the WC as either complementary or supplementary, many WCs changed their names to *centers*. The purpose was to change the mindset of the academy and also to prepare WCs for a paradigm shift - that the WC service was central and not peripheral to the curriculum (Carino, 1992).

In the online forum of the WC community called WCenter, the issue of naming often recurs as names are a way of defining WC's philosophy and praxis, and roles and

functions. Recently, Sherry Robinson of Eastern Kentucky University reported at WCenter that her students liked their WC name changed to Writing Studio because they perceived a *center* as a place to get help, but a *studio* as a place to create. Her university administrators also liked the new name (S. Robinson, personal communication, March 11, 2005). This example serves to illustrate that a WC name is very much context dependent, and is reflective of the institution it serves.

2.3 Defining an Online Writing Lab

The concept of OWL can be inferred from how it is named and defined. As naming and defining an OWL are closely related to the meaning and conceptualization of an OWL, this section presents how OWLs have been variously named and defined.

A brief definition of OWL can be found in *The Writing Center Resource Manual* (Silk, 1998). The editor says that OWLs

... refer most generally to a set of online services offered by a WC. OWLs may offer e-mail tutorials (opportunities for writers to send in papers and questions via email), web-based resources such as online handouts and links to other information, and the opportunity for synchronous connections via something like a MUD/MOO. (p. Appendix B)

The term *online writing lab* or *OWL* was coined by Muriel Harris, the director of the Purdue Writing Lab, and her colleague. The term began to appear in the writing center discourse from the early 90s (Brown, 2000). By 1993, the Purdue University OWL and the State University of New York (Albany) OWL were in operation. In 1994, OWL announcements started to appear on the WCENTER listserv (Inman and Sewell, 2000). By 1998, the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) homepage recorded 237 OWLs (Brown, 2000), and by November 2000, NWCA listed 331 writing center gopher, web, and OWL sites at its website: <http://nwca.syr.edu/NWCA/NWCAOWLS.html> (Pegg, 2000).

In the 1990s, with the increasing number of writing labs changing their names to writing centers, there was a suggestion to change OWLs to COWs (Centers of Online

Writing) (Brown, 2000). This suggestion prompted keen reaction from the WC community in proposing an appropriate name for online WCs. Among them, Eric Crump, the creator of the Online Writery at the University of Missouri, suggested *Writing Intensive Online Learning Environment (WIOLE)*, and Clint Gardner, the coordinator of the Salt Lake Community College Online Writing Center, proposed *Virtual Writing Center (VWC)*. Harris (in Brown, 2000), however, stated that the use of either *center* or *lab* was very much dependent on what the words meant locally. She explained that in Purdue University where she has been the writing lab director, the word *center* is linked to a place with a lot of bureaucratic red-tape, while *lab* is linked to friendly help labs. Therefore, she would not consider replacing her OWL with COW.

In the NWCA's OWL list (Pegg, 2000), out of the 311 names, 238 have the word *center*, while 39 carry the word *lab*, and the remaining 34 use words such as *workshop*, *place*, *space*, *studio*, *room*, *learning assistance*, *writing assistance*, *writery*, etc. Moreover, in the NWCA's Online Tutoring list (Pegg, 2000), out of the 29 writing centers offering online tutoring either via e-mail or MOO², 11 use the word *center*, 8 use *lab*, while the remaining use some other words. In general, the name *Writing Center* takes precedence over the name *Writing Lab* by a vast majority. However, when the word *online* is also in the name, only 14 out of the 311 names carry both *center* and *online*, or having the meaning of *online* such as *cyber* (only one example) or *virtual* (also one example), compared to 28 names with both *online* and *lab*.

Why is there this tendency to call the virtual or electronic version of writing centers *Online Writing Labs* and the physical walk-in centers *Writing Centers*? Perhaps this has to do with how the writing center community sees OWLs or defines what an OWL is. Generally, an OWL is seen as an extension of writing center services into the cyber space via the Internet (Blythe, 1995), as the first OWLs were set up by established writing centers, for example, the Purdue OWL and the Michigan OWL. Harris (1996) contends that it is acceptable to call the online component of a writing center *lab* as in *computer lab*. Later, when new writing centers constructed entirely in the cyber space came into existence without having any walk-in centers (for example, the Dakota OWL), Harris' explanation of OWL was no longer foolproof. Hobson (1998), instead, used the term *wired writing centers* interchangeably with OWLs in his book *Wiring the*

Writing Center; and Coogan (1999) used the term *Electronic Writing Center* to name his book.

When OWLs began to appear in different sizes and shapes, the term *OWL* also carried different meanings to different people. To some people, an OWL is just the web site of a writing center that may serve as an advertisement for the physical center. For example, a survey on OWLs conducted in 1997 found a respondent defined OWL as: "We have an OWL that is a Web site" (Shadle, 2000, p.7). Yet to others, an OWL could be compatible to a physical center, engaging in the same activities and offering the same services, but in a different medium. In 2000, the publication of *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work* edited by Inman and Sewell generally affirmed the established acceptance of the term *OWL*, as all of the twenty contributing writers consistently used this term in their papers.

The writing center community, nevertheless, has been careful in deciding on a name for its online component that best illustrates its commitment in a specific local context. Sometimes, this naming exercise can be difficult. For example, Monroe, Rickly, Condon and Butler (2000) describe how they finally adopted the name *OWL*:

We liked the notion of OWL, but did not want to be limited by the terminology. We tried various acronyms ..., but none of them had the powerful graphic symbolism of the acronym OWL. So we kept the acronym but reassigned the letters to mean *online writing* and *learning* to refer to our online tutoring service, in an effort to foreground the human interactivity over the place or even the technology. (p. 212)

This use of OWL to include the concept of learning is certainly not unique. A check with the NWCA's OWL list (Pegg, 2000) again shows that 11 names carry the word *learning*, for example: Hawai'i's Online Learning Assistant (HOLA), Furman University's Center for Collaborative Learning and Communication (CCLC), Oregon State Center for Writing and Learning, and State University of New York College at Geneseo Writing Learning Center. In New Zealand, the OWL at Massey University has the name OWLL, which stands for Online Writing and Learning Lab (Emerson et al., 1999), as writing was just one of the learning skills concerned.

For this project, the operational definition of OWL is the online or cyber presence of any writing center via a computer network, either through the Internet or an intranet. This definition of OWL is all encompassing, covering any writing center that has a web site, regardless of whether it has a physical place, or the kind of online service or activities it engages in. It can serve a most basic function of advertising for its physical counterpart, function as an information distributor, or provide a most sophisticated function of online tutoring.

This all-encompassing definition is necessary because the focus of this research is on a WC and OWL model applicable to ESL students. Since the late 90s, some WCs and OWLs have been emerging outside North America or are still in the process of construction, for example: the WC and OWL at Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, and City University of Hong Kong. A narrow definition may result in leaving out some of these WCs and OWLs from other contexts.

2.3.1 Online Writing Labs and Technologies

An OWL is not the first instance of a computer technology application in WCs. As early as the late 70s, computers already had a place in writing instruction and WCs (Hawisher et al., 1996). According to Hawisher et al.'s (1996) description of computer use in writing instruction, the early 80s saw a proliferation of use of computerized drill-and-practice modules. Some early computer-assisted-instruction (CAI) process software such as Wordsworth, Writer's Helper, spelling and style checkers were developed during this period. The potentials of word-processing software in revising writing were immediately recognized. From the late 80s to the early 90s, e-mail and online discourse became the favorite topic of WC discussion (Carino, 1998). It was also during this period that WCs began to explore the potentials of networked technology, and OWLs were developed as a result.

Just as WC practitioners debated the effectiveness of CAI software in the 80s, the same debate went on with the adoption and application of networked technology in developing OWLs. Areas of concern, aptly summarized by Hobson (1998), included the

nature of the WC community that was shaped by the networked technology. He asked: Would the WC become an obsolete service, with the OWL replacing the WC? And, would the OWL become just another computer lab? Would WCs be described and classified according to technological sophistication? The second area was the concern that the OWL might support only Current-Traditional Rhetoric and not Social Constructivism as being practiced by WCs (see Section 2.4 for further discussion). The third area of concern was to consider the strengths and weaknesses of OWLs as compared to WCs.

In addition, Hobson (1998) also promulgated researching and assessing OWLs. Areas that warranted such investigation included identifying the OWL clientele, features of a successful online tutorial, OWL's effectiveness in dealing with higher order composing concerns, the effect of the absence of paralinguistic cues on online interaction, the strategies employed by online tutors in engaging their clients, the effects of synchronous and asynchronous tutorials on the interaction quality and client's attitude, the cost of creating and maintaining an OWL, and finally, the influence of technology on the mission of WCs.

On top of the preceding cautionary concerns, WC and OWL practitioners have been reminded that they should not let technologies drive pedagogy. They must instead critically apply the kind of technology that can help them achieve the intended pedagogical goal (Wallace, 1998).

Amidst this kind of cautionary reminders, the ICT advancement continues to motivate OWLs in experimenting with various state-of-the-art innovations. These technological applications will be discussed alongside the basic models of OWLs in the next section.

2.3.2 Basic Models of Online Writing Labs

OWLs can be categorized into three basic models based on functionality (Koster, 2002). Each model employs different information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The first is the Information OWL whose function is expository. This model has the largest number of OWLs. For an example of this model, see the OWL at the University of Richmond at <http://writing.richmond.edu/> (Koster, 2002). The OWL virtual space or website is used to advertise the services provided by the physical walk-in WC, and also to publicize information such as the location, opening hours, and staff. This model may also provide online handouts on various discrete skills of writing and grammar, writing samples, tutor training guides, style guides such as MLA or APA, online quizzes for ESL students, frequently asked questions, and links to related online resources (Koster, 2002). The advantages of an Information OWL include that it enables dissemination of information round the clock, and it helps to promote the services offered by the physical WC. Its online resources such as writing guides and worksheets can be read, downloaded and printed by its distant clients any time anywhere. In essence, it functions as an always open reference station, different from a physical WC or library that only opens certain hours certain days. The static content of an Information OWL can also be updated quite conveniently from time to time (Johnson, 1996; Lasarenko, 1996). The main disadvantage of an Information OWL is that it requires constant updating in terms of online technology and content, and thus it can be costly to maintain (Harris, 1995-1996).

Compared to Interactive and Live OWLs, the Information OWL is less complicated to design and create as it comprises mainly static resources. Before the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW), some OWLs were created on the Gopher platform comprising only plain text. For example, the OWL for the School of Nursing at the University of Wisconsin Madison created in 1993 (For an archived page, see <http://www.wisc.edu/pubs/home/archives/gopher/nursing93/00000020.html>). The Purdue University OWL still contains some Gopher content (see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/owl/stats/ftpfall97.html>). When the first generation Web was released to the market in the early 1990s, it outshone Gopher with its multimedia features such as various font styles, colors, layouts, sounds, animation, and hypertexts. Given this new found option, users embraced the WWW, and the static pages of Gopher no longer appealed. The current second generation web is even more sophisticated as it is able to incorporate Flash³, PDF⁴ (Portable Document Format) files, and streaming audio and

video. This added capability enables web pages to be highly “fleeting, dynamic, multilayered, multi-fragmented, and hybridized” (Squire, 2005, Now section, para. 4). Some of the advanced features, for example, the posting of Power Point files, can be found on the Purdue University OWL (see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/pp/rhetsit.PPT#1>).

In the near future, the anticipated third generation web, known as the three-dimensional web, will have depth on top of height and breadth to produce a more televisual and cinematic effect on the web (Squire, 2005). At one time, designers kept web pages simple to speed up download time. Now with broadband⁵ and Streamyx⁶ becoming more commonplace, download time may cease to be a problem. Moreover, with the current generation of users who were born and are growing up with the Internet, a simple or static web page may not entice them. Therefore, OWL websites must progress with time to attract users.

The second model is the Interactive OWL that allows users to interact asynchronously or in displaced time with OWL administrators and tutors via technology such as e-mails (Koster, 2002). For an example of this model, see the OWL at the Purdue University at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>. This kind of OWL makes online tutoring possible by using an online interactive tool. By far the most popular asynchronous tool is e-mail; while bulletin board⁷, forum⁸ or listserv have also been used but to a lesser extent. E-mail tutoring is more popular as evidenced by the statistics provided by IWCA (International Writing Centers Association) that recorded 29 WCs offering e-mail conferencing, with only 5 conducting multi-user domain (MUD) conferencing (Pegg, 2001). Also, there has been more discussion on e-mail application in the WC literature (see, for example, Coogan, 1995, 1998, 1999; Honeycutt, 2001; Mabrito, 2000).

Like the Information OWL, the Interactive OWL too has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include convenience and flexibility as tutors and tutees can work at a time most suitable to them. Although paralinguistic cues are absent in e-mail communication, the gain is the positive loss of social pressure (Harris and Pemberton, 1995). In e-mail tutorials or online forums, the communication is more

egalitarian because everyone has an equal chance to talk (Cooper and Selfe, 1990). Also, due to the distance afforded by e-mail, students tend to be less inhibited in asking questions or voicing out their opinions (Terryberry, 2002). In practice, the loss of paralinguistic expression induces the writers to plan and write more clearly as they have to rely solely on the written text to understand one another, and this writing (e-mail) to get help in improving writing is a good first step toward effective writing. The online tutor's e-mail can also serve as a model of good writing (Blythe, 1995). The weaknesses of e-mail consultation include the slow response compared to instantaneous feedback from a face-to-face or a synchronous session. An e-mail also takes a longer time to write. Further, research has confirmed that e-mail does not sustain the kind of extended conversation of a face-to-face or synchronous tutorial, and this is against the principle of social constructivism (see Section 2.4.1 for an extended discussion) WCs aim to foster (Castner, 2000). Nevertheless, the strengths of e-mail tutoring seem to outweigh the weaknesses as it still remains popular. For an example of asynchronous tutoring using e-mail, visit the Northern Illinois University Writing Center at http://www.engl.niu.edu/writing_center/email.html. For an example of asynchronous tutoring using an online forum, see <http://www.csun.edu/%7Ehflrc006/virtual.html>.

Certain interactive OWLs have begun to develop a space via a web/bulletin board or a blog⁹ for users to publish their writing and also to post reviews or comments on writing, for example, the Bellevue Community College (BCC) Writing Center Blog (see <http://bccwc.blogspot.com/2004/09/welcome-to-bcc-writing-center-blog.html>).

Another such online writing space innovation that is catching up in popularity recently is a wiki¹⁰, invented by Ward Cunningham in 1995. For an example, see his Wiki Wiki Web at <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WelcomeVisitors>. Briefly, a wiki is a website that has a collection of web pages on some specific topics. These web pages can be read, edited or changed by anyone. Some features of a wiki include “ego-less” content, “time-less, and never finished”, often anonymous, and multi-authorship (Lamb, 2004, p. 37). Possible uses of a wiki in OWLs may include brainstorming for ideas and editing. For an example of how a wiki can be used in a WC, visit the Tutoring and Learning Center at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi where a lecturer uses a wiki to interact with students in a writing course (see <http://falcon.tamucc.edu/wiki/TollyCooke/Home>).

The third model is the Live OWL (Koster, 2002). For an example of this model, see the OWL at the Colorado State University (see <http://writing.colostate.edu/chat/>). Usually, the more sophisticated OWLs, such as the Live OWL or the Interactive OWL, also have features of the Information OWL.

A Live OWL allows users to interact in real time or synchronously with OWL staff and other writers in the world. The real time communication can either take place at a virtual chat room via such software tools as ICQ¹¹ (see <http://www.icq.com>), Microsoft NetMeeting (see <http://main.placeware.com/index.cfm>), or Daedalus Interchange (see <http://www.daedalus.com/>), or a simulated environment such as MOO¹² (see an example of MOO at Lingua MOO <http://lingua.utdallas.edu/>) or MUD¹³ (For an experience of MUD, visit <http://www.3k.org/>; Crump, 1998).

A number of WC practitioners have reported their experiments with these synchronous tools. For example, Doug Enders (2000, 2001) has reported his experience in using Microsoft NetMeeting for synchronous communication at his Indiana State University OWL. Johanek and Rickly (1995) had much success in using Daedalus Interchange at the Ball State University Writing Center to train tutors. Jordon-Henley and Maid (1995) used a MOO-based OWL to link students at Roane State Community College in Tennessee with graduate student tutors at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock for online live tutorials. Eric Crump (1998) experimented with MOO and MUD at his Missouri University Online Writery, and commented that these real time platforms helped promote virtual communities of writers. For an application of MOO at a WC, visit the Bridgewater College OWL (see http://www.bridgewater.edu/WritingCenter/online_help.html).

The advantages of a Live OWL, on top of convenience and flexibility, include that it supports social construction of knowledge in giving everyone a voice and an equal chance to talk (Johanek and Rickly, 1995). Also, the speed required in synchronous communication may inspire the mind to generate multiple ideas, and thus an online chat may be useful for the brainstorming or the outlining stage of a writing

process (Honeycutt, 2001). Moreover, the transcript of the online communication can be studied as a specific genre (Monroe, 1998).

On the other hand, there is concern whether online tutoring is capable of helping students who have difficulty with the conceptual level of writing, and if the tutor offers conceptual help, the student might be tempted to appropriate the written idea (Baker, 1994). Therefore, Baker (1994) suggests that online tutoring may serve factual writing concerns such as help with grammar or syntax, but not conceptual writing concerns. Another concern with online tutorials is that students may not pay attention to the proper conventions of writing, and they may suffer later in in-class writing that requires correct writing conventions (Grubbs, 1994).

As with all other technologies, OWL technologies too require a critical appraisal and a balance between the pros and cons. The application of an Information, Interactive or Live OWL or a combination depends on individual WCs as each has its unique academic, political, fiscal, and pedagogical contexts (Selfe, 1995), and therefore no single OWL model is adequate. Given the various models of OWLs currently practiced in North America, there is a need to critically appraise specific applications of OWLs that will be useful for Malaysian tertiary institutions.

2.4 Theory and Practice

The relationship between theory and practice has been a frequent debate in the writing center (WC) community (see, for example, Hobson, 1992, 1994; Carino, 1995). Generally, the WC community is made up of practitioners or pragmatists and not theorists. Early WCs (pre 70s) were originally set up by people who were assigned the responsibility to help students improve their writing ability. These early practitioners did not have a specific learning theory or epistemology to practice or follow. The only 'theory' existed then was trial-and-error. It was through this early struggle and experimentation that the WC pedagogy evolved, which is now generally recognized as non-directive, non-threatening, student-centered one-on-one tutoring (Bruffee, 1984; Ede, 1989; Harris, 1986; Lunsford, 1991; Murphy, 1994; North, 1984).

From the mid 80s, the WC community saw the need to relate practice to theory and vice versa (Mullin and Wallace, 1994; Olson, 1984). The need arose mainly because WC work was not recognized as a discipline, and theorizing was seen as a means to establish disciplinarity and respectability (Carino, 1995). It was also felt that “theory without practice is likely to result in ungrounded, inapplicable speculation”, and “practice without theory ... often leads to inconsistent, and sometimes even contradictory and wrong-headed, pedagogical methods” (Ede, 1989, p.100). However, theorizing WC work has not been an easy task, as Eric Hobson (1992, 1994) and Christina Murphy (1994) have both affirmed that no single theory or epistemology is adequate to account for the eclectic and diverse nature of WC praxis. As every WC serves a different institution or community, the practitioners need to situate theories according to contextual practices. In other words, it is by situating the idea of a WC where it is put to work that the most appropriate theory emerges (DeCiccio et al., 1995, cited in Cummins, 1998). Another difficulty in theorizing WC practice is in applying or integrating composition theory to WC praxis, and yet still maintaining the distinct uniqueness of WC theory from that of composition (Carino, 1995). A possible solution is to engage the WC community in dialoguing theory and practice, allowing theory to inform practice, and practice to affirm or adapt theory (Carino, 1995).

With this understanding of the theory-practice interdependence, this section discusses the philosophy or theoretical foundation and epistemology related to or exemplified by the WC and OWL praxis.

2.4.1 Writing Center Theory and Practice

The theory and praxis of WCs pivot on three main philosophies and theoretical foundations or epistemological paradigms: current-traditional, expressionist, and social constructionist rhetoric (Carino, 1995; Hobson, 1992, 1994; Lunsford, 1991; Sherwood, 1998).

Firstly, current-traditional Rhetoric, also known as the conservative model (Murphy, 1991; Murphy and Law, 1995), or the ‘storehouse’ model (Lunsford, 1991), emphasizes grammatical and mechanical correctness, and prescriptive organization

patterns or forms. It has one leg in the positivist epistemology that places knowledge as absolute truth outside the writer, which is “immediately accessible, individually knowable, measurable, and sharable” (Lunsford, 1991, p.93), and another in the objectivist epistemology that sees knowledge as neutral and prescribable that is also outside the writer. It sees writing as a product, because instructional intervention happens only after a written task is done. This model views the WC as a site for remediation, for diagnosing and eliminating language weaknesses.

WCs that preach this model are likely to operate a grammar hotline, and foster the use of self-accessed programmed modules or worksheets on discrete items or skills. The belief is that students will produce error-free writing if they are given enough drill on the specific problem area, and their correct language use would be reinforced with immediate positive feedback. This ‘skill and drill’ mode is traceable to Skinner’s Behaviorism, which stresses the learning cycle of stimulus-response- reinforcement.

The second theoretical foundation is expressionist rhetoric that views writing as a process of self-discovery (Sherwood, 1998). This is also the ‘WC-as-garret’ model that Lunsford (1991) describes. It views knowledge as “interiorized, solitary, individually derived” and “individually held” (Lunsford, 1991, p.94). As knowledge is found within the writer, the tutor’s role is to elicit this knowledge from the writer, and to assist in the discovery of the individual own voice and composing process (Hobson, 1992) through individualized student-centered tutorials where the writer has the opportunity to invent and express individual ideas (Sherwood, 1998). This kind of supportive and non-threatening student-centered tutorial is traceable to Carl Rogers’¹⁴ non-directive and non-evaluative client-centered therapy, in which the client directs the focus and pace of each counselling session. Based on this theoretical foundation, most instructional intervention takes place during the process of writing and not after, and the purpose is to improve the writer and not the writing (North, 1984). WC tutors who subscribe to this model see themselves as coaches or facilitators in helping less experienced writers to write successfully.

The third, the most discussed and the most current theoretical paradigm is the social constructionist rhetoric. It is also known as epistemic rhetoric (Hobson, 1992,

1994), and is exemplified in the *WC-as-Burkean-Parlor*¹⁵ model (Lunsford, 1991). The term *Burkean-Parlor* originated from the name of a great American theorist of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), who vividly described an intellectual discussion parlor as a place that promotes multivocality in never ending conversation. The following quote depicts a scenario in a Burkean Parlor:

Imagine you enter a parlor ... the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defence; ...the discussion is interminable... And when you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke, 1974, p.110-111)

A WC that models after the Burkean-Parlor is a WC that promotes dialogues and negotiation of knowledge that are vital to collaboration. It would be impossible to collaborate if the individuals concerned do not talk to one another. In supporting collaboration, Andrea Lunsford (1991) substantiates that collaboration aids in problem finding, problem solving, learning abstractions, transfer, assimilation, and interdisciplinary thinking. Collaboration also promotes sharper critical thinking, higher achievement, and excellence. Moreover, she continues, collaboration engages the whole student and encourages active learning by combining reading, talking, writing and thinking, and providing practice in both synthetic and analytic skills. In illustrating how collaboration works in her proposed Burkean-Parlor WC, she says:

Such a center would place control, power and authority not in the tutor or staff, not in the individual student, but in the negotiation group. It would engage students not only in solving problems set by teachers but in identifying problems for themselves; not only in working as a group but in monitoring, evaluating, and building a theory of how groups work; not only in understanding and valuing collaboration but in confronting squarely the issues of control that successful collaboration inevitably raises; not only in reaching consensus but in valuing dissensus and diversity. (p.97)

The preceding description of Lunsford's (1991) Burkean-Parlor WC contains the basic tenets of social constructionism of negotiation, collaboration and respect for diversity. This social constructionist view of writing instruction becomes dominant in the early 1990s. Social constructionism holds that knowledge is not a result of discovery of unique ideas in an individual mind, but rather, results from the interaction between the individual and the society (Hobson, 1992), or negotiated among members of a discourse community (Sherwood, 1998). WC tutors who subscribe to this model see themselves as co-learners or collaborators in the writing tutorial or conference. The tutor and the student writer (Sherwood, 1998):

... interact more or less as equals or co-discoverers each contributing creative vision to a project, each sharing (by consensus) in decision-making, and each learning from the other. Together tutor and student seek a rhetorical stance that permits the fruitful synthesis of apparently conflicting facts, experiences, voices, and perspectives that, eventually, becomes a text. (p. 11.1.3)

Also central to this strong belief in collaboration is the power of talk or dialogic discourse. As Stephen North (1984) contends, writers usually like to talk about their writing, "preferably to someone who will really listens, who knows how to listen, and knows how to talk about writing too" (p.441), so the WC is a response to this need. Through talking to WC tutors, student writers can get started on a writing task, and try out various composing strategies. In talking about their ideas, they can see and organize their thoughts more clearly.

Most current WCs practice the social constructionist approach to writing tutoring. In a tutorial, the tutor and the student collaborate to produce better writing. This form of collaboration is called collaborative learning about writing, which is different from collaborative writing (Harris, 2001). In collaborative writing, the collaborators divide out the writing task by writing a part of the whole, or pool their ideas and effort together in creating the writing, and they co-own the resulted work. In collaborative learning about writing, the collaborators learn from one another in the writing process. Usually the less experienced writer has more to learn from the more experienced, and the less experienced must decide what to change based on the information or advice from the more experienced. Because the actual act of writing and

the decision made on the writing are done by one person, the resulting work has only one single author. WC tutoring resembles collaborative learning about writing. Clearly, the more experienced writer is the tutor, who plays the role of an informant or adviser, in guiding the less experienced student decide what to change or improve. Through this collaborative learning about writing, tutors learn to become better tutors, and students learn to become better writers.

Adding to this relationship of talking and writing, Sallyanne Fitzgerald (1994) suggests the whole language theory that underpins the collaborative learning framework. She posits that the integrative use of the four language skills such as reading, speaking, listening and writing, can more effectively help students succeed in communication acts, and help them become better writers.

While these three theoretical foundations related to WC theory and practice each has its applications and merits, each also has its weaknesses. Firstly, Current Traditional Rhetoric that exemplifies positivist pedagogy ignores “the contextual nature of discourse and the malleability of language” (Hobson, 1992, p.103). Also, Current Traditional Rhetoric cannot explain the thought and interaction processes that happen in a WC tutorial. Secondly, expressionist rhetoric emphasizes the central role of an individual in meaning-making that may suggest a false sense of autonomy by the student writer (Hobson, 1992). Lastly, social constructionist rhetoric that emphasizes negotiated meaning and consensus in discourse production may promote homogeneity and conformity that may silence individual voice and stifle creativity (Lunsford, 1991). But diversity is important as it can contribute toward the production of new information, and also improve the aggregated wisdom of group consensus.

In summing up, the weaknesses found in each epistemological paradigm related to WC theory and practice serve to reaffirm that no single paradigm can account for the diverse political agendas and the variably defined WC theory and praxis by different institutions (Hobson, 1992). In short, it is impossible to provide a single framework for understanding the WC’s purpose, function and significance, and the three main epistemologies discussed might play a complementary role in informing the WC theory

and praxis (Murphy and Law, 1995) (see Figure 2.1). Therefore, it is necessary to reshape theory to fit each particular need in each WC.

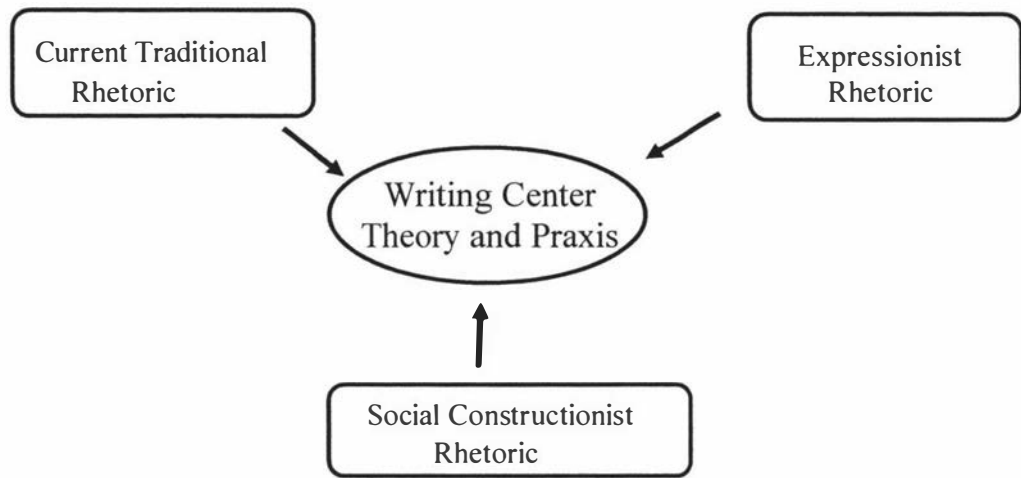


Figure 2.1 Writing Center Epistemologies

2.4.2 Online Writing Lab Theory and Practice

At least two sets of theory have been used to guide OWL praxis. The first is related to the adoption of technology, or specifically networked technology, in the WC (Blythe, 1997), and the second, the epistemology of WCs (Bruffee, 1984; Carino, 1995; Ede, 1989; Harris, 1986; Hobson, 1992; Lunsford, 1991; Murphy, 1994; North, 1984; Sherwood, 1998).

Drawing extensively from Feenberg (1991), Blythe (1997) details three theories of technology application in relation to OWL: the instrumental theory, the substantive theory, and the critical theory. Firstly, the instrumental theory of technology sees technology as a tool that is inherently neutral, and thus free from values or cultural biases. Its resultant positive or negative effects are very much dependent on how the human makes use of it. Therefore, the user, not the tool, should be held responsible for the technology use. This theory assumes that a technology has an inherent function that

can be used by any culture. Based on the same reasoning, if a technology works in one WC, it must also work in another, or all the other WCs.

The second theory is the substantive theory of technology. This theory argues that the design of a technology determines its values. It is the typical design of a technology that privileges or suppresses certain actions or activities. Therefore, the technology determines culture or practice, not the user of the technology. WC practitioners who adhere to this theory of technology tend to support or resist the adoption of a certain technology based on its perceived impact on the WC practice. In other words, those who adopt the substantive theory of technology tend to assume that the technology is more powerful than humans and it is able to change human actions.

Both of these theories of technology, Blythe (1997) contends, are inadequate in guiding OWL praxis. The instrumental theory is adequate only when networked computers are regarded as mere tools (e.g. when used as word processors). However, networked computers are more than just tools. They can also function as a medium (e.g. to transmit information), or an environment (e.g. a virtual dimension). Therefore, a simplistic instrumental theory of technology can only answer logistical questions related to, for example, infrastructure, software, hardware, personnel, and training about implementing networked technology in WCs. The substantive theory, on the other hand, is able to answer conceptual or theoretical questions such as: "How do networked technologies fit in with, or alter, a writing center's mission? How may an OWL affect a writing center's image on campus? Who benefits from those technologies? And who gets left out?" (Blythe, 1997, p.5) Nevertheless, because the substantive theory focuses on whether a technology will change practice for the better or worse, the result is either total acceptance or rejection.

A possible solution lies in the middle path, a critical theory, that contends that "technology affects, and is affected by, political and cultural systems while searching simultaneously for ways to avoid fatalism" (p.19). The critical theory encourages practitioners to envision and shape new technologies for OWLs. This critical theory of technology is similar to the social construction of technology (SCOT) theory proposed by Bijker (1987, 1995). The main tenet of the SCOT theory is that technology and its

use is created, determined and shaped by social, political, economical and cultural systems in a society. According to Klein and Kleinman (2002), the SCOT conceptual framework comprises five components: interpretive flexibility, social groups, closure and stabilization, the wider context, and the technological frame.

The first component of interpretative flexibility means that a technology has no inherent value or meaning, and it is up to an individual or a social group to interpret or determine the value or the meaning of the technology. The human interpretation is subject to change according to changing circumstances and needs, and the evolving nature of the technology (Klein and Kleinman, 2002).

The second component, a social group, in the context of SCOT, comprises members who assign similar meanings to a technology or a technological artifact (Pinch and Bijker, 1987). For example, computer use in a WC or an OWL might involve various social groups such as students, teachers, tutors, administrators, parents, technology developers and promoters. Among the student social group are various sub-groups who use and interpret e-mail differently.

The third is closure and stabilization of a technology. A technology continues to develop and evolve until all the involved social groups reach a consensus with the design, and all the conflicting opinions are resolved. When this stage is reached, the technology is said to have reached a closure with the stabilization of the final design. A technological closure can be reached through two means. Rhetorical closure is when the developer announces that there is no further new model or version, and closure by redefinition is when an unresolved problem is being seen from a different perspective so that it is no longer a problem from the new perspective (Klein and Kleinman, 2002). For example, instead of responding to critiques that the use of grammar drill software in a WC reflects rote learning, the software developer might persuade users that the software is essential for ESL learners who are generally weak in grammar.

The fourth component is the wider context in which a technology develops. It includes the relationship among the various social groups, the social or cultural rules that impact on their interaction, and the factors that contribute to the differences in

power of the various social groups. Klein and Kleinman (2002) criticize the original Bijker's SCOT theory (1987) for the simplistic assumption that all social groups are equal, and that all are present in a technology development process. Such an assumption fails to address the reality of the different roles various social groups play in relation to their power. Also, certain groups might be deliberately prevented from playing a part in the development process, and this might give a false sense of consensus on the technology (Klein and Kleinman, 2002).

The fifth component is the technological frame that includes the "goals, key problems, current theories, rules of thumb, testing procedures, and exemplary artifacts" of a technology. In other words, the technological frame is the "shared cognitive frame" that contains the common interpretation of the technology's value and meaning from all the members of the various social groups (Klein and Kleinman, 2002, p. 31).

The theory of SCOT is relevant for the planning of technology adoption in a WC or an OWL because it rationalizes factors leading to closure and stabilization of a technology. More importantly, SCOT considers diverse viewpoints across all social groups. The adoption of a technology in a WC is usually costly, and justification for any such adoption is usually required. If the technology does not result in any uptake from the target social group (in this context, students), it would be more difficult to propose a second technology in the near future. Hence, in planning for any technology adoption in a WC, the initiator must consider different viewpoints to ensure a better chance of uptake and success.

Most of the contributing writers of the two recent books on OWLs, i.e. *Wiring the Writing Center* edited by Hobson (1998), and *Taking Flight with OWLs* edited by Inman and Sewell (2000), seem to have embraced the critical theory of technology in practicing OWLs. These writers generally regard the application of networked technology in the WC as a development of progress, while at the same time they remain cautious and critical in applying the technology to suit different environments and needs. In particular, Lerner (1998, p. 135) reminds the WC community to be cautious of the "seductive lure of technology", and Beebe and Boneville (1998) invite WC practitioners to explore three fundamental questions when considering integrating

technology into WCs. The first is to consider if the technology eases or complicates the relationship between theory and practice in WCs. The second is to examine if recent technologies have helped WC practitioners understand the theory and practice gap, and the role of technology in WC practice. Finally, the third question is whether theorists have adequate knowledge about the future of technology in composition and epistemology to predict the role of technology in future WC practice. These three questions are useful in conceptualizing a framework for an ESL WC and OWL (in Chapter VII).

The second set of theory that may guide OWL praxis is related to WC epistemological foundations, namely Current-Traditional Rhetoric, Expressionist Rhetoric, and Social Constructionist Rhetoric (Bruffee, 1984; Carino, 1995; Ede, 1989; Harris, 1986; Hobson, 1992; Lunsford, 1991; Murphy, 1994; North, 1984; Sherwood, 1998). As the human race is living in a more connected world within the robustness of ICT, a new epistemology for the digital era called Connectivism (Siemens, 2004) might guide OWL praxis in addition to the three main epistemological foundations discussed in the earlier section. Connectivism is especially relevant in discussing the application of networked technology in OWLs.

Connectivism has been proposed to explain the current trends of learning in an increasingly digitized and networked world (Siemens, 200, 2005). The epistemologies discussed in Section 2.4.1 that include Current-Traditional Rhetoric, Expressionist Rhetoric and Social Constructionist Rhetoric, generally propagate the individual as the principal agent in any learning experience. These epistemologies do not address learning that is mediated or supported by technology. They also cannot explain learning that happens in an organization such as a university (Siemens, 2004, 2005). Therefore, connectivism has been proposed to fill the gap in theorizing learning.

A couple of decades ago, what one learned in school or university could usually be applied for a long time if not a lifetime in a job situation. But this is no longer applicable today (Siemens, 2004, 2005). With the rapid growth of technology and knowledge, what one has learned gets quickly displaced. To stay current and relevant, one needs to update and upgrade all the time. Moreover, the exponential growth of

knowledge compels one to learn only the relevant and the immediately applicable. Thus, the ability to evaluate what is worthy of learning is an essential skill. On top of know-what (what to learn) and know-how (how to learn it), one also needs to know where to look for the relevant information, the know-where. Also, what and how we learn, think and communicate can now be off-loaded, mediated or supported by technology. For example, cognitive operations such as calculations, information storage and retrieval can now be performed by a computer (Siemens, 2004, 2005).

In the light of the recent aforesaid development in learning technology, knowledge management and ICT, Siemen's (2004, 2005) proposal of connectivism as a learning theory for the new millennium is timely and relevant. Connectivism contends that learning involves building networks with people who have the knowledge, and also establishing associations among related knowledge bases that can be stored in various formats or media such as the Internet, newspapers, and CD-ROMs. Furthermore, in this era of knowledge explosion, one can no longer personally experience all one needs. Therefore, one must leverage on the knowledge and experience of other people. In taking advantage of this leverage, one needs skills in forming and sustaining various networks of learning or practice.

In building such connections, a learner needs to have the know-how to effectively use ICT tools such as e-mail, online forum and video conferencing, to name just a few. Thus, learning how to learn and where to source relevant information are essential skills in connectivism. The theory also posits that each learner is a node ready to connect with other nodes who may be human (for example: teachers, experts, or peers) or non-human (for example: knowledge portals, PDAs, or virtual university) to form his/her personal learning network. This learning network, when connected with other networks, becomes a self-feeding gigantic database for continuous or lifelong learning (Siemen, 2004, 2005).

Like social constructionism, connectivism promotes developing networks, collaborations and interactions among learners. However, unlike social constructionism, connectivism highlights the inclusion of non-human nodes in the learning network. In this respect, connectivism is applicable to WCs and OWLs as learning in the physical

space of WC and the virtual space of OWL involves forming various networks, for example, between students and tutors, students with peers, students with lecturers, and students with practitioners in their disciplines. Learning through an OWL too encourages the use of non-human devices such as online reference databases for writing assignments and storage devices for downloading information from an Internet source.

Linking theory to practice, the WC community has generally agreed that the uniqueness of WC practice is its Rogerian non-grading, non-directive, and non-threatening client-centered one-to-one writing tutoring. In discussing OWL theory and practice, a general concern is whether OWL can or should replicate WC theory and practice (see, for example, Beebe and Boneville, 2000). A number of WC theorists reason that, as OWLs are seen as extensions or components of walk-in centers, the same epistemological foundations should therefore also guide OWL practice (Carino, 1998; Hobson, 1998; Wallace, 1998).

However, Hobson (1998) feels that many WCs seem to create the antitheses of themselves in the name of OWL. Such OWLs seem to be primarily made up of, for example, digitized worksheets, drill and skill auto-tutorials, and guides to mechanics and styles. By disseminating such handouts freely online, and thus in a way indirectly encouraging students to write in isolation, these WCs seem to re-subscribe to the outdated tenets of Current-Traditional Rhetoric that insists on "originality of ideas", and expressionist rhetoric that portrays "the individual as the locus of a personal truth" (p. xvii). This kind of free-flow online information, Hobson (1998) contends, seems to contradict the WC's commitment to ensuring writing as a negotiated social collaborative process. Along this line, he questions:

Can an OWL ... accomplish results that are in the writer's best interests and that are consistent with the philosophical and pedagogical principles the WC community has fought dramatically to make the center piece of the community's practice and self-definition? (p. xviii)

And he is doubtful that the WC community would find the time, resources, energy, and continuous training in creating OWLs that are consistent with the theory and practice of social constructivist rhetoric.

Amidst this kind of expressed skepticism though (for example, Hobson, 1998; Mohr, 1998), a number of enthusiasts have endeavored to demonstrate social constructivist pedagogy in OWLs through implementing synchronous and asynchronous tutoring and establishing online communities, locally and globally, by using various MOO or chat software (see, for example, English, 2000; Jordan-Henley and Maid, 1995; Mabrito, 2000; Thurber, 2000). As with all other computer and networked technologies, these online activities have both plus and minus points. For example, the cyber tutorial has the negative loss of paralinguistic cues in face-to-face tutorials, but the positive loss of social pressure (Harris and Pemberton, 1995). Therefore, cautious use, continuing research, constant monitoring and fine-tuning this emerging OWL technology are constructive practices for OWL development. Like WC theory and praxis, the technology-related theories discussed thus far serve to play a complementary role in informing OWL theory and praxis (see Figure 2.2).

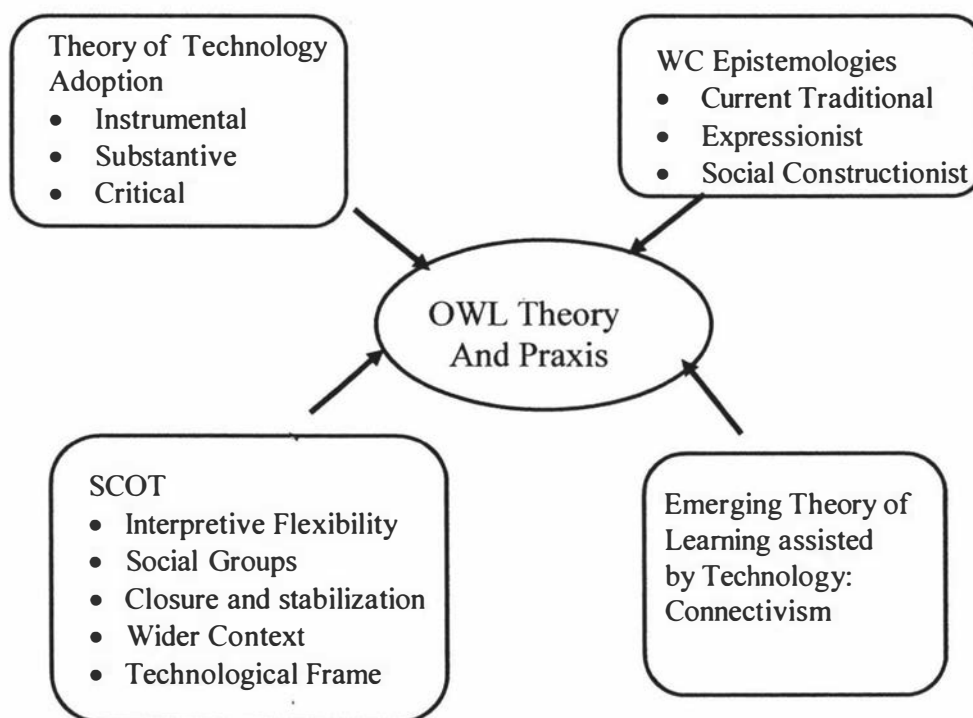


Figure 2.2 Theories for OWL Praxis

2.5 Writing Centers and Writing Programs

The roles and functions of WCs have been closely related to the development in the teaching and learning of writing. Generally universities in North America administer one or two main writing programs namely First Year (FYC) or Freshman Composition (FC), and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) (McLeod and Soven 1992, Russell 1991, Young and Fulwiler 1986). Because the development of WCs is often discussed against the backdrop of FYC and WAC, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction of these writing programs.

2.5.1 First Year Composition

First Year Composition (FYC) is a basic or generic writing course first year undergraduates need to study in most tertiary institutions in the USA. It is usually administered and taught by the English department or its equivalent (Emerson, 1999). The objective of FYC is to teach undergraduates essential writing skills so that they can perform various writing tasks such as note taking, writing lab reports, research reports or essays during the course of their studies in the university.

FYC was first taught at Harvard University as a two-semester writing course since 1873 (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). From the beginning of the twentieth century, universities in the USA were no longer seen as privileged institutions admitting only elites from upper social classes, who usually had the language competence to filter through university entrance exams. Instead, the modern universities adopted the philosophy of equal access or open admission¹⁵ (Russell, 1991). As a result, not only did student enrolment increase unprecedentedly, students were also from a wider range of social background with different language abilities. When student populations increased multifold and classes became larger, with many unprepared or underprepared to write, professors and lecturers found that they were unable to teach writing effectively and to cope with the marking load. Consequently, courses traditionally requiring writing assignments were reduced to short-answer or multiple-choice assessment. Students too avoided taking courses that required writing if given a choice. With rising tuition fees, some students needed to work part time to make ends meet, and

therefore did not have much time for extensive writing. Slowly, FYC was reduced to a single-semester course, and some universities even abandoned it altogether. Such neglect to writing was felt when Newsweek published the startling cover story *Why Johnny Can't Write* (Sheils, 1975). Government, social leaders, educators and parents in the USA realized the need for a writing reform. The first step was to revise FYC.

There were, nevertheless, many debatable issues concerning the content, philosophy, administration and teaching of FYC. Two were specifically relevant to this discussion. The first was whether FYC should include or exclude literary discourse. According to Lindemann (1993), if the purpose of FYC was to teach academic and professional discourses, then literature did not have a place in FYC. In supporting her stand, she gave several reasons including that the skill practiced in literature was reading not writing, and literature was not the only source for humanistic content. Holding an opposing view, Tate (1993) suggests that the focus of FYC should be on an all-rounded education and not just training for jobs. Thus, students should be exposed to a rich array of texts including literature. Gamer (1995) also holds the same opinion that literature should be included in FYC because literary texts usually have multiple viewpoints and are multidisciplinary, and thus literature could help students establish connections among courses in different disciplines.

In answering the pro-literature in FYC viewpoints, Lindemann (1995) highlights the purpose of FYC again. She argues that if writing was seen as a product, then perhaps reading literary texts was important; if writing was seen as a process, then the focus should be on reading students' texts; and if writing was about initiation into disciplinary discourse, then reading specific disciplinary texts was essential.

As some form of guidance amidst differing opinions on FYC, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (2000) drafted the WPA Outcomes Statement for FYC. In the four broad areas addressed that included rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, reading and writing, processes, and knowledge of conventions, the emphasis toward writing in the discipline was obvious. For example, the Statement advised the faculty to help students learn "the main features of writing in their fields, the main uses of writing

in their fields, and the expectations of readers in their fields.” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2000, Rhetorical Knowledge section, para. 2).

The second issue concerning FYC was whether it should focus solely on academic writing. Elbow (1991) posits the need for non-academic writing in freshman writing course. He is uncomfortable that FYC should focus entirely on academic discourse because very few students will need to write academic discourse after they left the academia. Instead, they will need writing skills related to their work such as writing notes and letters. Besides, many practitioners of FYC assume writing comprises transferable skills. Putting language knowledge such as the mechanics of punctuation and proper sentence construction aside, generic skills such as specific focus, logical development and organization, adequate support, summarizing, paraphrasing, citing and referencing learned in FYC can later enable students to write in their majoring disciplines. While this may be true, it is argued that different disciplines possess different writing conventions and genres. The discourse of engineers and that of medical practitioners or lawyers are seen as different, for example. Therefore, it is proposed that FYC expand to include discipline specific discourse in order to be useful (McLeod, 1992). This has brought forth a related issue: Are English staff capable of teaching discipline specific discourse? And correspondingly: Is the English department the best faculty to administer writing courses? On the reverse, there is concern whether staff in other disciplines has the expertise to teach writing (Chapman, 1997). Such debates continued with the initialization of the WAC program and throughout its development.

2.5.2 Writing Across the Curriculum

The term WAC was coined in the early 1970s. It advocated the teaching of writing as shared responsibility among the various disciplines in the academia. The WAC movement, according to Fulwiler and Young (1982), is premised on the belief:

1. that communication education (primarily writing, but including reading, speaking, and listening) is the responsibility of the entire academic community, 2. that such education must be integrated across departmental boundaries, and 3. that it must be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education. (p. ix)

In *Defining Writing across the Curriculum*, McLeod (1987) explains two philosophical approaches to WAC. The first approach is *cognitive*, which sees writing as a powerful tool in assisting thinking and learning based on the constructionist theories of instruction. It emphasizes “writing to learn” and “expressive writing” (Britton et al., 1975, cited in McLeod and Soven, 1992). For example, if students summarize in writing a topic they have read or been lectured on, they will be able to relate ideas and see connections more clearly. They are also more likely to understand and retain the acquired knowledge much better than students who do not process the topic in writing. The second approach is *rhetorical*, which sees writing as a form of social behavior in a discourse community. It highlights “learning to write” or “transactional writing” (Britton et al., 1975, cited in McLeod and Soven, 1992). This rhetorical approach advocates that students learn the writing conventions and discourse of their discipline so that they can function and communicate efficiently as members of their specific discourse community. This second approach is also known as Writing in the Discipline (WID).

In general, a WAC program can manifest in any of the following structures or models depending on the requirement of an institution. The three structures, as described by McLeod (1987), are:

1. WAC Freshman Composition Course – FYC that incorporates WAC. It uses texts from various disciplines. Students learn to write for and about the discipline they major in.
2. Adjunct Course – A writing course is taught by a writing instructor in tandem with a content course taught by a content specialist in a specific discipline.
3. Writing Intensive Course – This course teaches writing in the specific discipline, and is usually taught by a content expert.

In the 70s, WAC was initiated as a result of the literacy crisis (Russell, 1991). In the 90s, the same problem is still present when Riley (1996) reported that the only test response of many undergraduates was to shade the circles on op-scan forms, and many employers complained that although many university graduates’ technical know-how was reasonably good, their ability to write (or speak) was disappointing. Therefore,

WAC was set up with the goal of encouraging students to write in most if not all of their university courses.

In line with WAC projects, there are advocates who feel that another form of communication, speaking, is equally important as writing (Morello, 2000). This is especially true with the increasing number of ESL tertiary students who require speaking training. Even native students too need training in more advanced speaking skills such as public and persuasive speaking. The term Communication Across the Curriculum (CAC) has been coined to include both writing and speaking. Lately, CAC has been expanded to include information technologies known as Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum (ECAC). It recognizes a new mode of communication through the electronic medium in the form of e-mail, synchronous and asynchronous conferencing, multimedia, and the World-Wide-Web. These emerging forms of communication promote learning within and across disciplines (Reiss et al., 1998).

In the twenty first century, after 25 years of WAC propagation and development, it is surprising that certain people still have some misconceptions about WAC (Mahala, 1991, for example). Intending to “clear the air”, McLeod and Maimon (2000) list four major myths of WAC, and reason against each one. Firstly, WAC is not just grammar across the curriculum. Instead, it is intended to enhance student’s critical thinking and problem-solving skills by writing to learn and learning to write in the disciplines. Secondly, WAC and WID are complementary entities and not two totally different dichotomies. Thirdly, the writing to learn approach is not superior to learning to write, and the latter does not focus only on technical accuracy. In essence, the two approaches involve critical and analytical thinking. Lastly, WAC theory in North America is not meant to challenge the status quo in higher education, but to initiate exploration to various forms of academic literacy.

WAC is not without criticism or difficulties, including:

... lack of full institutional support, the high cost of some WAC programs, the compartmentalised structure of academia, counterproductive attitudes and assumptions about writing and learning in the university, research and service

demands on faculty, faculty workload, the faculty reward system, current emphasis on quantification and testing in the academy, lack of an appropriate theoretical and research base of WAC, and leader retirement or burnout. (Walvoord, 1996, p.1)

Therefore, in order to sustain WAC in the new millennium, the challenge for WAC administrators and practitioners is to achieve more efficient integration among program administration, pedagogy, and research (Jones and Comprone, 1993).

2.5.3 Critical Concerns relating to Writing Centers and Writing Programs

In the intersections of WCs and WAC, WCs have faced critique. Initially, the significance and usefulness of WCs were more profoundly felt as more institutions implemented a WAC program. As a result of the increased number of writing assignments across all disciplines, faculties needed tutoring assistance, and WCs were perceived as the best place to provide such a referral service (Freisinger and Burkland, 1986; Harris, 1992; Mullin and Childers, 1995; Waldo, 2001; Wallace, 1987). Waldo (2001) gives three reasons. Firstly, WCs, with designated objectives and services, had the space and expertise to help initiate and sustain writing programs. Secondly, WCs promoted interaction among the various rhetorical communities across disciplines, and lastly, WCs held an impartial and neutral position on campus because they were not attached to any specific discipline (Waldo, 2001).

Furthermore, many writing administrators and practitioners felt that WCs were useful for the tutoring service they provided (Freisinger and Burkland, 1986; Harris, 1992; Mullin and Childers, 1995; Waldo, 2001; Wallace, 1987) including one-to-one or small group tutoring in writing, computer-assisted remedial in grammar and usage, and specialized tutoring for WAC (Wallace, 1987). Harris (1992) posits a rationale for tutoring writing, and a rationale for tutoring through a WC. She explains that tutoring offered by a WC is more helpful than that by a course lecturer. Because tutors work in a non-evaluative yet supportive environment, they offer student writers a chance to write, think and talk, and this kind of collaborative talk and questioning helps students to use

language to develop ideas, to try out possibilities, and to re-see and rethink about their writing.

Another positive factor along the same line, Freisinger and Burkland (1986) argue that tutor evaluation is different from teacher evaluation because each has different expectations. A teacher's assessment is usually on the finished product, whereas a tutor looks at work in progress. A teacher may be upset if she sees that her student's writing does not demonstrate understanding of her instruction, but a tutor will not be affected emotionally simply because she is not involved in the teaching, and thus will be able to see the writing more objectively. Moreover, students are more likely to accept their tutors' comments and suggestions because they see tutors as helpers rather than evaluators.

However, not all writing experts feel that WCs provide the required support for WAC and that WC tutors are the best people to comment on student writing. For example, Pemberton (1995) reasons that the pedagogy of WAC highlights multiple discourse communities, while there is a danger that WCs see writing as generic as WC tutors are generally not trained as experts in the rhetoric of a particular discipline. He cautions against the view of assuming writing with a capital W that "either transcends or can be attended to separately from content issues" (p.119). Pemberton's (1995) concern may be valid if the tutors at a WC are all English majors, and if the WC has no expertise in tutoring writing in other disciplines. However, there has been a trend of placing a WC outside an English Department, for example, under a provost office as an academic support center, so that the WC is not seen as privileging a certain discourse. Examples of WCs that are administered under a provost office or in conjunction with an English Department are the WC at the Alfred University, the University of Oklahoma, the Temple University, the Stanford University, the New School University, and the University of Texas-Pan American. This "new breed" of WCs should be independent of any discipline, and the competent tutors should also come from various disciplines (Waldo, 1993, p.16). This issue will be discussed further in Section 2.7.3 under the heading of generalist versus specialist tutoring.

In summing up the current section, WC tutors have been recognized as being able to enrich cognitive processes of student writers from across disciplines (Pemberton, 1995). WC tutors are able to achieve this purpose by offering student writers new perspectives for thinking about the writing task, and thus contributing significantly in the student writing process.

Given this recognized benefits of WC tutoring in enriching student writing processes, one would wonder if the same benefits could be expected if the WC innovation is transferred to Malaysia. In Malaysian universities, the emphasis is more on whole language development in English rather than on writing specifically. Programs such as FYC and WAC that are being practiced commonly in the United States are not known to have been practiced in Malaysia. Instead, the first English course a UPM undergraduate with a Band 1 or 2 in MUET (Malaysian University English Test) must enroll is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and not FYC as in the United States. This basic EAP course teaches integrated skills and not just writing. There are specific writing courses such as English for Academic Writing and Report Writing, but students are given other options and thus they can choose not to take any of the writing courses. In a way this lack of emphasis to academic writing and the absence of WAC could have contributed to the generally poor writing competence in English of Malaysian tertiary students. Seen in this light, a WC whose main concern is helping students with their writing processes in complementing classroom instruction, has indeed a more challenging role to play in Malaysian tertiary education. The first challenge of a Malaysian WC is expected to be in investigating how its tutoring services can fit in with the existing writing courses. Another challenge may be in taking the leadership in initiating a FYC and/or WAC program, so that writing in English can be given its due emphasis and thereby raises the competence level of Malaysian students in academic writing in English.

2.6 Efficacy of Writing Centers

The preceding section has discussed the usefulness of WCs in the context of WAC, and has affirmed WC's contribution to students' writing processes. Yet, a hard question has often been asked regarding WC efficacy: Does WC tutoring improve

student's writing ability? In times of budget cut and shrinking institution finance, WC directors are often confronted with the imperative to produce concrete evidence in justifying the continued existence of such a service. Despite the long history of WC praxis, there has been a serious lack of empirical or formal research that employed statistical analyses or quantifiable data (Bell, 2000; Jones, 2001; Lerner, 2003; Thompson, 2006). A review of WC assessment literature found that research in this area has been limited. Most WC research tends to be qualitative, comprising mostly reflections of the practitioners such as WC directors or tutors, surveys on WC and OWL usage, and "speculations about the theoretical possibilities of writing centers" (Jones, 2001, p.6).

The limited quantitative evidence on WC efficacy might be due to the academic background of WC directors who are mostly experts in language and rhetoric, and not math and statistics (Bell, 2000). Also, the very fact of the proliferation of WCs since the inception of the first WC in North America in 1934, and WCs' persistent existence through the thick and thin of different eras, may have been thought of as testimonial to WC effectiveness in writing instruction – the so-called "evidence speaks for itself". Hence, no urgency was felt by many WC directors to empirically assess WC effectiveness especially when they were constrained by servicing growing student populations (Boquet, 2002).

Nevertheless, a very limited amount of qualitative and quantitative data has been produced to examine the efficacy of WCs.

2.6.1 Qualitative Evidence

Qualitative assessment of WC effectiveness has often been published as reflections from WC directors as they appraised the challenges and attainment of their WCs (see, for example, *Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies* by Harris and Kinkead, 1993). Data were usually collected through tutors' narratives of the tutorial experience, and evaluative feedback forms filled up by students immediately after a one-to-one writing tutorial (Masiello, 1992). The student feedback forms usually elicit demographic details such as first year or senior and the majoring discipline, first time or

repeated tutorial, and the purpose of the WC tutorial. Students are given some options or a Likert scale to rate if the tutorial was helpful (or not) (Harris and Kinkead, 1993). Certain WCs also list rhetorical areas such as invention, development, grammar, syntax and mechanics for students to tick areas that have been attended to during the tutorial (Masiello, 1992). This kind of data collection will shed some light on the specific writing concerns students perceive as helpful.

Qualitative assessment has often been used to gauge the affects of the student clientele. For example, a case study was conducted to investigate the relationship between attending WC tutorials and writing apprehension (Taylor-Escoffery, 1992). The purpose of the case study was to find out the relationship between WC use, writing apprehension, and the perception of the function of written language. The focus group comprised ten first year students who were randomly selected from among those enrolled in a Basic Writing course. All students taking Basic Writing were required to attend WC tutorials. The case study was conducted in an urban university whose students were predominantly black.

The research methodology consisted of a pre and post writing apprehension test, and interviews to elicit the students' perceptions on WC tutorials and the functions of writing. On the students' first visit to the WC at the beginning of the semester and prior to attending a WC tutorial, they were asked to respond to the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension test. By the end of the semester and after the respondents had attended several WC tutorials, they were asked to respond to the same test again. The results suggested that the WC experience might have helped to reduce the writing apprehension level of these ten basic writing students. The WC experience also improved their perceptions and understanding on the usage of written language especially in the domains of expressive and transactional writing.

In another study conducted by Paul Ady (1988) in Rhode Island College, 96 students from four English classes were required to seek help at the college WC in improving their assigned essay drafts. About 66% of the respondents were first semester students and the rest were second or third year who had postponed the completion of the English requirement. Of the 96 students, only one had used the WC before.

After the first WC tutorials, the students were required to describe their tutorial experience in writing. Based on the students' descriptions, the researcher compared the students' perceptions before and after the WC experience. The results showed that the students did not know about the WC or how a WC tutorial was conducted. Before attending the very first tutorials, they were having negative feelings about the tutorials. Many were frightened and worried that the WC tutors would laugh at their drafts. They also thought that the tutors would command them to change their writing or to rewrite for them. However, after the first WC tutorial session, their initial negative perceptions of WC tutorials seemed to have changed when they met face-to-face with the friendly and supportive tutors. More than 80% of the students felt that the WC tutorials were useful and they would like to continue using the facility. They also liked the collaborative approach practiced by the tutors.

However, the remaining students (less than 20%) reported that the WC tutorials did not seem to have helped them. They expected the tutors to be more directive and specific with their feedback, but the tutors kept asking questions to make them guess what was wrong with their writing. This small group of students did not find the non-directive tutoring helpful. The non-directive tutoring was also resented by an ESL student who commented that the tutor did not want to tell him what was wrong with a specific sentence. Based on the feedback of this small group, the researcher recommended that any tutor training program must attend to the affective aspect of tutoring. Because students are different, it may be appropriate for tutors to be sensitive to the needs of the students and apply the tutoring approach (e.g. directive or collaborative) accordingly, rather than using the non-directive approach as a blanket rule.

In another study, similar results were reported. Students were found to become more confident writers and perceived the WC service more positively than students who did not attend WC tutorials (Matthews, 1994). In addition, anecdotal evidence from faculty in another study also confirmed students' use of the WC service had resulted in them producing writing that was "easier to read, better organized, and had fewer of the typical writing mistakes" (Jones, 2001, p.12).

The qualitative evidence from these limited cases suggests that the WC intervention, in the form of one-to-one tutorial, might have made some difference in improving student's perception, attitude, motivation and confidence towards writing. As compared to native students, ESL students tend to have higher apprehension when they are required to write in English (Cornwell and McKay, 2000). These findings from these few studies might have strengthened the application of WC as a form of affective support in assisting students' writing processes, in addition to cognitive support, especially for ESL learners. The intangible gain in the affective domain might have led to measurable gain in students' writing grades in the long term (Clark, 1993; Harris, 1995).

2.6.2 Quantitative Evidence

Quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of WC can be gleaned from four statistical research studies (Bell, 2000; Carino and Enders, 2001; Lerner, 2003; Niiler, 2005).

The research by Bell (2000) was designed to investigate four research concerns: 1. The student's satisfaction level with the WC tutorials they participated in; 2. The objectives set at the tutorials; 3. If students applied the knowledge and skills they gained from the tutorials to their assignments; and 4. If they perceived the learning experienced in the tutorials helpful in future. Each research question was followed by a six-point Likert scale. The purpose of the research was to ascertain if "students learned something during conferences, were able to use that knowledge in writing independently, and thought they had gained something of long-term value" (Bell, 2000, p. 18).

Three different groups of respondents of 45 students each were randomly selected from the WC student clientele. One group was given the printed questionnaire to tick their responses immediately after they attended a 45-minute one-to-one tutorial. The second group was telephone interviewed using the same questionnaire two weeks after they attended a WC tutorial, and the third group two months after they attended a tutorial.

The survey results showed that 100% of the Immediate Group were satisfied with the writing tutorial and the tutorial objectives, and they were able to apply what they learned at the tutorial in their assignments. For the Two-Week Group, more than 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they could apply what they learned from the WC tutorials to their assignments, and they believed that the learning would continue to be useful in future. For the Two-Month Group, 75% said they could apply what they learned from the tutorials to their academic work, and about 66% agreed or strongly agreed the learning from the tutorials would continue to be useful in the future. The response from the three groups was positively convincing, especially that from the Two-Month Group, as by then the effects of the tutorials would be assumed to have evaporated.

A shortcoming of the research might be that the data was collected by a WC peer tutor whom the respondents might have acquainted with, and therefore might have given supportive rating. In view of the shortcoming, the researcher replicated the survey using a student interviewer who was not associated with the WC. The results of the second survey were not as positive as the first one, but were still very positive overall. The contributing factor to the reduced positive percentages might be due to the shortened tutorial time from 45 minutes in the first survey to only 30 minutes in the second survey. Overall, the findings yielded some concrete data in suggesting the usefulness of WC tutorials, whether immediate, short or long terms (Bell, 2000).

Another statistical study was designed to correlate the frequency of WC visits to student satisfaction (Carino and Enders, 2001). The questionnaire asked the number of times students visited the WC in the semester, if the consultant was courteous and interested in the student's work, if the consultant helped the student do his/her own work or did the work for the student, if the confidence of the student in completing assignments was enhanced, if students' visits to the WC contributed to improved writing, and if the student would recommend the WC to his/her peers. Each question was followed by a five-point Likert scale. The course instructors of English 101, English 105 and English 305 were requested to administer the questionnaires at the end

of the semester. A total of 399 respondents over two semesters completed the survey questionnaires.

Overall, the findings of the survey suggested that the frequency of visits to the WC did not significantly correlate to the satisfaction level of students with their WC tutorials. The frequency of visits also did not impact on students' perception of the consultants' ability in helping with the writing assignments. However, the frequency of visits did significantly improve students' confidence in writing and the perception that their writing ability had improved. Also, the frequency of visits did influence students in recommending the WC to their peers.

Contrary to the popular belief that "the more students visit a WC, the more s/he likes it", the results of the survey study showed that no significant correlation existed between frequency of visits and student satisfaction. In fact, return or repeated visits to WC could be a cause of concern too as compared to zero or few visits. Too many repeated visits might indicate that the student has become over-dependent on the WC, when s/he should have built up the confidence and competence to work independently. Nevertheless, exactly how many repeats are considered optimal or problematic? This is perhaps an area awaiting further research.

The third statistical research, conducted by Lerner (2003), on a total of 399 First Year students over four academic years, aimed to find out the relationship between WC use and non-use to First Year Composition and First Year GPAs. The research design used was an improvement over a similar study by the same researcher in 1997. Table 2.1 shows that all the differences between the users and the non-users were statistically significant except for the mean SAT verbal scores that the researcher used to establish a similar entry point between the two groups. The research design had considered the experimental group (WC users) and the control group (non WC users), and the implication of teacher effects that would have been balanced off by the use of a large pool of respondents. The researcher argued that by using "data across multiple years, multiple students, and multiple teachers, but applying the single variable of writing center usage", he could convincingly say that WC use did contribute to improved First Year Composition and First Year GPAs.

It is true that Lerner (2003) employed improved design in this study, and his conclusion that WC visit was indeed effective is also quite convincing. Nevertheless the design could have been improved further if Lerner engaged the same number of non-users to match that of the users (see Table 2.1), as sample size can implicate the statistical significance and the reliability of measurement (Carino and Enders, 2001).

Table 2.1 Effects of WC Use on FYC and FY GPAs
(Source: Adapted from Lerner, 2003, p.68)

	SAT Verbal Mean Score	FYC Mean GPA	FY Mean GPA
WC Users (n=307)	487	3.07	2.73
WC Non-users (n=181)	490	2.78	2.42

While the preceding quantitative studies investigated the impact of WC visits on students' writing ability, either through self-perception or GPAs, the following study investigated the efficacy of the WC from a slightly different aspect, that of the improvement in drafts in terms of global and local concerns, written by students before and after they consulted a tutor at the WC. In a recent statistical study of WC outcomes, Niiler (2005) aimed to gauge the extent of WC intervention that had impacted on the global (also known as rhetorical or higher order) and local (also syntactical or lower order) concerns of students' essays. He also set to find out the consistency of three expert raters in evaluating these students' essays. The study employed an improved research design over his 2003 study (Niiler, 2003). The students involved in the study were from two Art History and Political classes, and two FYC classes. The researcher had the cooperation of the class instructors to write the grade of each essay on a separate card. The grade cards were given to the students for them to decide if they want to have their essay grades improved through a 36-minute WC tutorial. The essay and the grade were returned to students who chose not to attend a WC tutorial. For students who wanted to improve their grades, their original clean-copy essays were returned to them for them to consult a WC tutor. Another clean copy, with the name removed, was given to the researcher. Through this method, a total of 38 students actually self-selected themselves as subjects of the study. After the WC tutorial, the students involved

rewrote their drafts accordingly, and a clean copy with the name removed was given to the researcher. The researcher then duplicated three sets of the two stacks of pre and post WC drafts, and gave the blind copies at random to three faculty members who evaluated the drafts independently. The evaluators were not connected in any way to the WC, and they had good experience in evaluating essays. There was no way for them to know if each draft was pre or post WC tutorials. Both the global and local aspects of each draft were assigned a score from one to five.

The results showed that the global and local ratings of pre WC drafts were below the median of 3, while those of the post WC drafts were above the median. This result was strengthened by the positive inter-rater correlation of two expert raters. The third rater did not produce similar strong correlation with the other two colleagues, and the researcher suggested the need for evaluation training. In comparing the improvement on both global and local concerns, global concerns had a mean improvement of 1.03 while that of the local concerns was only 0.6. The findings might suggest that the WC tutorials were able to significantly improve students' writing ability through just one 36-minute tutorial, and the improvement achieved was more global than local. This finding is in line with the fundamental practice of WCs in giving priority to global concerns in students' drafts over local concerns. It would be interesting to replicate the study in an ESL setting to find out if similar findings can be achieved.

In summing up this section on WC efficacy, both qualitative and quantitative evidence in the WC scholarship seemed to suggest the usefulness of the WC as a support service in complementing classroom efforts. As the research on WC efficacy is limited, more studies are needed to draw convincing evidence. Nevertheless, it is difficult to predict if similar results could be achieved if the studies were conducted in the Malaysian contexts when WCs have been set up there, given the differences in variables such as the target users, culture and education setting. Therefore, R & D should be two inseparable activities that must go full circle in any innovation transfer: research, develop, then more research to improve the implementation and development.

2.7 Current Issues in Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs

The discourse on WCs and OWLs is often enriched with debate over theories, approaches, and practices. Such issues include aspects of tutoring, be it face-to-face or online, tutoring approaches, technology adoption and application, ESL learners, research, usability and effectiveness, and ethics. The following sections present some selected issues, more inclined toward guiding WC and OWL practice in an ESL environment.

2.7.1 Tutoring and the Notion of Help

The main purpose of WCs is to help students become better writers. Often, WCs have to balance the provision of this kind of help with ethical issues such as authorial integrity and ownership. If students improve their writing tasks from talking to tutors, and incorporating tutor feedback or ideas into their writing, can the students claim total ownership of their writing? Must they acknowledge which part of the writing is originally theirs and which part is contributed by their tutors? Does collaboration practiced in WC tutoring encourage plagiarism? These are but some legitimate issues that must be addressed before any WCs embark on providing the facility of writing tutoring.

Deciding the amount of help and the kind of help given to a student at a WC tutorial can be difficult. Sherwood (1998) suggests that the amount and the kind of help extended by a tutor to a student at a WC tutorial may be based on the philosophy or practice of a WC. If a WC supports the Current-Traditional Rhetoric or Behaviorism model, a tutor, as a more experienced writer, is free to correct a student's writing, or to provide a better model for the student to emulate. If the WC supports the Expressionism theory, then the student is expected to self-generate the ideas for creating the piece of writing independently. And, if the WC adheres to a Social Constructionist Rhetoric theory, the tutor will help the student see the weak points in the writing, and the student will decide how to change what based on the tutor's guidance. Again, the question of ethics arises--how much and what kind of collaborations are acceptable as ethical collaboration?

In ensuring authorial integrity, WC tutors must ensure students take full responsibility for improving their work. This is possible through minimalist tutoring (Brooks, 2001), a non-interventionist approach that emphasizes students taking full charge of their writing, and prohibits tutors from making any actual act of changes on a student's writing. The actual practice of minimalist tutoring discourages the tutor in holding a pen, and the tutor is trained to answer a tutee's questions by more questions, leading the tutee to discover the answer and also to make decisions in the writing process. Minimalist tutoring has been the preferred approach in most North American WCs probably to "mollify faculty who suspect tutoring is a form of plagiarism" (Carino, 2003, p.99). In other words, minimalist tutoring is used as some kind of a "defence mechanism" (Carino, 2003, p.100) in alleviating faculty suspicion (Clark and Healy, 1996).

Despite the good intention of improving student writers and not their writings, and protecting WCs from any accusation of promoting plagiarism, minimalist tutoring is not without criticism. A strong remark came from Grimm (1999) who criticizes that WCs are withholding "insider knowledge" (p. 31) by not informing students of the mainstream or academic culture. This negative comment on minimalist tutoring led Power (1993) to propose shifting the role of a minimalist tutor to that of a cultural informant, informing where necessary to help students understand the difference in cultural expectations.

Another criticism on minimalist tutoring came from Carino (2003) who cautions that minimalist tutoring, when practised to the extreme, might encourage peer tutors to abstain from asserting authority and expertise. He illustrates this point by quoting two tutoring snippets where the first tutor, strictly adhered to the principle of non-intervention, let the student decide whether or not to take out the irrelevant introduction to a play review although the student repeatedly said he did not know and had no experience in writing a play review. The second tutor, more willing to take the authority as a more experienced writer, aptly advised the student of the convention of a play review, and more effectively helped the student learn the art of writing a play review.

In summing up, minimalist tutoring, being a tried-and-seasoned tutoring technique in the long WC history, certainly has its merits. However, students who seek WC help have diverse needs and abilities and are from various backgrounds. Therefore, a balanced approach instead of a strict adherence in applying minimalist tutoring might be a more desirable practice. Basic writers, many of whom are ESL students, require more guidance and direction. In Malaysia, most ESL students started to write in academic English when they are enrolled in the university, where specific courses in disciplines such as medicine, engineering and computer science are taught in English. Therefore, a minimalist approach in tutoring this group of ESL students may not achieve positive results.

2.7.2 Generalist versus Specialist Tutoring

A good number of WCs are administered by an English Department, the tutors, who are usually advanced English-major students, are trained to provide generalist tutoring. This means they apply the same generic writing tutoring techniques to students across disciplines. A question is raised as to whether the generally trained tutors should have discipline specific knowledge (Kiedaisch and Dinitz, 2001).

A faction of the WC practitioners felt that a generalist tutor who is ignorant of the specific discipline is “best suited to ask questions that will make authors look again at their texts and prompt them to rethink critically their underlying assumption” (Shamoon and Burns, 2001, p. 62, citing Trimbur, 1988). Hubbuch (1988) went a step further to affirm that an ‘ignorant’ or generalist tutor is able to offer more help than a tutor who has the discipline knowledge. For example, the generalist can “help the student recognize what must be stated in the text” (p.28).

For a long time this kind of generalist approach to tutoring seemed to be the standard. The extensive WC manuals (see, for example, the review by McDonald, 2005, on recent tutor training books) and literature seemed to have perpetuated the standardization of the generalist and minimalist tutoring procedure that is non-directive questioning and attending to global before local concerns. The generalist approach can be applied so long as the tutor has a barrack of questions in guiding the writer to

recognize a shortcoming in the writing or to generate more ideas to improve writing (Shamoon and Burns, 2001).

In investigating the effects of disciplinary knowledge on tutoring sessions, Kiedaish and Dinitz (2001) analyzed 12 videotaped tutoring sessions. They found a positive correlation between disciplinary knowledge and the quality of the tutoring session. A second finding was the confirmation that a generalist tutor could have limitations because there were times when questioning or general advice did not help to improve the paper. They also found that tutors who had succeeded in working on higher order concerns were the ones who had discipline specific knowledge. Thus, a tutor's knowledge of the subject matter and the writing convention of the discipline are helpful, although it is also true that discipline knowledge alone does not guarantee a good session.

2.7.3 Peer Tutoring and Peer Review

Peer tutoring in the WC is sometimes confused with peer review in the classroom especially by people who are not familiar with WC work or literature. The confusion may be caused by the fact that both are student-centered pedagogies and both involve peer collaboration in responding to writing with the intention of improving the writing or the writing skill (Breuch, 2004; Harris, 1992a). In both scenarios, the peer “replaces the hierarchical model of teachers and students with a collaborative model of co-learners engaged in the shared activity of intellectual work” (Trimbur, 2001, p. 290).

However, there are obvious differences. According to Harris (1992a, p.369), peer tutoring is “collaborative learning about writing”, while peer review is “collaborative writing”. Secondly, a peer tutor is considered more skilled compared to a peer reviewer in a review group as the former is usually trained prior to working as a peer tutor. A peer tutor is both a peer and a tutor. S/he is a *hybrid* (Harris, 1992a), expected to play the role of a more knowledgeable peer. While a peer tutor is often trained to attend to overall effectiveness or the higher order concerns of a draft before attending to stylistic or lower order concerns, a peer reviewer does not necessarily follow the same procedure. In practice, a peer reviewer follows the instruction of a

composition teacher who dictates the focus of a review, usually in a printed structured response sheet. Peer review also resembles joint or co-authorship in collaborative writing, and is more likely to be practiced later in a job situation. An additional difference is that a peer tutor is usually trained to apply the non-directive technique in responding to a student in a writing process, but a peer reviewer mainly uses the directive method (Harris, 1992a).

A peer is engaged in tutoring writing in a WC and reviewing writing in a classroom instead of a teacher or any other person because of the obvious benefits of engaging a peer. The first benefit is affective because the peer, being also a student, is less threatening than a teacher or any other outsider. The peer is able to offer the required emotional support, for example, in offering encouragement and in reducing writing apprehension, as the peer and the student can relate better to one another as they share some common experience in writing (Harris, 1992a). For WCs, there is also the obvious economic reason of employing peers as the student hourly rate is very much lower compared to that of a professional.

In responding to writing in a peer review, students are actively involved in the learning and writing process (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004). They formulate and evolve new ideas while reading and reacting to their peers' ideas. Peer response provides the opportunity for students to involve in "unrehearsed, low-risk exploratory talk" that may not be possible in a teacher-led interaction (p. 226). Students have the chance to receive feedback from more than one person, and thus they understand their writing better. Through responding to writing, students become more critical readers and more effective writers. They also acquire the critical skill to analyze and improve their own writing. In the long run, students become more confident and less apprehensive writers. The peer response activity also helps to foster a community of writers. The teacher's workload can also be reduced (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004).

On the other hand, peer response also has its share of criticism (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004). Among the stronger ones, peer response tends to focus more on surface errors while neglecting higher order concerns. The comments or feedback from peers may also create conflicts and hostility especially when the students are overly

critical and are not skilful in softening their comments. In an ESL composition class, students may be struggling to understand their peer reviewers who may have a special accent. A further concern is that ESL students may not have the meta-language to comment on their peers' writing (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004). They may also not be able to detect or correct their peers' errors (Nelson and Murphy, 1993). Furthermore, cultural and social differences among group members may create conflicting expectations to the peer response and may also complicate communication (Carson and Nelson, 1996).

In comparing the value of teacher and peer feedback, O'brien (2004) reports a survey study by Zhang (1995) who found that the majority of tertiary ESL preferred teacher feedback. In another study reported, majority of the tertiary students whose L1 was Chinese preferred peer feedback included in addition to having teacher feedback (Jacob et al., 1998). In a third study that surveyed Hong Kong upper secondary students, Tsui and Ng (2000) found that students had more preference for teacher feedback. They also incorporated more teacher than peer feedback in their revisions. However, the students also found peer response useful. These studies seem to suggest that although the Chinese EFL students preferred teacher feedback, they also learnt from peer response.

Kjesrud (2005), in reviewing the book titled *Writing Groups inside and outside the classroom* by Moss et al. (2004), expressed his concern that collaborative work such as writing review might be imposing and hegemonic, particularly if the institution is one that practices individual reward system. This raises doubt to the genuine intent of helping a peer obtain a better grade in any collaborative work in a situation where there is keen competition to squeeze into the top 5% rung of the cohort group. His questions, "What's the best way to implement writing groups?" and "How do power relationships affect writing groups?"(p.63), open yet another dimension for thinking about implementing any writing collaboration such as a peer review of writing in a composition class.

With the advent of ICT, writing tutoring and review have gone online. In a recent book titled *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in an*

Online Environment, Breuch (2004) defines virtual peer review as “an activity of using computer technology to exchange and respond to one another’s writing for the purpose of improving writing” (p.10). The change of media from face-to-face discussion to online communication for virtual peer review has fundamentally made virtual peer review a distinct pedagogy from classroom peer review. In essence, virtual peer review disrupts time, space and interaction of writing review. Traditional writing review is usually talk-based involving both oral and written communication, whereas virtual peer review is mostly if not wholly written communication unless the peers concerned integrate physical meetings or telephone communication on top of the online communication. Breuch (2004) suggests that virtual peer review can be a plausible extension of classroom work, and practitioners might tap into the flexibility of the online environment to optimize teaching and learning opportunities. Other than supporting social constructionist approach to writing, virtual peer review encourages ICT literacy in writing studies. For a detailed discussion of the various techniques of synchronous and asynchronous writing tutoring or review, please read Section 2.3.2.

2.7.4 Tutoring ESL Students: Directive or Non-Directive

In North American WCs, non-directive tutoring has been traditionally practised and has been generally accepted as being effective. If the tutor knows more than the student, non-directive tutoring helps the tutor from appropriating the student’s writing. If the tutor knows less than the student, non-directive tutoring saves the tutor by drawing out the student’s knowledge of his/her writing. In both scenarios, the tutor is protected by practising non-directive tutoring (Carino, 2003). While these notions of WC pedagogy seem readily embraced in a native or English as the first language tutoring context, certain WC practitioners have reservations about non-directive tutoring in an ESL context. They suggest that non-directive tutoring is counter-productive in tutoring ESL students (Brooks, 1991; Shmoon and Burns, 1995).

In the context of WC tutoring, non-directive tutoring means that the tutor is not supposed to ‘direct’ the improvement of a specific part of the student’s writing. Instead, the tutor is expected to use Socratic questions in guiding the student to discover the strengths and weaknesses in the writing. In practice, non-directive tutoring is similar to

minimalist tutoring in that students must decide and perform the act of improving their writing, and tutors must avoid dominating and intervening too much in writing conferences (Clark, 2001; Thompson, 1995).

On the notion of directiveness, Clark (2001) comments that directive and non-directive tutoring should be seen as a continuum and not a dichotomy. In other words, there are various degrees of being directive or non-directive. She reports that she had a tutor who identified herself (tutor) as not directive or non-directive but manipulative, meaning that she 'manipulated' the degree of directiveness according to the personality and needs of the tutee. This alternative tutoring method illustrates that WCs require a potpourri of tutoring methods and techniques to serve clients who are unique individuals with differing abilities, needs and personalities.

In tutoring ESL students, there is a need to help them identify primary error patterns and teach them edit their work (Lusty, 2002). In terms of error correction, ESL students are not good at spotting their own errors, but they can usually correct their errors when pointed out by their tutors (Gillespie and Lerner, 2000). This has called for a more directive approach for ESL students because they simply do not have the knowledge and the intuition of a first language learner to identify the errors.

In Malaysia, students learn English as a second or third language. Since English stopped being an instructional medium across all levels after the country achieved independence from the British government, students' English proficiency had dropped due to reduced exposure and practice. Therefore, a more directive approach should be applicable especially when students are at the beginning of the learning curve, and the approach can become increasingly less directive when students have achieved some level of proficiency.

2.7.5 Should Grammar be Taught in WCs?

Early WCs had a close relationship with the teaching of grammar, as they were often seen as a good place to help under-prepared students cope with the academic English demands of the university. During the early era (1950s – 1970s), influenced by

the Behaviourist learning theory that emphasized the reinforcement of correct responses and the avoidance of wrong responses, and the Current-Traditional Rhetoric that emphasized mechanical and grammatical correctness, a good majority of WCs, in one way or another, conducted some form of teaching of discrete grammatical items through skill and drill handouts or computerized auto-tutorials (Murphy, 1991). Most WC tutors also did not hesitate in marking grammatical errors on students' writing assignments (Clark, 1985). With the paradigm shift in writing instruction from the product to the process approach, and with the rallying cry of Stephen North's "produce better writers, not better writing" (2000, p.69), grammatical errors were tolerated. In fact, errors were then positively viewed as a product of active learning as learners experimented with newly acquired language, and tested out linguistic hypotheses (Ferris, 2002). It would seem that the teaching of grammar has lost its appeal, with the focus of WC tutorials shifted to the overall rhetoric instead of on discrete grammatical forms. Indeed, teaching grammar in isolation and over emphasis on grammatical accuracy can slow down or even impede the development of a student's written language, as the teacher will have less time to improve the overall writing competence (Glover and Stay, 1995; Hillocks and Smith, 1991; NCTE, 1985).

On the other hand, grammatical correctness has a certain degree of significance in writing instruction (Wallace and Hunter, 1995). Only when it is deemed as the sole cause of concern in writing is it questionable. Undeniably, grammatical mistakes can affect an assessor's judgment of the writer (Danielson, 2000). For example, whether a job applicant is successful may depend on the grammatical accuracy of his/her application documents. Indeed, unlike language teachers, assessors are often less tolerant of grammatical errors.

This has called for a balanced approach in teaching grammar in WCs, that grammar should neither be the sole concern of a WC tutorial nor be totally abandoned (Weaver, 1996). And the best way to treat grammar in a writing conference is to teach it "in the context of a writer's own writing" (Writer's Web, 2005; Weaver, 1996). In addition, global or higher order concerns such as organization of ideas and overall structure must be addressed first before dealing with sentence level errors or lower order concerns.

Indeed, WCs are seen as a ‘logical’ place for teaching grammar as content courses are often constrained by time and course objectives in teaching grammar. Moreover, the one-to-one WC pedagogy favors the individualized teaching of grammar. This is because students made irregular and diverse errors, and thus the blanket teaching of grammatical items often practised in the classroom is not justifiable (McFarland, 1975, cited in Hobson, 1994, p.2).

Besides the individualized treatment of grammatical concerns, many WCs keep a good stock of grammar guidebooks, discrete item worksheets, and computer-assisted software. This rich resource caters for self-access grammar discovery, and helps to develop grammatical awareness and competence.

In Malaysia, English language teaching has been following the world trend in pedagogical approaches. Before the 70s, grammar was emphasized in all levels of English classrooms. Even the textbooks were organized according to grammatical items such as Past Tense, Countable/Uncountable nouns, and Gerunds. With the introduction of the communicative syllabus in all Malaysian English language classrooms in the 80s, discrete teaching of grammatical items was discouraged. Indeed there was a popular adage that read “grammar is caught, not taught”. Nevertheless, outside the circle of ELT, people generally equate good language with good grammar, and grammatical errors are usually the first to be pinpointed, especially by people who do not know much about the psychology of language, that a piece of muddled writing is caused by other factors than just poor grammar. Against this backdrop of the general importance attached to grammar, if a WC is to be introduced to Malaysia, it has to be able to attend to grammatical needs of its clientele. It has to perhaps be ready for clients who may come in and ask “Could you please check my grammar?” This issue will be addressed further in Chapter VII.

2.8 Epilogue

In envisioning the development of WCs and OWLs in the twenty first century, Wallace (1998) cautions that technology should not be allowed to drive pedagogy, and

WCs “should serve primarily as a valued, individualized, pedagogical resource, and only secondarily as a possible additional technological resource center” (p. 170). Development is also seen in the promotion of WC pedagogy as the best method in teaching writing, and WC’s outreach effort into external communities such as linkages with high schools, NGOs, and business organizations.

The approximately seventy years of WC history has traced the development from the initial experimentation with the laboratory method, to struggling for professional recognition, and finally, the growth of WCs outside the country of origin. While much has been discussed concerning roles and functions, and theory and practice of WCs and OWLs in North America where English is the native language, can the same be applied on WCs and OWLs in countries where English is used as a second or foreign language? On taking this immediate challenge, a full appraisal of the WC theory and praxis must be complemented by a critical review of the ESL writing participants-the students, the current practice of teaching ESL academic writing as compared to WC pedagogy, and existing ESL support systems. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Footnotes

1. GI is a common abbreviation for Government Issue. Today the abbreviation has evolved to mean a soldier in the US Army when it is used as a noun. As an adjective GI means *military* as opposed to *civilian* (Dictionary.com, 2005).

2. Listserv: An email-based mailing list for a group of people who share similar interests. This list is maintained by a listserv software. Anyone can subscribe to a listserv by sending a *subscribe* command to the listserv administrative address. An e-mail sent to the listserv address is copied and mass-mailed to the e-mail address of all the subscribers, who may then read or reply to the e-mail.

3. Flash: A computer program developed by Macromedia for delivering interactive graphics and animation on the World Wide Web (Dictionary.com, 2005).

4. PDF: PDF stands for Portable Document Format. It is a native file format for Adobe Systems' Acrobat. It can represent documents created by various application software, hardware, and operating system. A PDF file can be very simple and short comprising just plain texts, or it can be lengthy containing "any combination of fonts, graphics, and images in a device-independent and resolution-independent format" (Dictionary.com, 2005).

5. Broadband: A communication channel that supports a wide range of audio and video frequencies. It can carry "multiple signals by dividing the total capacity into multiple, independent bandwidth channels, where each channel operates only on a specific range of frequencies". It now stands for any kind of Internet connection with a download speed of more than 56 kbps (Dictionary.com, 2005).

6. Streamyx: Streamyx is a Malaysian brand of broadband. It provides perpetual connection to the Internet with speed bandwidths. The service is good in supporting web hosting, video streaming, e-commerce, and distance learning (TM-Net Website, 2005).

7. Bulletin board: A computer service that allows users to send or read electronic files or data by phone or telecomputing. The messages are of general interest and are not addressed to any particular person (Dictionary.com, 2005). For an example, see <http://www.oldiesmusic.com/bbs/>.

8. Forum: A forum functions very much like an electronic bulletin board; users submit postings for all to read and they may then respond to the posting by e-mailing to the forum. It is different from real-time chat, or person-to-person private e-mail (Dictionary.com, 2005).

9. Blog: A blog is a personal web site that compiles headlines of a specific theme from other sites on a daily, weekly or irregular basis. A blog may include journal entries, commentaries and recommendations. It is also written as web log or Weblog

(Dictionary.com, 2005). A good example of a blog is the Stephen Downes' OLDaily at <http://www.oldaily.com/>.

10. Wiki: A freely editable web site. Its purpose is to create a communal repository of knowledge. It allows both novice and expert users to act as active members of a community in shaping the online content. A potential problem is that this open editing system is also subject to vandalism (IBM Collaborative User Experience Research Group Homepage, 2005).

11. ICQ: An abbreviation for *I seek you*. It is an online chat system. The name *ICQ* is a play on *cq*, the radio signal for seeking conversation. For more information, see <http://www.icq.com/> (Dictionary.com).

12. MOO and 13. MUD: *MOO* is an acronym for "MUD, Object-Oriented". *MUD* stands for "Multi-User Dimension or Dungeon", originated from the Dungeon and Dragon game developed for multi-users on the Internet. Most MUDs still retain this game-like atmosphere when applied in education. MOOs were developed as social spaces. They are used in the classroom for online synchronous conferences and meetings. MOOs allow groups from different geographic regions to connect and communicate in real time. They serve as chat rooms in virtual reality (Crump et al., 1999).

14. Carl Rogers: His full name was Carl Ransom Rogers (1902 - 1987). He founded the client-centered approach of non-directive counseling. This method of psychological therapy must base on three core conditions of empathy, acceptance and genuineness. His client-centered approach is often referred to as Rogerian counseling, and has also been applied in education as student-centered approach and facilitative practice in group work (Association for Humanistic Psychology, 2001).

15. Burkean Parlor: Named after Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), a self-taught thinker who integrated scientific and philosophical concepts with analysis of semantics and literature. He was considered America's most brilliant theorist of rhetoric (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001).

16. Open Admission: Also known as open enrollment, a policy of admitting to college all high-school graduates in an effort to provide a higher education for all who desire it (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001).

CHAPTER III

ESL UNDERGRADUATES, ACADEMIC WRITING AND LEARNER SUPPORT

To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality.

~James Berlin (1994)

3.0 Prologue

This chapter explores ESL learner characteristics and needs, research and pedagogical approaches in ESL academic writing, and initiatives in providing learner support through such areas as self-access centers and learner advising. As the focus of the dissertation is on WCs and OWLs in an Asian ESL tertiary institution, this critical overview highlights key aspects of the theory and practice of ESL writing which are an essential component of any investigation of writing developments in the Malaysian context.

3.1 ESL Students: Characteristics and Needs

Proposing ESL learner characteristics can be an extremely difficult task especially after William Littlewood (1999) has criticized some writers for their unrealistic generalizations of learner characteristics, and has warned against “all-inclusive generalizations” (p.77). Instead, he recommends treating learner characteristics as “hypotheses” or “predictions”, serving as “clues” (p. 77) or plausible explanation (not absolute truth) for certain learning behaviors, and subject to verification. With this understanding, and on the basis of the literature, this discussion proposes three characteristics of Asian ESL students: that they are more reserved; that they are people-oriented as opposed to task-oriented; and that they are highly motivated.

A loose definition of ESL is used in this discussion. *ESL student writers* in this context are tertiary students who are learning English after acquiring a first language, and English may be the second, third, or even fourth language. As the ultimate aim of this research is to propose a conceptual framework for WC and OWL application in an

Asian setting, or specifically, tertiary institutions in Malaysia, the discussion that follows is biased toward undergraduates in Malaysia, whose first language may be Malay (about 65% of the total Malaysian population), Chinese (about 25%), and Indian (about 7.7%) (Department of Statistics, 2005). Because of this diverse cultural and linguistic background of Malaysian undergraduates, only common characteristics observed among these three ethnic groups are discussed. The discussion may also apply to tertiary students in some Asian countries, for example Indonesia and Brunei where Malay is the dominant language; and China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong where Chinese is the dominant language.

Proposing common characteristics and needs of this group of ESL student writers can be difficult. This discussion highlights only some observable general characteristics that distinguish this group of ESL students from English-as-first-language students, while fully recognizing cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and individual differences cultivated by demographic, environmental, and socio-economical factors. The following discussion on characteristics and needs is a derived generalization based on the available literature on ESL learners' characteristics and needs (for example: Johnson, 2001; Sanchez and Gunawardena, 1998; Scarcella and Oxford, 1992; Silva and Matsuda, 2001a, 2001b).

3.1.1 Characteristics of Asian ESL Tertiary Students

Learner characteristics have been a popular topic in language learning research. Learner characteristics are closely related to learning styles (Sanchez and Gunawardena, 1998). It is believed that learning is more effective if learner characteristics and learning styles are matched with learning pedagogies, materials, resources, and support (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992).

At least three categories of variables can be used to describe ESL learner characteristics. The first is cognitive variables such as intelligence and aptitude in learning English. The second is affective variables such as motivation and attitude toward English, and the third is personality variables such as optimistic versus

pessimistic, extrovert versus introvert, and sociable versus shy (Johnson, 2001). For this research, cognitive variables are not the focus and therefore will not be discussed as the aim of this study is to identify and establish a support system for ESL students who may have little aptitude for English. Moreover, learning a language is a basic human right regardless of one's intelligence or aptitude level. Also, intelligence and aptitude are inborn, and thus an accepted reality. Therefore, more attention will be given to affective and personality variables as second language learning theory suggests that they contribute more than cognitive variables towards the success or failure of learning a language (see, for example, Krashen, 1982).

Besides, as mentioned in the preceding section, personality variables or characteristics are also shaped by cultural (e.g. ethnic origin), linguistic (e.g. language universal), social (e.g. upper or lower income), and environmental (e.g. home and school) variables.

The environmental variables are best illustrated through the situation of Asian ESL tertiary students who study in their home countries as compared to those study overseas such as the USA, UK, Australia, or New Zealand. For example, a certain level of English proficiency may not be a requirement for entrants in an Asian university, whereas at least a specific level of pass in IELTS or TOEFL is required for entry into any of USA, UK, Australia, or NZ universities. Therefore, Asian ESL tertiary students in their home countries may generally have lower English proficiency compared to their international counterparts.

The second difference, from the perspective of environmental variables, between these two groups of ESL tertiary students is that in their home universities, the majority if not all the students are ESL learners. Most of their teachers are also ESL speakers. Therefore, these students have very little chance to interact with native English speakers, unlike their international counterparts who are actually being thrust into a crowd of native English speakers. As a result, the home-based ESL learners have less opportunity to interact with competent English users and also less exposure to standard English compared to their international counterparts.

More Reserved

One obvious characteristic of Asian ESL tertiary students is that they are more reserved and would prefer not to ask questions in a learning context if given a choice, compared to tertiary students of western culture, regardless of whether the learning medium is their first language or English. In an ESL context, a possible reason may be the lack of meta-language to ask questions (Garner and Young, 2003). However, because these students also seldom ask questions in a first language context, we can deduce that this characteristic is more cultural-induced than linguistic. In a culture that holds high respect for teachers and regards teachers as the authority, Asian students think that questioning teachers is disrespectful. Also, Asian students tend to think that asking questions means revealing their ignorance. The Asian culture prefers reticence. Most Asians believe that “the nail that sticks out will get hammered first (my paraphrase)”. Coincidentally, this proverb appears in Chinese and Malay, as well as Japanese language (Carrington, 2002). Because of this deep-rooted preference for conformity and low profile, Asian students tend to play safe by keeping quiet.

Nevertheless, asking questions is a way of getting information, and an efficient way to learn. ESL teachers, realizing this weakness among Asian students, have tried special strategies to encourage these students ask questions. It is found that these students are more likely to ask questions on a one-to-one basis than in a whole class setting (Wang, 1994), for example: writing conferencing/tutoring in the writing center, or seeking advice in a self-access lab; or asking questions online, for example: through e-mails, where their identity can be anonymous, or less obvious. Also, because of this reserved characteristic, Asian ESL students tend to take a longer time in responding to a question. While western students tend to “think on their feet” (Wang, 1994, p. 13), Asian students will consider and reconsider their response before they raise their hands.

People-Oriented

The general perception that western culture is more task-oriented while non-western culture is more socially oriented (Sanchez and Gunawardena, 1998) is a general

perception of ESL tertiary students. It is generally observed that Asian ESL students learn better and are more enthusiastic in learning English when they have good rapport with the person teaching it, although some of them can be strategic learners at the same time. While western or native English speaking students may be more keen to achieve a learning objective or to complete an assignment, Asian ESL students are more keen to find out more about their teachers and peers, and to establish friendships with these 'learning partners'. Asian ESL students tend to have heightened morale in learning English when they like and are liked by their teachers and peers (Cai, 1994). Because Asian ESL students tend to anticipate friendship, education providers should create a friendly and supportive atmosphere inside and outside the classroom in both physical and online environments to put the learners at ease in their new academic institutions.

Highly Motivated

While it is true that most tertiary students are highly motivated in learning and in successfully completing their degrees, Asian students, especially Chinese in Malaysian public universities, are even more highly motivated to succeed. The competition in gaining a place at a public university in Malaysia is especially intense among the Chinese due to the quota system practiced by the government. This quota system allocates university places based on racial composition in the national population. As a result, Malay students form about 70% of the overall tertiary student population, and Chinese about 25% although there may be more Chinese who are qualified for university admission. Thus, when they succeed in gaining a place in a varsity, they see no room for failure, and they usually go all out in achieving excellence in their studies. This high motivation for success has been exemplified in the comparatively higher number of Chinese students scoring First Class Honors (see, for example, Convocation Program Book, 2004). Consequently, the Chinese tertiary students in Malaysia are highly motivated in learning English because they understand that to achieve excellence they need a good command of English in addition to the Malay language, the national language and the medium of instruction, and their mother tongue, Chinese.

While it may be true that highly motivated students will learn English under whatever circumstances, the English learning experience of these students can be enhanced if the ESL program is tailored toward their needs.

3.1.2 Writing Difficulties and Needs of ESL Students

Besides the difference in learner characteristics, the writing of ESL students also shows some distinct features different from that of native English speakers. This has been the research interest of Contrastive Rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996), Error Analysis (Richards, 1974; Hendrickson, 1981), and Interlanguage (Corder, 1981). The findings of Silva (2001) based on 72 research reports comparing L1 and L2 writing of ESL students show that L2 writing was “simpler”, “less effective”, “more constrained”, “less fluent” and “less accurate”. Their writing comprised “more but shorter T-units, fewer but longer clauses, more coordination, less subordination, less noun modification, and less passivization”. They also used more “conjunctive” but fewer “lexical” cohesive devices, and the writing also showed “less lexical control, variety, and sophistication” (p. 200). The difference in ESL writing from that of L1 may be traceable to the difference in L1 rhetorical patterns (Connor, 1996), also called “interlingual transfer”, and “intralingual transfer” caused by over-generalization of L2 rules (Brown, 1994, p.213-214).

Usually, ESL writing is more difficult than L1 writing because students think in L1 and write in L2. The translation strategy is often word for word guided by a bilingual dictionary, resulting in awkward, stilted, and often incomprehensible writing. Other writing problems include confusion over idiomatic expressions which is often culture-specific, wordiness, and interference from L1 Grammar.

In view of the writing difficulties ESL tertiary students experienced, additional effort must be organized to support them, so that they are able to write the accepted academic discourse to succeed in their tertiary education, and subsequently become successful ESL users in their professions upon graduation. Among the pedagogical strategies and assistive options that have been found useful in helping ESL students such as pre-writing activities, teacher and/or peer feedback, and revising processes (see,

for example, Kasper, 1997; Silva and Matsuda, 2001), three may be the most useful in supporting ESL tertiary students in Malaysia. These strategies include the use of one-to-one tutorials, and attention to genres and authenticity.

One-to-One Tutorials

In some Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, students begin to learn English from Year One of their primary education. By the time they graduate from high schools, they have had studied at least 12 years of English. Yet tertiary educators and employers, particularly in Malaysia, often complain that tertiary students “cannot write a proper sentence in English”. This realization has motivated reflection on ESL pedagogy in general, and ESL writing pedagogy in particular. In Malaysia tertiary education, academic writing in English is taught in the classroom, and the class size can be as big as 50 students. The weakness of whole class ESL instruction is its ineffectiveness in attending to individual differences especially when learners are from different cultures and native languages like those in Malaysia. Also, due to inadequate attention given to individual students’ writing problems, students need additional learning support other than just classroom teaching. In this light, one-to-one writing tutorials are believed to be more superior as they provide the opportunity for immediate diagnosis and identification of specific writing problems, and allow the opportunity for ESL students to interact and negotiate meanings with a more experienced writer or tutor in a less threatening atmosphere outside the formal classroom (see, for example, Powers, 2001; also Section 2.6 Efficacy of WCs).

In other words, one-to-one tutorials provide a direct focus on student needs. It also gives learners a chance to clarify difficult issues on the spot with the tutor. In addition, individualized tutorials help teachers by reducing their marking load, when students learn to identify errors in their writing from the tutor (Conrad and Goldstein, 1999). The tutorials also help teachers avoid appropriating students’ writing by taking over the responsibility of improving the writing from students. Due to these apparent advantages, some strong proponents of one-to-one tutorials have recommended doing away with classroom writing instruction, and let one-to-one tutorials take over as ‘the’ writing pedagogy (Carnicelli, 1980; Harris, 2000).

On the other hand, several studies have also pointed out that one-to-one tutorials may not be preferred by certain groups of ESL students whose cultural background inhibit them from questioning a more superior or senior person such a tutor or a teacher (Goldstein and Conrad, 1990). Nevertheless, there are counter claims that ESL students are more likely to ask questions in one-to-one and online than in whole class settings, for fear of 'losing face' (see, for example, Shadle, 2000).

The above limited studies regarding empirical evidence for the effectiveness of one-to-one tutorials is conflicting, and further research is needed to produce more convincing evidence. Nonetheless in the literature, frequent claims continue to be made on the value of one-to-one support for student motivation, attitudes and general facilitation of the writing process (Harris, 1995). Given the value placed on the availability of one-to-one support, any new writing initiative is expected to have a one-to-one support as a feature.

Attention to Genres

As the rhetorical patterns of ESL students' L1 are different from English, providing ESL students with examples of various academic genres in English such as argumentative essays, research proposals or case study reports may help them get started on a writing task (Dudley-Evans, 1997). Given some appropriate genre examples as guides, students can see for themselves the required rhetoric and style, and they can then mirror after the models to develop their writing competence in academic English.

However, modeling after a target genre has its downside too. If used too early at the writing process, modeling can stifle the creative mind of beginning writers, and inhibit them from developing their own voice and composition strategies (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). Students may tend to pay more attention to formal features such as rhetorical and grammatical forms than to the purpose and intended audience of the genre model. It can also mislead students into thinking that writing involves following prescribed formulae (Kroll, 2003). Indeed, the ability to write a particular genre involves more than just producing a text that looks like the model. Knowledge of the

purpose, setting and culture for which the genre is produced is essential (Dias et al., 1999).

Therefore, composition teachers have been cautioned against the mechanical and premature use of genre models. An effective application of genre models is to incorporate textual analysis, which can raise students' awareness in the use of specific lexical, syntactical, grammatical and rhetorical devices (Frodesen, 2001). It is also important to discuss with students the significance of appropriate presentation of ideas, documentation and citation that forms an important part of academic writing.

In the genre literature, numerous research reports have suggested the positive results of applying the genre-based approach to the teaching of ESL/EFL writing (see, for example: Henry and Rosemary, 1998; Mustafa, 1995; Reppen, 1995; reported in Paltridge, 2004). However, there seems to be a gap in the literature concerning the effectiveness of the application of genre modeling in the ESL writing classroom. Nevertheless given the practical observation that ESL tertiary students in Malaysia often struggle to get started on a target genre, there may be some value in providing appropriate genre examples in conjunction with effective pedagogical strategies such as genre or textual analysis, to jump-start the writing process of this particular group of students.

Attention to Authenticity

The use of authentic materials with ESL tertiary learners in EAP/ESP courses has generated positive learner attitude toward academic writing tasks (Jordan, 1997). Authentic materials for EAP allow ESL students the chance to link academic writing tasks to real life applications, for example: market survey reports. For Asian ESL students in their home countries, opportunities for interacting with authentic situations and materials where English is used are much less compared to their counterparts who study in native English countries. Thus using authentic materials from sources such as the market place, newspapers, journals, TV interviews and seminars, helps create a sense of relevance and generates genuine interest when students can perceive the practicality of academic writing tasks in linking their learning to real life uses. In a way,

using authentic materials helps to boost the motivation of learners when they feel that they are using 'real' language.

On the other hand, ESL educators do also need to balance the preference for authentic materials with authentic tasks in considering the needs of the students. If the language of the authentic materials is too difficult for the target students, teachers may need to modify the language while still retain the task. This view on authentic text modification has been objected by Guariento and Morley (2001), who contend that complete comprehension of any authentic text is not essential. They argue that partial comprehension of authentic texts often happens in real life, and hence there is no need to simplify the text to match the student's literacy level. Hence for ESL students, authenticity of purpose/task may be more relevant than the authenticity of text in matching an instructional need (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

The issue of authenticity in terms of texts, tasks and contexts in the writing classroom has been discussed quite substantially in the ESL literature. However, there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of employing authenticity in the ESL writing classroom. Some studies have explored the Internet and the WWW as a rich resource in providing authenticity for ESL writing. For example, Warschauer and Healey (1998) have suggested the value of the WWW in providing assessable social and cultural relevance in the form of authentic information and contexts, and the increased opportunity for authentic writing assignments and communication. This form of authenticity mediated by technology is a key area of the WC and OWL environment to be developed for the ESL tertiary context in Malaysia.

3.1.3 Character Types, Learning Styles and Strategies

Over the past two decades, the development in ESL theory and praxis has been based around the exploration and the development of a number of diagnostic tools which are seen as helpful to learners in developing an understanding of themselves in the process of English language learning. In the field of ELT, numerous studies have been done on the relationship between learner personality or character type, learning styles, and learning strategies (see, for example: Ehrman, 1993, Ehrman and Oxford,

1990; Keirsey and Bates, 1984; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). The studies propose that the understanding of learner character type may inform better consideration in the identification of learning styles, and the application of learning strategies.

Character Types

Enquiry on character type was initiated by Jung in the 1920s, and continued by Myers and Briggs in the 1950s and 60s (Keirsey and Bates, 1984). Myers and Briggs designed a personality type indicator to test four dichotomous types: extroversion versus introversion, sensing versus intuition, thinking versus feeling, and judging versus perceiving (see Appendix 3.1). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has since been copyrighted and marketed by Consulting Psychologists Press or CPP Inc. (see <http://www.cpp-db.com/products/mbti/index.asp>). Linking these character types to language learning, for example, an Extrovert student may prefer speaking in front of the whole class, while an Introvert may dislike it; and an Intuitive student may be better in creative writing while a Sensing student factual writing. Therefore, the character type indicator may be useful in helping learners to better understand themselves thereby taking control of their learning paths. It may also provide a framework for education providers and teachers to think about possible weaknesses and strengths of a particular learner. Most importantly, the individual self-knowledge helps the individuals gain insights about themselves.

To date, a few studies have questioned the validity of the MBTI, especially about its application in determining a career choice (see, for example, Anerbach, 1992), and also the possibility that it can be influenced by cultural effects. However, it is outside the scope of the present research in conducting a critical appraisal on the MBTI.

Learning Styles and Strategies

In the field of ESL and EFL, a character type is linked to a particular language learning style, defined as “the characteristic manner in which an individual chooses to approach a learning task” (Skehan, 1998, p.237). Of these learning styles, the Willing’s (1987) model was based on an empirical study, and his subjects were adult immigrants

learning English, hence the model reflects closely real life language learning situations and is relevant for ESL tertiary learners (see Figure 3.1; Skehan, 1998).

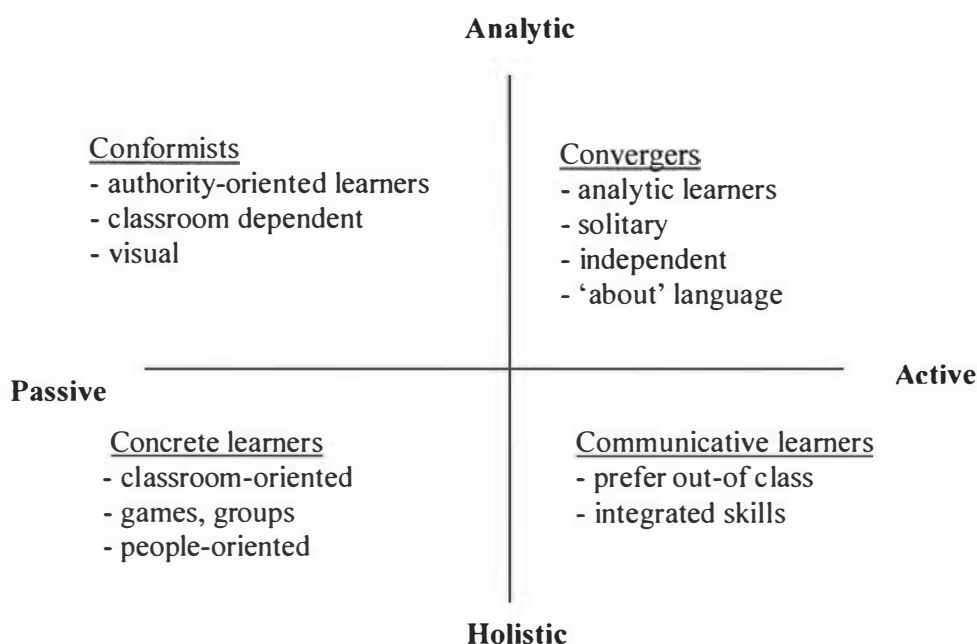


Figure 3.1 Willing's Model of Two-Dimensional Learning Styles
(Source: Skehan, 1998, p.247)

Using the character type indicator (Appendix 3.1) or the learning style model (Figure 3.1) may help in linking ESL students to their preferred learning strategies. Research interest in language learning strategies was motivated by Naiman et al. (1975) with their observation on strategies employed by successful language learners. Effort in categorizing language learning strategies was initiated by O'Malley et al. (1985), who categorized language learning strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, and affective types (see Appendix 3.2). Practitioners have observed that most L2 learners use strategies. The question is whether the use is adequate or appropriate, as not all L2 learners are equally successful. In meeting this need, Oxford (1989) created the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (see Appendix 3.3). The purpose of the Inventory is to raise consciousness regarding strategy use, and also to tailor a specific strategy training program to help learners apply more efficient language learning

strategies, that is, teaching them how to learn. In empowering students to become independent learners, the SILL (Appendix 3.3) should form part and parcel of the learner training package.

Millennials and Netgeners

A second question concerning learning styles and strategies is whether the current batch of tertiary students who are born and growing up with the Internet, the so-called Millennials or Net-geners (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005), have similar learning styles and strategies as the earlier generation. If the answer is probably not, the instruments or inventories on learner characteristics, styles and strategies may have to be redesigned or adapted accordingly, and this will involve substantial future research.

With the increasing use of ICT in language learning, a valid concern is whether the ELT staff has the background and skills to match the netgener learners (White, 2006). On the other hand, with the Internet speeding up globalization, the sociology concept of *glocalization* is beginning to catch attention in the ESL field (see, for example: Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou, 2004). *Glocal* is a hybrid term coined from *global* and *local*. The coinage originated from a Japanese term *dochaduka*, and it was popularized by an American sociology professor Roland Robertson through his 1995 book and a few journal articles and conference talks (see his homepage: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sociology/staff/rolandR.php>). In essence, glocalization seeks to strike a balance between globalization and localization. It highlights the contradiction as well as interdependency between global and local forces. Applying this concept to the Net generation learners, it would seem that they might share some common global (or ICT) characteristics, while still (or not) retain their cultural characteristics. Moreover, also because of their immersion in the ICT culture, their learning styles are probably different from the earlier generation. Some of these emerging learning styles include, for example (Dede, 2005):

- Fluency in multiple media and simulation-based virtual settings.
- Communal learning involving diverse, tacit, situated experience, with knowledge distributed across a community and a context as well as within an individual.

- A balance among experiential learning, guided mentoring, and collective reflection.
- Expression through nonlinear, associational webs of representations.
- Co-design of learning experiences personalized to individual needs and preferences. (para. 2).

This section characterizes Eastern or Asian ESL tertiary students from Western native English students by referring to the differences in their respective cultural background. This line of discussion may help to inform if a pedagogical innovation successfully implemented in a western culture could be applicable in an Asian setting. While unique characteristics are seen across cultures, the same is present among people within the same culture. Therefore, universities and educators must be aware of the changing time and the changing demography and needs of their students, and must also change accordingly to remain competitive and relevant.

3.1.3 Learner Autonomy

Over the last three decades, the development of literature has increasingly recognized a significant element in the development of language learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is part of the philosophy of providing support to ESL learners. It has been argued that autonomy is the most important attribute of a successful language learner, and also a prerequisite for life-long learning (Littlewood, 1999). Learners must be able to recognize and seize language learning opportunities outside the classroom, and learn independently of their teachers. The rationale is that learning another language entails more than just classroom learning, and that learners must be assisted to become skilled lifelong language learners and users, and in this case, writers of English.

Holec's definition of learner autonomy- "the ability to take charge of one's own learning"- has been most widely quoted by learning autonomy specialists (see for example: Benson, 2001, p.10; Cotterall and Crabbe, 1999, p.3; Sinclair, 2000, p.6). This

simple definition of learner autonomy has been expanded to include more dimensions to the interpretation of autonomy.

There are at least five dimensions in analyzing autonomy. The first is *technical autonomy* that involves the act of self-initiated learning outside an educational setting, and learners must be trained to be able to apply independent learning techniques or strategies. The second, *political autonomy* refers to empowering learners with the skills for autonomous learning so that they take full control of the learning content and processes, and also learn to take responsibility in serving their communities. The third, *psychological autonomy* refers to the transformation in the individual as a result of taking control of the learning goal. These three dimensions of autonomy have been discussed by Benson (1997). The fourth dimension is *individual autonomy*, involving the individual initiating independent learning, as opposed to the fifth, *social autonomy* that is possible only through collaboration and interaction with community members who could be a peer or a facilitator (Sinclair, 2000).

However, different learning autonomy specialists seem to emphasize different dimensions of learner autonomy. For example, Ryan (1991; in Littlewood, 1999, p.74) highlights two concepts of individual autonomy: *self-determination* and *self-regulation*, and a concept of social autonomy: *relatedness*. He explains that self-determination and self-regulation are seen in autonomy asserted by the self - the individual, and relatedness is the autonomy exercised by the individual as a member of a social group, for example: the language classroom. Self-determination and self-regulation suggest that the individual has to first decide and initiate autonomy, and then the individual monitors or manages the extent or degree of autonomy during the process of achieving independence as a member of a social group. This relatedness interpretation of learner autonomy is similar to *autonomous interdependence* highlighted by William Littlewood (1999, p.75), who sees that a learner's autonomy is best attained in a supportive community or environment. The self-regulation concept of autonomy covers two levels: *proactive* and *reactive* (Littlewood, 1999, p.75-76). Proactive autonomy is seen when learners identify, plan, and organize learning activities independent of a teacher or a more experienced other. Reactive autonomy is responding actively to a set goal, planned

syllabus/curriculum, or instructional materials designed by teachers or institutions, and taking initiative to achieve increasing autonomy in the learning process.

Among all the dimensions and concepts of autonomy discussed thus far, two more concepts related to the development of learner autonomy, *learner training* and *learner involvement* (Tudor, 2001, p.119-120) are the most relevant to ESL learners in Malaysia. Being brought up in a culture that respects seniors and elders, Malaysian ESL learners generally accept what their elders, including teachers, tell them to do. In this light, many of them are not confident in making decisions for themselves, not to mention taking charge of their learning. Learner training and learner development propose that learners can be assisted in achieving independence through explicit explanation on the significance of learning autonomy, and explicit training in study skills and learning strategies or techniques. Then they can be involved in identifying learning objectives, setting goals, negotiating learning tasks or activities, and sourcing learning materials (Tudor, 2001).

Another related concept of learner autonomy is the interconnectedness of autonomy and language learning: *autonomy for language learning* and *language learning for autonomy* (Tudor, 2001, p.119). While the preceding discussion has emphasized the importance of autonomy in learning, or language learning in particular, Ian Tudor (2001) brings forth the idea that learning an essential language helps in empowering learners toward achieving autonomy in lifelong learning. This concept relates very well to the dynamic effort the Malaysian government is taking in ensuring a nation of English proficient citizens. Clearly, the Malaysian government has realized the interconnectedness of language and power. A key focus of the WC and OWL, when set up in Malaysia, is to nurture a generation of autonomous ESL learners, who can be trained to take charge of their learning, academically, vocationally or professionally and also life-long.

3.2 ESL, EAP and Academic Writing

ESL writing, a branch of second language or L2 writing, is a relatively young field compared to native language or L1 composition. It originated from second language acquisition or specifically, teaching of English as a second language (TESL) (Silva, 1990), or teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) (Silva and Matsuda, 2001). A main concern of ESL composition discourse is academic writing as this has proven a problem area for tertiary ESL learners (Jordan, 1999).

ESL students are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants and international students, or tertiary students whose first language is not English, but must acquire a functional level of English competence to pursue their field of study that uses English as an instructional language. This latter ESL group comprises students at a number of Asian, European and African universities (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). As discussion on ESL writing is often linked to tertiary academic writing, this study has identified ESL academic writing, specifically tertiary writing, as a main focus.

3.2.1 The Development of ESL Academic Writing

In discussing ESL academic writing development, field experts often foreground it against the development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This section presents a brief history of EAP before discussing ESL academic writing.

EAP is a branch of applied linguistics as well as a teaching approach (Hamp-Lyons, 2001). It is one of the two sub-disciplines of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the other being English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). EAP is different from general English as it focuses only on those areas of skills, grammar, topics, themes and tasks that are immediately needed by students in their studies at a university. Usually student needs are identified through a needs assessment or analysis. This needs analysis becomes the basis for the formulation of course objectives, syllabus and material design, and methodology (Hamp-Lyons, 2001).

The term *EAP* was first introduced by the British Council of English Teaching Division Inspectorate in London, who organized a training seminar called EAP in 1976. This term was subsequently used by the SELMOUS (Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Student) Group in the UK established in 1972, when it changed its name to BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) in 1989 (Jordan, 2002).

Up to the 1960s, there had been little concerted effort in supporting English language needs of international students who enrolled in the USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand universities. Efforts in meeting this need was first initiated by Birmingham University that designed an induction course for its overseas students in 1962. Then Leeds University developed a writing program in 1971 for its international students based on the Leeds Proficiency Test, followed by Manchester University that conducted full time pre-session ESP courses during summer and part-time in-session courses during term time, as well as a diagnostic test for ESL students. In the next year (1972), Newcastle University established a language laboratory that later became a language center for identifying and supporting students weak in English. These four universities became the founding members of BALEAP whose aim was to promote and support the professional development of EAP in the UK and later internationally through its annual forums and biennial conferences, Register of Current Research in EAP, and publications (Jordan, 2002).

Areas of investigation and recurring issues of EAP involved the changing needs of ESL students and problems encountered by EAP teachers. However, the most prolific field of enquiry in EAP has been academic writing (Hamp-Lyons, 2001). For economic reasons, many universities are pressured to accept more fee-paying ESL students. In practice, it means lowering the entry English proficiency level, and conversely increasing the demand for more EAP courses and more specialized training for EAP teachers. A positive finding for the EAP enterprise is that ESL students have shown to become more confident in their studies with improved academic language awareness, and they could also adjust better to the new academic culture. A recent trend in EAP is the increased use of web-based resources and self-directed learning (Jordan, 2002).

3.2.2 Pedagogical Approaches to ESL Academic Writing

At the initial stage of ESL teaching in the USA, writing was more of a support skill in learning English, for example: writing answers to grammar or comprehension exercises (Reid, 2001). Today, ESL writing has evolved to become a respectable discipline with a concrete base in theory and pedagogy, resulting from its growing significance in the academia of higher learning, and the abundant scholarly research work conducted. Up to now, ESL writing practitioners experienced four recognizable approaches of ESL writing instruction that also loosely represented major paradigms or eras in the field, all of which will be critically reviewed including reference to how theories relate to writing pedagogy in the Malaysian context.

Product Approaches

Controlled or Guided Composition (Silva, 1990), also called *Focus on Form* (Raimes, 1996) is one of the Product approaches. This approach to ESL writing is traceable to the principles of structural linguistics and audio-lingual method in the 1950s that learning a language involves habit formation, language is basically speech, and writing is reinforcement for speech habits. Thus, avoiding errors caused possibly by L1 interference and reinforcing correct L2 behavior were the central tenets of this approach to ESL writing. The proponents of this approach believed that writing in L2 involved correctly manipulating fixed patterns learned by imitation. Therefore, free writing meant to promote creativity and fluency should be avoided in ESL writing classes (Silva, 1990).

Another Product approach was *Current-Traditional Rhetoric*, popularized in the 1960s (Silva, 1990). It was prompted by the realization that ESL students needed to write extended discourse and not just grammatically correct sentences. The Current-Rhetorical approach to ESL writing was very much influenced by Kaplan's *Contrastive Rhetoric* (2001), which recognized that L1 interference in extended discourse was a more serious threat to comprehensibility compared to grammatical errors in writing. The characteristics of this approach included emphasis on the written product; analysis of discourse into words, sentences and paragraphs; classification of discourse into, for

example, description and argument; emphasis on usage such as spelling and punctuation, and style such as conciseness and clarity. Similar to the Controlled Composition approach that focused on the correct manipulation of discrete syntactical items, Current-Traditional Rhetoric was concerned with the manipulation of longer linguistic units such as sentences and paragraphs into prescribed discourse structures. Because of the emphasis on the written product, both the Focus-on-Form approach and the Current-Traditional approach are also known as the *Product* approaches (Pincas, 1982; Reid, 1993). Writing teachers who practised a Product approach usually began by teaching the discrete linguistic items (focus on form) as input for students to write controlled composition, followed by guided writing that included imitation of writing samples and transformation of syntactic patterns, and at a more advanced stage, free writing (Zamel, 2001).

Process Approaches

The *Process* approach in ESL writing was developed from the late 1970s (See, for example, Zamel, 2001), following the process movement in L1 composition. The doctrines of the process approach included “content determines forms” and “good writing is involved writing” (Horowitz, 1986, p.144; cited in Silva, 1990, p.16). This approach shifted the emphasis from the written product to the various acts by the writer at the different stages in the process of writing, and hence was also known as *Focus-on-Writer* approach (Raimes, 1996). Writing was viewed as a recursive process of discovery whereby the writer explored ideas and experimented with words and structures that would best express the intended meaning to the reader. This process view of writing was very much akin to Expressivist Rhetoric in that the writer discovered his/her own voice, and determined the choice of topic and linguistic items in generating the intended message (Matsuda, 2003).

In the *Process* classroom, the responsibility of the ESL writing instructor was to ensure a supportive workshop environment, and to facilitate the various stages of composing such as brainstorming, planning, multiple drafting, revising and editing. Emphasis was placed on the pre-writing stage, since this has been increasingly recognized as a critical element in developing the skills of ESL writers (Risinger, 1987).

Content-based Approach

The *Content-based* approach emerged from the mid 1980s in ESL writing instruction (Raimes, 1996). As ESL writing was mainly concerned with academic writing, the Content-based approach was also called the *EAP* approach (Silva, 1990). This section will combine the two terms and rename it the EAP Content-based approach.

In the EAP Content-based approach, the focus on ESL writing was switched from the writer to the content area or the specific discipline of the student, when certain practitioners thought that adopting the Process pedagogy of L1 composition was inappropriate for ESL students who were less familiar with the academic culture of a native English environment, and who did not have much academic English to initiate writing independently into producing multiple drafts and revisions.

In a broader view, the Process approach tended to favor certain social groups, for example native English speaking students, and thus helped to propagate the existing social structure in the academia (Santos et al., 2000), resulting in marginalizing the minority or the ESL group further. In addition, the Process approach was criticized for several other reasons. Firstly, the Process approach did not regard the differences of students from diverse background, and it did not consider findings from contrastive rhetoric. Secondly, it neglected certain major writing tasks such as the writing test that was in practice very much product-oriented. In certain cases, the various stages in the writing process were overly emphasized that the quality of the resulting product was neglected (Corbett, 1996). Thirdly, because the Process approach emphasizes “individual motivation, personal freedom, self-expression and learner responsibility” (Hyland, 2003, p.19), teachers might be reluctant to intervene as they might see the intervention as stifling student creativity. Thus indirectly, the Process approach disempowered the traditional role of teachers as experts in the classroom. The Process approach also disempowered students, as the inductive discovery method favored in the Process approach did not explicate what was to be learned (Hyland, 2003). Lastly, the Process approach focused too much on the ability of the writer at the expense of the socio-cultural context in which the written product operated. In short, it did not consider the differences in various writing tasks and writing contexts (Silva, 1990), and students

were “offered no way of seeing how different texts are codified in distinct and recognizable ways in terms of their purposes, audience and message” (Hyland, 2003, p.19). This disappointment with the Process approach instigated the application of the EAP Content-based approach in ESL writing.

In practice, the EAP Content-based approach favored the adjunct model of teaching academic writing in a content course, for example: Information Technology, Business Communication, Psycholinguistics, etc. This Content-based approach might involve the collaborative effort of an ESL expert and a subject-matter expert in team teaching and in designing modules and specific mini-courses on specific topics or themes and integrated skills for EAP (Raimes, 1996). Nevertheless, the EAP Content-based approach was not without criticism. For example, its critics felt that the strong focus on writing in the disciplines (WID) was not realistic because ESL students also needed non-academic writing skills such as writing for occupational purposes.

Genre-based Approach

The most recently conceived approach to ESL writing that became popular from the late 1990s was the Genre-based approach (see, for example: Badger and White, 2000; Hyland, 2003), following the seminal work on genre analysis by Swales (1990). The Genre approach was sometimes referred to as a post-process approach, although some ESL scholars (for example, Matsuda, 2003) disagreed that there ever was a post-process as it presupposed the conception and end of the Process approach.

A genre, as defined by Swales (1990), is “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (p. 58). Transferred to writing, a genre approach places importance on the communicative purpose of the writing act or task, very much influenced by the social context comprising such factors as the reader or the recipient of the writing, the relationship between the writer and the reader, the subject matter, and the accepted writing convention such as the organizational pattern, structure or format of the writing (Badger and White, 2000). Some examples of written genres include clinical reports, weather logs, research abstracts, and business faxes. In a way, the Genre approach is similar to the Product approach in terms of imitating or mirroring the target text or genre; the difference lies in

the emphasis on the social situatedness of each writing act. In sensitizing students to the discourse community of the academia, students are introduced to the various academic genres initially. They then learn to reproduce the genres by modeling and by collaborating with a more experienced peer or a teacher, before becoming an independent member of the specific discourse community (Dudley-Evans, 1997).

The downside of the Genre approach is that it tended to regard learners as passive writers, needing guidance in learning a genre. Also, it places little priority on the skills that are needed to help learners write a specific genre. It was also felt that certain aspects of a genre cannot be explicitly taught. These tacit aspects must be acquired gradually through exposure and immersion in the specific discourse community (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005), very much akin to first language acquisition.

Summary: Pedagogical Approaches in the Malaysian Context

In Malaysia, all the approaches discussed in the preceding sections are being practised in varying degrees in the tertiary ESL writing classroom. The decision of the application of an approach or a combination of approaches lies very much with the training background or the skill of the individual writing teacher. It is unlikely that a teacher who has never been exposed to genre-based approach would practice this approach with his/her class. As each approach discussed earlier has its strengths as well as weaknesses, “an effective writing methodology needs to incorporate the insights of product, process, and genre approaches” (Badger and White, 2000, p.157). Picking and combining the strengths of each approach, a practice known as *reasoned eclecticism* (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005, p.33), the selective combined application of the approaches, can be complementary instead of conflicting.

In summing up, although the above discussion on ESL academic writing approaches may seem linear or progressive, that is, moving from the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and to the present, in actual practice, all the approaches are still being used in some ESL contexts at different times. There never was an end to a writing approach in the emergence of a new approach (Matsuda, 2003).

3.2.3 Research in ESL Academic Writing

Initially, ESL writing practitioners looked to L1 composition studies for guidance in research and practice especially in the 70s and 80s. Later, practitioners realized that L1 composition studies could not be directly applied in ESL writing instruction. Although L1 and L2 composition are similar in a number of ways, there are obvious differences. Therefore from the 90s, practitioners turned to analyzing specific features of L2 writing for guidance, and thus L2 composition became grounded as an independent field (Silva and Matsuda, 2001).

However, despite the plethora of L2 writing research from the 90s, such studies had generally reported the researchers' findings, and not the views or reflection of ESL student writers on their writing (Leki, 2001; Paltridge, 2004). Therefore, there was limited first hand information regarding the difficulties and concerns ESL student writers experienced in their writing classes or during their writing processes. This limited first hand information (directly from the mouth and mind of student writers and not information processed by researchers) might blur the genuine state of ESL student writers. Leki's call clearly indicates that ESL writing researchers and practitioners need to communicate more with students, listen to them, and empathize with their specific needs and difficulties before any realistic solution can be proposed to help them write.

Since the last decade, a key research area on ESL academic writing has been online writing on top of computer-aided writing from the previous decade (Paltridge, 2004). A myriad of online communication tools such as forum, bulletin board, e-mail, chat, weblog, and wiki have promoted and expanded online writing opportunities albeit among only those with Internet access. The proliferation of mobile phones among student population has also brought forth a new genre of writing called SMS. This issue will be taken up again in Section 3.3.3.

3.2.4 Pedagogical Issues in ESL Academic Writing

Research and studies in L1 composition and second language learning have informed how ESL academic writing should be taught. Three key pedagogical issues central to Malaysian context of ESL writing are discussed in this section.

The Reading-Writing Relationship

"Every reader is a writer, every writer is a reader." ~Jay Rosen

In general, ESL writing experts seem to have three different views on the relationship of reading and writing (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005).

Firstly, the *directional* hypothesis proposes that the ability to write must be preceded by the ability to read. It assumes that comprehensive input, in the form of reading, is essential in developing writing competence. In other words, one must learn reading first before learning writing. ESL educators who believe in this hypothesis will make a reading course a prerequisite to a writing course. ESL writing instructors will make sure students learn the sub-skills of reading such as scanning, skimming, predicting and inferencing before teaching any writing process or sub-skills.

The second view is the *non-directional* hypothesis that proposes that reading and writing involve a number of similar cognitive processes, and that the learning of reading and writing does not need to follow a certain direction or progression. In other words, the learning of reading does not necessarily precede writing or vice versa, and that one acquires writing competence through learning to write and not through learning to read. At one time, reading was viewed as a passive or receptive skill, and writing an active or a productive skill. It is now generally agreed that both reading and writing are active and productive skills, demanding active interpretation and negotiation of meaning with the text.

The third is the *bidirectional* hypothesis that suggests a reciprocal relationship between reading and writing. This view holds that reading develops writing skills, and writing improves reading skills. As student writers progress, the relationship between

their reading and writing competence also changes. Therefore, the pedagogy of ESL writing must be sensitive and adjustable to the diversified needs of students. Differential priorities should be given to either skill depending on learner needs at various stages of the writing development by adjusting the attention and time given to reading or writing practice.

All the above hypotheses on the relationship of reading and writing are true in the Malaysian context. In Malaysia, tertiary students need to read a lot in English, as 90% of the books in any of the tertiary library are in English. In this sense, reading comes before writing as students have no choice but to master the reading skill in English to develop the content area of their majoring discipline. In a way, reading is a survival skill for students to master the content for an examination or assignment. It has also been observed that avid readers of English usually write fluently. In this sense, reading complements writing, and writing induces more focused reading.

Writer-based Writing versus Reader-based Writing

In elaborating reading and writing connection in ESL writing pedagogy, a “false” dichotomy often existed in linking reader-based writing to the Product approach, and writer-based writing to the Process approach (Reid, 2001, p. 29).

Reader-based writing means writing for an intended reader, for example, an academic audience. The writers adjust their writing style to what they assume as preferred by the audience. They usually follow or mirror their writing after an established genre, sometimes to the extent of by hiding their own voice.

On the other hand, writer-based writing means writing read only by the writer, for example, a diary entry or a journal article. Therefore, consideration for the audience as well as accuracy in the choice of expression and rhetoric is less important than fluency in expressing ideas.

In reality, the current practice in the ESL writing classroom shows a balanced approach between the two emphases of writing. Fluency and accuracy are considered equally important, with perhaps more priority for fluency at the beginning or elementary

levels, and accuracy for more advanced level (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). With the influence of social constructionist epistemology, ESL writing pedagogy is becoming more student-centered, and academic writing is becoming more of a social act. Activities such as learner-selected topics and evaluation criteria, peer response to writing and collaborative writing projects are a common practice in the ESL writing class (Reid, 2001).

3.3 ESL Learner Support beyond Classroom Instruction

While most ESL instruction takes place in the teacher-fronted classroom, a number of support systems have been developed to complement this process. In this section, the place of learner support in language learning has been considered along with the kinds of support systems that have been introduced, and WCs and OWLs can be seen as aligned to these developments. As the whole of Chapter 2 has been devoted to the discussion of WCs and OWLs, this section will investigate other alternative support systems including self-access language learning (SALL), language advising, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and online language learning.

Learner support can be broadly defined as “all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies” (Simpson, 2000, p.6). It includes ways of responding to the needs of each individual learner through interacting and investigating what the individual learner needs (White, 2003). Learner support can be mainly categorized into academic or tutorial, and non-academic or advising/counseling. Academic support includes facilitative actions aimed at developing learners’ knowledge, cognitive skills and learning skills, for example: follow-up explanation regarding a writing task or giving timely feedback. Non-academic support includes advice and guidance for non-academic problems related to affective needs such as managing stress and overcoming exam anxiety, and systemic problems related to organizing or managing studies such as time management and identifying suitable courses (Simpson, 2000; White, 2003).

The main function of learner support is to complement the effort of a teacher-fronted classroom or an instructional delivery system, in assisting students attain their learning goals. An effective support system helps students achieve excellence in their

enrolled academic program. Although most institutions of higher learning seem to place more emphasis on the development and implementation of instructional materials and courses, a good number of them have realized that providing student-centered learning support is vital in ensuring student retention as well as successful and quality learning. This has been confirmed by a research study commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education that investigated the impact of student support services and academic development on undergraduate student performance (Prebble et al., 2005).

Learner support is also important for a commercial reason. Providing tertiary education to international students has long been a thriving industry in developed countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand. In the USA, for example, for the academic year of 1999-2000, 2% of about 16.5 million undergraduates enrolled were international students, and 13% of the total undergraduate enrolment for the same year was ESL speakers (Horn et al., 2002). Also, teaching English as a second language (TESL) or a foreign language (TEFL) is becoming a lucrative and an enterprising industry. In the UK, each year about 700 thousand people from all over the world go there to study English (British Council UK, 2003), and the British Council teaching centers all over the world reported a total of 130,000 ESL students at any one time (The British Council UK, 2003). Due to this global competition in attracting more fee-paying students, education providers are keener to improve their instructional delivery system that includes an effective learner support system.

In achieving optimal learner support, there must be convenient and affordable access to the support system. Also, the support must add value to the core business of study, for example: the academic achievement of students across disciplines and levels should show a measurable improvement. In addition, the kind of support must fit the need and interest of the learner – called ‘learner fit’ by some authors, and ‘congruence’ by White (2003, p. 170). In achieving an optimal level of congruence between the support system and the learner, the education provider must have a genuine interest in the student’s personality, academic, social and cultural background.

In general, ESL tertiary students need additional English language support for them to meet the academic demand of English medium instruction. This also means providing them with additional opportunities to learn English. In the UK, concerted

support effort for ESL tertiary students was initiated in the 1960s (see Section 3.2.1). The initial support system focused mainly on the ESL learners' English language needs. Later, being informed by findings from second language learning research that affective aspects such as learner attitude, self-esteem and motivation, and cultural aspects such as learning differences across cultural and social background, are equally if not more important factors in learning a new language; the learner support system expanded to include affective and cultural/social concerns. The following sections discuss only the main language support facilities designed for ESL tertiary learners that include SALL, Language Advising, CALL and Online Language Learning.

3.3.1 Self-Access Language Learning

The concept of Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) was introduced quite a long time ago, but keen interest in this field was from the 1980s (see, for example: Dickinson, 1987). Related terms that carry more or less the same meaning include: self-directed language learning, self-instruction language learning, autonomous language learning, and independent language learning. The rationale for SALL is that "not every thing a learner needs to know can be taught in class" (Nunan, 1988, p. 3).

SALL is a learner-centered learning approach and not a teaching approach. It aims to help learners become independent by not relying on the teacher as a source or resource person for language learning. It is a versatile and flexible system as it caters for individuals as well as groups; for various proficiency levels: varying degrees of independence such as teacher-directed or self-directed; for different age groups, and also for different cultures (Gardner and Miller, 1999). SALL is neither "a collection of materials" nor "a system for organizing resources" (p. 8). Rather, it is a "learning environment" (p. 11) comprising teachers, learners, managers or coordinators who organize and oversee the self-access system; and resources such as instructional and authentic materials, activities and technology.

A simple dictionary definition of *access* is "the opportunity or right to use something or approaching somebody" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1995, p. 7). *Something* here in the context of SALL could mean the self-access language learning environment, system, venue, and resources; and *somebody* could be administrators who

fund the establishment and operating costs of a self-access center (SAC) or system, teachers who plan and organize instructional resources, or facilitators/counselors/language advisers/tutors stationed at a self-access venue to guide users in the optimal use of the self-access system. The instructional resources in a self-access system comprise some or all physical resources such as a place or a space with logistics for conducive learning such as adequate lighting, air-conditioning, tables and chairs; and instructional equipment such as televisions, CD-players, and PCs; and instructional materials such as language learning texts, guidebooks, audio/video tapes and CDs on various language skills, themes, or tasks, dictionaries, CAI software, self-study and self-correction modules and worksheets. The *self* in SALL is the learner who can be any age with any level of language proficiency, and from any social or education background. To summaries, SALL allows language learners the opportunity to access, either on their own initiatives or based on advice from a more experienced other, instructional materials they perceive as helpful in meeting their learning objectives or language needs.

The rationale for SALL as a complementary language support system for ESL students is closely related to language learning autonomy that encompasses concepts such as independent learning, self-directed learning, self-instruction, self-study, learner empowerment, individualization, and self-access learning. The contemporary boundary of a language classroom has extended to cover learning outside the traditional teacher-led classroom (Tudor, 2001). In fact, teachers alone are not able to cope with the increasing diverse nature of any learner group, and to attend to individual differences and needs. Therefore, language learning must extend beyond the classroom, and learners must be trained to take more responsibility in identifying language learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom, and to make good use of additional language support.

In addition to meeting different needs, SALL is also more likely to suit various learning styles. Learners have differing language aptitude and attitude that impact on their learning preferences. Therefore, SALL is also more likely to sustain learners' interest in providing a diverse range of learning materials and activities for learners to study at their own pace and at their own time (Gimenez, 2000).

Moreover, a SAC is also able to provide organized and systematic support to

language learners. Learning progress can be monitored by the use of a learner portfolio or a learning contract. Quality control can be achieved through counseling, and accountability can be checked by using learner profiles (Gardner and Miller, 1999).

In the past, whenever any instructional innovation was introduced, teachers were quick to ask the question whether their professional role would diminish or be replaced by the innovation. The same was with SALL: If learners become independent language learners, do they still need teachers? For sure, innovative teachers would not be replaced by an innovation. Instead, they would have more roles to play with any additional innovation. In a SALL environment, teachers serve multi-roles. They function as instructional resource developers, identifying and matching learning objectives with ready-made teacher-designed materials. Teachers are also counselors, advising learners how to make optimal use of the SALL system. Teachers also organize and administer learning activities in SACs. They assess and monitor learners' progress, and also evaluate the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the SALL system. Teachers also need to remind themselves to allow more freedom and less control over learning in SACs, because allowing students to make mistakes is a way of learning (Gardner and Miller, 1999).

Like the teachers, learners also play multiple roles in SALL. They are planners and assessors of their own learning, and also that of their peers. Being clients of the SALL system, they often help in the evaluation. They are organizers and administrators of their own learning activities in the SAC. They also need to be self-motivated.

Over the years, various models of SALL have emerged (Gardner and Miller, 1999). First, a SALL system can be created for two main categories of learners: native and non-native or ESL. Second, SALL can also be implemented in controlled environments such as the classroom, the library, or the SAC; uncontrolled environments such as the Internet and the mass media; and private environments such clubs or homes. Third, SALL systems can be categorized in terms of the extent or the type of technology used, for example: a networked SAC. Fourth, SALL systems can also be identified by the main function they aim to serve, for example: the self-access writing center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was established for students to improve their writing skills (Hayward, 1994). In summary, each of these models can be successfully applied if

it matches with institutional and learner needs.

3.3.2 Language Advising

In relation to supporting students in language learning, the concept of language advising is important especially in an ESL context. In 1995, the Teaching Quality Assessment in the UK found that language centers with excellent self-study resources were generally underused (Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, 2001). The assumption that tertiary students were experienced and thus capable of independent learning had been proven wrong. It was realized that learners from a different culture and a different language background could not automatically acquire autonomy in using language support. They needed guidance to use such self-study system, and gradually build up their confidence in exercising autonomy in language learning.

In recent years, due to increasing student population and relatively limited resources worldwide, the role of language advisers is becoming even more significant. Increased student enrolment has brought forth a bigger class size resulting reduced teacher contact time and interaction with students. Teachers are also having difficulty in coping with a more diverse student population. Moreover, with the relatively shortened replacement rate and the increased use of computer and ICT technologies in the last two decades, language teachers need support in handling and managing new technological resources. On top of the pragmatic and pedagogical rationale given above, educators become more aware of the concept of learner autonomy and independent learning in recent years. Therefore, a language advisory system has been proposed and put into practice in the UK, and later the practice spread to other European countries and some South-East Asian countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and then to the USA (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001).

The role of a language adviser is defined by the operating context, depending on how autonomous learning is interpreted by the institution (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001). Among the multiple roles, the central role of a language adviser seems to lie with ensuring the optimal use of learning resources of an institution. This is, in fact, the very

reason that started the practice of language advising in the UK (Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, 2001). In general, language advising discourse points toward the role of a language adviser as “one of facilitator concerned with the development of learner autonomy and supporting the language learning process in a non-instructive way”, and “emphasis is placed on management of resources for self-study and advice is often language specific” (Bartle, 2001). However, certain institutions give priority to learning development over language development, and the advisers call themselves learning advisers instead of language advisers. In some institutions, language advising covers a wider scope that not only includes learner cognitive and meta-cognitive development, but also affective support for the language learner (Dingle and McKenzie, 2001). Cognitive development may include support effort in developing learners’ reading or presentation skill, meta-cognitive support may include guiding students in learning how to learn through understanding learning styles and identifying effective strategies, and affective support may include establishing a learning network and building up learners’ self-esteem (Simpson, 2000).

In a survey study conducted at University of Hull in the UK (Bartle, 2001), the tertiary students responded that they sought advice from a language adviser instead of their teacher because the former had the time to listen to them. The assistance given by the language adviser was also confidential and free from assessment. The students perceived the language adviser’s duties to include managing learning resources, teaching learning strategies, promoting independent learning, and also giving language specific advice. The most common role of the language adviser, as responded by this group, was helping those who used the self-access center. In this sense, the language adviser acts as a bridge, a human interface, or a transition, linking learning in the classroom to open independent learning in the self-access center.

The advising can be done collectively such as a learning workshop for a small group of student, or it can be done individually on a one-to-one basis, either face-to-face or by e-mail (Altshul, 2001). The advising usually operates as a desk system, providing on-the-spot assistance (Dingle and McKenzie, 2001). In practice, some institutions have

both language teachers and advisers, and some have teachers functioning as advisers on a time-share basis.

3.3.3 Computer-Assisted Language Learning

The introduction of the first microcomputer or personal computer (PC), branded Apple I, into the homes and schools was in 1976. However, the wide use of PCs in North American schools was from the early 1980s (Hewisher et al., 1996). Since then, the features, capacity and capabilities of PCs have improved exponentially, and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has become popular especially in the self-access learning of English. CALL software excels as a self-access learning resource compared to others because of the immediate feedback and interactivity features, and the engaging multimedia interface. It has been observed that CALL is generally not integrated in the classroom instruction, but developed as an adjunct service to complement classroom efforts.

The discourse on CALL is usually careful in differentiating *pre-network CALL* using stand-alone PCs from *network CALL* (Chapelle, 1999). Network CALL involves the use of a computer network with PCs linking to one another either through a local area network (LAN), or a wide area network (WAN) or the Internet (Kern and Warschauer, 2000). In the context of learner support, CALL can be briefly defined as using the computer technology to assist the effort in learning a language. Support effort using stand-alone PCs is discussed in this section, while that using the network technology will be discussed under the sub-heading of Online Language Learning in the next section (see Section 3.4.4).

CALL offers numerous advantages for ESL students. In enabling ESL students to become independent learners, nothing is more empowering than giving them two important tools: English and computer. By using computers in learning English, ESL students have the dual advantage: they learn English through the technology, and also learn the technology through English. This is the effect of “dual immersion” (Warschauer, 2001, p.25) of acquiring two literacies at the same time.

Generally, ESL students can refer to three CALL approaches in using a computer as a language support tool. Kern and Warschauer (2000) use three epistemological terms: *Structural*, *Cognitive* and *Socio-Cognitive*, to distinguish the three CALL approaches.

Structural CALL

Under the influence of the structural approach, the computer was used as a tutor in that it taught language items albeit in a very rigid way (Higgins and Johns, 1984). It was most efficient in conducting tutorials through programmed modules and structural pattern drills. Users could repeat the same instruction countless times, and received immediate feedback to their answers or responses. Although text presentation was linear as in the book, the use of colors and animation had made it more interesting than a static book. Language games and simulations were created on the computer to supposedly teach language in a fun way. For the first time computers were used to grade objective tests in multiple-choice, true-false, or matching format (Kern and Warschauer, 2000).

Cognitive CALL

In line with the cognitive approach to instruction, the role of computer in language learning changed from being a tutor to that of a tutee (Taylor, 1980). The learners as active thinkers commanded or taught the computer (through programming) to carry out tasks for them, for example, to calculate or sort data. CAI (computer-assisted instruction) kind of tutorials and drill and practice software were replaced by programs based on simulations of real life (called *microworlds* by Seymour Papert in 1980; in Kern and Warschauer, 1999, p. 1-7) and problem-solving.

In living up with the computer-as-tutee metaphor, language teachers were encouraged to author CALL materials instead of using off-the-shelf packages all the time. For the purpose of authoring their own instructional software, they either learned a programming language, or used an authoring tool (e.g.: Private Tutor). There was also keen interest in using artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) in language education. AI and NLP were used to make software more flexible and

responsive (Hamberger et al., 1999). An early use of AI and NLP applications was seen in the software program called “ELIZA”, who played the role of a psychotherapist in responding to users’ questions. ELIZA displayed some limited ‘intelligent interaction’, but ‘she’ was not capable of involving in genuine negotiation of meaning. AI and NLP were also applied in the creation of more sophisticated grammar and style checking software, and also intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) (Hamberger et al., 1999). The enhanced capacity of PCs in the 1980s made possible multimedia CALL. A language learning package was able to include not just colors and graphics, but also sounds, animation, hypertext, and some limited interaction. These multimedia and AI features brought forth the era of ICALL (Intelligent CALL).

Socio-Cognitive CALL

The *Socio-Cognitive* approach had the central tenet that language was not just a mental construct; it was more of a social construct- that the meaning of discourse was closely related to the context of use (Kern and Warschauer, 2000). The emphasis on linguistic competence had shifted to communicative competence, popularized by linguists such as Dell Hymes (1979) and Michael Halliday (1975). Instead of just providing comprehensible input to second language learners, the focus was on providing situations for learners to interact with authentic audience, tasks, and materials.

For the purpose of interacting with authentic audience, the computer can be used as a mediation tool for learners to communicate not only with the local community, but also global communities through various types of networks such as LAN, WAN, and the Internet. This technological advance of PCs to include the networking facility has shifted the interaction between the learner and the machine to that of the learner with other people, either a peer or a more experienced person, on a one-to-one, small group, or one-to-many basis (Kern and Warschauer, 2000). From the perspective of socio-cognitive CALL, the computer can be used to perform authentic tasks by using software such as a word processor, database, spreadsheet and concordancer. The networking or online facility is perhaps the most significant contribution of CALL to ESL learners especially those in their home countries who often do not have much chance in authentic language learning. The link to global audience and information allows ESL learners to interact with native English speakers in genuine authentic

situations and also to access authentic hypertexts and hypermedia on the www. Please refer to Section 3.4.4 for further elaboration of network CALL.

For ESL students who usually require more practice to improve English competence, the pre-network CALL is a convenient way as it helps to develop grammatical accuracy and linguistic skills through untiring drill and practice, and at the student's own time, space and pace, without inhibition that might be caused by repeated attempts, or the presence of an instructor or others. Moreover, with the advancement in multimedia technology and enhanced storage devices, the current market has a plethora of professionally produced language software on CD-ROM that is sophisticated with video and audio features. Some of the software can actually function as a complete language course as it includes placement and exit tests, record keeping and learning management, for example: Longman English Interactive published by Pearson Education (Rost, 2003). Available in the market today are the vast range of published software on integrated and discrete skills that include critical thinking, technical writing, dictionary and interactive grammar. Students who do not have access to the Internet can practice language skills using these packages on CD-ROM. This kind of practice can complement the development of the writing competence. It also saves precious classroom and free the teacher to deal with more complex learning issues.

3.3.4 Online Language Learning

Network CALL is also referred to as online language learning. Online language support refers to structures on the LAN, Internet and the WWW that can be used to enhance the acquisition of English skills - the primary concern of all ESL learners, and the development of autonomy for life-long learning, the secondary concern but with equal importance, for ESL students. Online support is especially useful for ESL learners for five reasons coined in the acronym *ALIVE* (Warschauer et al., 2000, p. 7) which stands for:

- **Authenticity:** ESL students, especially those studying in a non-native English speaking country, have limited exposure for English and limited opportunity to interact in English. Therefore, authentic materials on the Internet where the language is used and illustrated in meaningful real life contexts are most helpful.

- **Literacy:** Online literacy is just one aspect of electronic literacies. The rest includes computer literacy (the ability to use a computer and to word-process), information literacy (the ability to find and assess the validity of information), multimedia literacy (the ability to understand and create document with animation, sounds, images and hypertext), and computer-mediated communication literacy (the ability to communicate with individuals or groups on the Internet) (Warschauer, 2002). To perform all these electronic literacies, the use of English is inevitable. Therefore, online support not only develops language, it also supports the development of electronic skills.
- **Interaction:** The network promotes fluency by providing opportunities for real life communication with native and non-native speakers around the world. The interaction is meaningful as ESL students communicate with real people. Also, cross-cultural communication enhances the understanding and appreciation for the target culture (Chapelle, 2001) that is, in this case, English for the ESL students. There is also another form of dual immersion, that is, the immersion in the *culture* and *language* of the Internet - English (Warschauer, 2001).
- **Vitality:** Online language learning is interesting and engaging as it is constantly changing, and the presentation is multimodal. There is always something for everyone.
- **Empowerment:** Online language learning allows learners to take charge of what they want to learn, and to become autonomous lifelong learners. By learning to find the information they need, they can gradually replace *just-in-case* learning to *just-in-time* learning.

Static Resources

Online language support can be provided through static and interactive resources. Static resources provide information to users with a click to a link. They are useful in supporting the development of a content area or subject. Static resources such as online journals do not require interaction from the user, or in most cases the interaction is minimal to just keying in a search term. The minimal interaction occurs between the user and the resource. Static online resources tend to meet the need of *information*

acquisition, while interactive online resources tend to serve the purpose of *knowledge construction* (White, 2003).

The Internet is a gargantuan database containing all sorts of information saved in digital hypertext and hypermedia. Gone were the days when learners needed to take note of the opening hours of a library in writing up a term paper. Now with a networked computer installed, the physical library is no longer indispensable because a networked computer serves the reference purpose of a library.

The main types of static resources include online media such as the newspapers- a main source of authentic materials for ESL learners, journals and magazines, databases with in-built search function such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and encyclopedias, virtual libraries, bookstores or publisher web sites, and information archive sites. In addition, there are various ESL web sites that provide downloadable lessons or worksheets on specific or integrated language skills or tasks. Some ESL web sites offer multimedia self-access CALL modules free of charge. Specific web sites rich in static materials for supporting ESL writing, to name just a few, are: Scientific English as a Foreign Language (EAP/ESP) at http://users.wpi.edu/~nab/sci_eng/, Writer's Handbook- Documentation Styles at <http://www.wisc.edu/writetest/Handbook/DocAPA.html>, and English Club at <http://www.englishclub.com/> (The Internet TESL Journal, 2003).

Some people think that learners will learn by themselves when given a networked computer. Quite the contrary, Warschauer et al. (2000, pp. 49-50) have pointed out that "information is not knowledge", and the borderless buoyant ocean of online information is ever ready to drown any uninitiated novice surfers into getting nothing but frustration and distraction from the massive static resources. In other words, ESL learners require specific electronic skills to tap the maximum online support from static resources. Training such as using a search engine, navigating the hypertext and hypermedia environment, creating bookmarks or favorite folders to compile useful sites, and critical evaluation of online information are essential for learners to become confident and autonomous online users and researchers, and must be incorporated in a learner support system.

Compared to the pre-network computer era, the Internet and the WWW have made possible anykind-anytime-anywhere information access, and have improved the speed and efficiency in information dissemination. Information presented in hypertext and hypermedia environment is also more interesting and tend to bring about improved retention compared to printed resources (See, for example: Mayer, 2001). The open environment of the Internet has also made possible online resources be accessed by any made of computer or any computer operating system. In addition, online static resources can be more frequently and conveniently updated and modified.

A question is asked as to whether online publishing and online search using a search engine such as Googles or Alta-Vista are static or interactive. Some writers (for example, see Ioannou-Georgiou, 1999) think that online publishing, online search, and accessing and evaluating online materials are interactive. Warschauer (2001), too, defines online communication to include reading and writing. This issue can be addressed by how interactivity is defined: whether it is confined to interaction between and among people only, or to include interaction between users and static resources.

Interactive Resources

For any CALL resource, interactivity is critical in ensuring the extent of involved or meaningful learning. Interaction involves communication, participation and feedback. Therefore, it promotes active and participative learning, and facilitates individual learners' needs and learning styles. Interaction also allows students to contribute to and control the learning process. Through interaction, meaning is negotiated, thus promoting the development of higher order knowledge such as critical thinking, reflection and problem-solving skills (Muirhead and Juwah, 2004). In CALL, the main types of interaction involve students and students (either one to one or in a group), students and facilitators/teachers, and students and learning resources (Anderson, 2002).

The advent of the Internet has improved the nature of interactivity in CALL. The Internet has made possible computer-mediated communication (CMC)-communication through the medium of computer and telecommunication technologies. In CMC, the interaction is between users and online content, or between or among users (Warschauer,

2000). Interaction can happen in LAN, WAN, or the Internet, between ESL students and local or distant peers, ESL students and teachers, ESL students and local or distant community, ESL students and community of the same or different cultures, ESL students and native speakers, and ESL students and their discourse community specific to their major study area or discipline (Kötter, 2002).

Similar to the requirement of specific skills and training to tap maximum benefit from using static online resources, interactive online resources also require learners to have some prerequisite skills to reap maximum online support. Sufficient training in using various online interactive communication tools such as e-mail, chat, discussion forum, bulletin board, and MOO is a basic pre-requisite. For beginning novice users of CMC, explicit teaching and modeling strategies of formulaic language expressions (e.g.: If I may interrupt...) for social interaction will help them get started online, and also to achieve a sense of *social presence* (Warschauer, 2000; White, 2003). Knowledge of netiquette is also important. Besides, the support provider must ensure a friendly and supportive online environment, so that learners do not feel inhibited or de-motivated to interact online (Cho, 2001).

The online technology has not only supported the development and creation of content, it has also promoted communication and interactive competence among ESL learners through various synchronous and asynchronous communication environments. In the online communication environment, ESL learners have the chance to interact with native speakers or more competent language users who provide language models for ESL learners to emulate.

Synchronous CMC

Synchronous online communication or real-time interaction is important in language learning because it requires “spontaneous interaction” (White, 2003, p.48) that promotes language fluency. Learner language or *interlanguage* (Selinker, 1992) and zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) are best displayed in this kind of interaction through various real-time text-based chat software such as ICQ (I-Seek-U), IRC (Internet Relay Chat), and MOO (Kötter, 2002). These two types of more popular online chat promote *dialogical interaction* focusing on meaning-making (Kötter,

2002, p.31). Video or audio conferencing through the use of computer and telecommunication technologies are other forms of synchronous CMC.

a. Real-Time Chat

The language used in online chat has been an area of contention. Because the chatters are interacting in real time, they have to type their written text as fast as, or at least almost as fast as, talking. They are under the constant pressure of their interlocutors waiting for their response. As a result of racing with time, chatters have invented time-saving devices such as emoticons, abbreviations, acronyms and onomatopoeia in place of phrases or even sentences. Also, typo-errors inevitably resulted in such haste of keyboarding.

On top of the above, with the recent linkages between some text-based chat systems such as ICQ and cellular phones, users are able to ‘converse’ across two different platforms by sending SMS (derived from Short Message System, has evolved to mean short messages), usually up to 100 characters per submission to fit into the tiny cell-phone screen. Due to time and space constraints, a reduced form of language—usually made up of abbreviated spellings (such as f2f for face-to-face), onomatopoeia (such as sum1 for someone), heavy use of content or lexical words, and omission of function words (such as a, the), has been invented. Because this kind of reduced language is trendy and easy to pick up especially by ESL learners, and through frequent exposure to its use online, learners do sometimes slip into using SMS language in their formal academic assignments. A recent publication of a primary school essay composed almost entirely in SMS language caused quite a stir among language educators (“British girl baffles teacher with sms essay”, 2003): Is this the kind of language we want our students to practice and master? Again, the question of ‘whose English’—in this case, learner or standard English—is asked. If the purpose of the online chat is to support the development of effective written communication in academic English, then the online support provider may need to describe and monitor what constitute acceptable language in online chat.

b. MOO

MOO stands for Multi-user Object-Oriented domain. It is one form of text-based chat that allows users to chat or simulate in real time in a simulated virtual locale such as a classroom or a university (Warschauer et al., 2000). The virtual locale usually contains 'objects' that can be people, animals, plants, things, or scenes. For example: items in the classroom such as a TV, overhead projector, and blackboard can be replicated or created on a MOO, and users can actually make use of these make-believed tools to present their work such as an essay, to the MOO community. In short, the interaction can happen between or among participants, or between participants and 'objects' or the environment.

The application of MOO in education has been comprehensively studied by Markus Kötter (2002). His book *Tandem learning on the Internet: Learners interactions in virtual online environments (MOOs)* gives a detailed account for MOO history, development, theory and practice, positive and negative aspects, and learning outcomes of MOO. An example of a popular academic MOO site is SchMOOze designed for English teachers and students. A number of researchers have found MOO a fun and beneficial way in supporting language learning (see, for example: Pinto, 1996; Donalson and Kötter, 1999). For a MOO session to be effective, the online group is to be limited to not more than 3-5 members. More than this number would be difficult to achieve cohesion in the interaction (Kötter, 2002)

Asynchronous CMC

By far, the most popular asynchronous tool is e-mail. It has become the most used communication tool in certain workplace in the USA by 1998 compared to telephone or even face-to-face communication (Warschauer, 2001). Due to its increasing popularity, a group of Hungarian ESL tertiary students had even perceived writing e-mails as one of the most important needs for their future profession (Kormos, et al., 2002). For ESL learners, e-mail in English provides significant support in the process of learning the second language, especially when it is integrated into the classroom or homework based on a "structured, project-based approach" (Warschauer, 2001, p.211). Some examples of e-mail projects or activities that can be used to support

L2 development include surveys, interviews, comparative investigation, simulations, and online publishing.

Another asynchronous tool that is catching up with popularity in ESL learner support is online forum (Warschauer, 1996). It is also called web/Internet forum, or message/ discussion/bulletin board (Wikipedia, 2006). Basically online forum is a website that displays a number of messages on a specific topic. Usually ESL teachers use online forum to promote more purposeful language use. The teacher moderates message submission to the forum to avoid any inappropriate or abusive posts. A significant difference between online forum and e-mail list is that the former requires users to visit the website to read the posts, while the latter automatically delivers messages to the subscribers' e-mail addresses. Online forum is especially useful to ESL learners as studies have shown that it promotes increased student participation (Kern, 1995), increased personal communication (Swaffer, 1998) and improved language outputs (Warschauer, 1996) by providing a less intimidating platform for second language discussion.

3.4 Efficacy of ESL Learner Support

As discussed in Section 3.3, learner support is significant in complementing classroom English language instruction especially for students who learn ESL in their home countries. The purpose of ESL learner support is to help students acquire the language competence so that they are able to survive academically and socially in the tertiary institution. In other words, ESL learner support aims to provide more opportunities for the learning and practice of the language and to train ESL learners in achieving autonomy so that they can initiate learning independent of a teacher. In addition to the support systems afforded by the WC and OWL discussed in Chapter II, the earlier section (Section 3.3) discusses the theory and practice of alternative support systems such as SALL, language advising, CALL and online language learning. This section specially focuses on discussing how useful or helpful these alternative learner support systems are to ESL learners based on findings from qualitative and quantitative studies. Enquiring the efficacy of various learner support systems is important as it answers the critical question of whether we achieve what we set to achieve (Morris et al., 2002).

Efficacy investigation involves both the effectiveness and efficiency of a learner support system (Gardner, 1999). An example of an effectiveness question is: Do learners who use the support system perform differently than those who do not? And, an efficiency question, for example, is: Is the cost for implementing and maintaining the support system justifiable for achieving the positive outcome? (PREST, 2004). As efficiency is more of an administrative issue, this section pays more attention to learner support effectiveness, which is more of a pedagogical issue (Gardner, 1999). Although attention to learner support has been increasing, the literature of this area seems to lack the kind of empirical data related to effectiveness studies, especially those based on comparative studies of these alternative support systems. Therefore, effort is taken to discuss the efficacy of each support system separately and not comparatively.

3.4.1 Findings from Self-Access Language Learning

Any educational programs including learner support can be said to be effective if learners produce positive learning outcomes. The prerequisite for any positive learning outcome is positive perception and attitude towards the targeted support system. In other words, students must like the support program or system for it to be effective. The discussion that follows looks at ESL learners' perception and attitude towards SALL and SAC. The result of their overall response may predict a corresponding learning effect from the support system.

In a study conducted at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the learning preferences and perception to autonomous learning of 30 first year Bachelor of Arts students were investigated through a questionnaire (Chan, 2001). Like students from Mainland China, Hong Kong students were perceived as passive learners conditioned by a very competitive examination-driven and teacher-centered educational environment (Chan, 2001). The summary of students' responses towards self-directed learning showed that more than 70% of them preferred to work independently and half of them were able to work by themselves without much assistance from their teachers. The majority (95%) said that SALL was important, and they appreciated the given "space and freedom" (Chan, 2001, p.289) for autonomous learning. On the other hand, the students were also aware of the problems associated with SALL such as learner

procrastination, lack of training for teachers and learners for SALL, examination pressure, and SALL placing too much responsibility on students. In countering these problems, the respondents suggested updated and interesting learning materials, a relaxed learning setting, and the availability of teacher guidance (Chan, 2001). Overall the study suggested that this group of students were positive towards SALL despite having little previous exposure to autonomous method of language learning. Despite the awareness of specific constraints that might affect SALL, the study generated adequate positive evidence to propose the introduction of SALL in the university (Chan, 2001).

In a somewhat similar study on the use of the self-access center (SAC) by a group of forty students from China who were required to attend an English bridge course at the National Institute of Education in Singapore before proceeding with their degree programs produced some interesting qualitative data (Chia, 2005). Because the Chinese culture regarded teachers as an authoritative source of knowledge (Pratt, 1999), the study was motivated by the question if the students would be resistant to SALL and learning from a SAC. The students aimed to learn time management, improve self-study strategies, and optimize their English proficiency by using resources in the SAC. They were interviewed after using the SAC for two months. Their response showed that they regarded study skills and the skill of knowing how to get knowledge as very important. They appreciated the opportunity afforded by the SAC for them to identify and focus on their weak areas of English, and the freedom to choose their preferred materials and activities to improve the weak areas. The students found watching English movies and listening to English language songs motivating and a pleasant break from studying only from books. On the other hand, some students commented that they were quite lost and not knowing what to do when they were first introduced to the SAC. This shows that students need time to learn the self-access method of learning, and it is important that their learning process in the SAC is being guided and monitored by a facilitator in order to achieve the optimal benefit of SALL. Overall the study suggests that the students generally perceived the SALL positively. Far from resistant to self-directed learning, they were in actual fact receptive to autonomous learning (Chia, 2005).

Contrary to the generally favorable perception and attitude of ESL undergraduates towards SALL in the two preceding studies (Chan, 2001; Chia, 2005), a study on the predisposition of 20 adult ESOL learners towards SALL revealed that not

all learners were receptive to SALL despite its high desirability by many institutions of higher learning (Ade-ojo, 2005). The findings of Ade-ojo's study (2005) implied that certain learners might not be ready for SALL, and there existed a need to alter the learners' beliefs to autonomy learning before implementing SALL.

With regards to whether learners benefited from a SALL approach, an early study conducted in a foreign language class in Denmark showed that the achievement level of self-directed children was somewhat similar to that of those who were taught by a teacher, but the former had much higher ability in learning the language (Dam, 1989; in Gremmo and Riley, 1995). The strong evidence reported in the study motivated most European educational institutions to include learner autonomy development as a curricular objective for any modern language (Gremmo and Riley, 1995).

In a study conducted at Victoria University of Wellington on 153 students enrolled in a 12-week intensive English course, one of the main aims was to investigate the extent of efficiency and effectiveness of SALL opportunities provided in the English proficiency program (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001). Data were collected through student and lecturer questionnaires, specific student interviews, structural discussions with teachers, and records kept in the language learning centers. Most student respondents showed positive attitude to SALL. They thought SALL in the language learning center was important. Overall the less proficient respondents rated learning in the language learning center as more important than that rated by the more proficient respondents. There was also evidence that students who perceived the usefulness of self-directed learning in the language learning center were inclined to use it more frequently. In enhancing the effectiveness of SALL at the university, the study suggested strategies such as investigating learners' beliefs about SALL, appropriate induction and training to SALL, on-going support and linking SALL to classroom activities (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001).

The findings from the limited empirical studies reported here seem to suggest the generally positive predisposition and beliefs to SALL. However, up to this point in time, there has been no direct measurement on the learning gain derived from SALL. This lack of quantitative data on the effectiveness of SALL is probably caused by the complexity inherent in SALL evaluation (Gardner, 1999). The evaluation complexity is

due to the unique characteristics of SALL that include voluntary usage, zero or little formal assessment, and the need for autonomous learning skills (Reinders and Lazaro, in press), described as “highly flexible” and “highly fluid” by Lazaro and Reinders (2006, p.21).

3.4.2 Findings from Language Advising

Language advising has been recognized as an important learner support system in optimizing SALL and the use of SACs or resource centers (see Section 3.3.2; Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, 2001). Usually the funding agency requires a language advising service to provide an effectiveness report in justifying the funding. However, advising service is difficult to assess as it is seen as mostly encouraging SALL, raising awareness to autonomous learning and promoting strategy use, and such concepts are difficult to measure (Reinders, 2006). Therefore, researchers have turned to investigating the subjective perceptions of language advisors and students on the issue of usefulness, instead of measuring effectiveness of advising service.

In a study conducted in Auckland University on a language advising program participated by 54 ESL/EFL students, the main research questions investigated were: “How do students perceive the advisory support given to them in the program? What are the main issues staff identify as affecting the success of the program?” (Reinders, 2006, p.82). About 17% of the subjects only had one formal meeting with the advisor, 71% had more than two sessions, and the average number of meetings was four occurring in a time frame of seven weeks. Data were collected through student and advisor questionnaires. Of the 25 students who responded to the questionnaire, the majority found the advising service useful or reasonably useful. Only one student found it not useful. This positive finding is similar to the studies conducted by Voller, Martyn and Packard (1999), and Mak and Tumbull (1999). The respondents felt that the advisory service was useful in facilitating their self-study and helping them identify weak areas (Reinders, 2006). Most respondents agreed that the advising service had helped them improve specific areas of their English, and also trained them in language learning and meta-cognitive strategies.

The questionnaire conducted on the advisors found that they perceived that advisory service useful to students who were more frequent participants of the advisory program. They also felt that the service was quite successful in promoting SALL evidenced by the students becoming less dependent on the advisors in telling them what and how to learn (Reinders, 2006). The advisors suggested that in optimizing the effectiveness of each session, the objectives of each session must be made explicit to the students. More thorough preparation for the advisory session is also requires in meeting the diverse needs of a wide range of students. It is also necessary to create a stronger tie with other support staff and also integrate the advisory support into other academic courses (Reinders, 2006). The researcher hoped that in the future more studies on the efficacy of language advising can be built on this exploratory study, and participants' beliefs on SALL and language advising can be gauged by pre and post service interviews (Reinders, 2006).

3.4.3 Findings from Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Research interests on the use of computers in language learning began to surface from 1980s when the PC was becoming more common in schools, at home, and at work. Initial interest was mostly on the effects of word processing, cost-effectiveness and quality of writing software. Pedagogical issues such as the application of specific computerized writing tools in the L2 composition classroom were also a concern (Reid, 1993). In the 1990s, the interest expanded to include using more intelligent CALL such as text analyzers, concordancers, CD-ROM software, and creating web pages and using emails, in developing writing. In the 80s, the issue of resistance to the use of computers in teaching and learning writing was often raised (for example: Brady, 1990; Gueye, 1989).

Today, the technology has matured and with the Internet becoming a huge public writing space, people are generally more accepting to using computers to teach, learn, or write. At present in the first decade of the new millennium, ICT and the Internet has become more advanced and commonplace. The Internet is becoming more enticing as an ELT and ESL resource with the multimedia World Wide Web, and enhanced speed and capacity. Research interests now include collaborative pedagogy, synchronous and asynchronous technologies, virtual communities of discourse, and

writing collaboration and communication on the Internet. The progressive development shows that each era: 80s, 90s, or 2000s, has specific pedagogical issues concerning the use of computers in ESL instruction and learning. With computers and the Internet becoming more ubiquitous, a common question often raised is related to the effectiveness of CALL.

The impact of computers on ESL instruction can be seen from Ferris and Hedgcock's (2004) summary of observed positive and negative effects of computer-assisted writing on ESL students reported in empirical studies (Table 3.3). Among the positive effects, students' writing with computers seemed to have increased motivation to revise probably due to the ease of correction and the embedded spell and grammar checkers, although the revision was mostly sentence level than overall organization. Secondly, students were more fluent and less self-conscious while composing on a computer. This was especially true when they were engaged in IRC or SMS communication. Computer-assisted writing also encouraged more writing and better writing. The typed text was also neater and easier to read than a hand-written one. Moreover, there was increased collaboration between teachers and students, and among students. Most importantly, students were more motivated to write because computer-assisted writing was easier and more fun.

On the other hand, the negative effects on student writers included anxiety caused by unfamiliarity with the hardware and software, limited access to computers, limited word-processing skills, and increased focus on surface errors. In reality, the categorization of the effects of computer-assisted writing was not as neat as presented here because there were bound to be contradictory findings on the same issue, due to different contexts of application, and different extraneous variables (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004).

In other words, the impact of CALL is very much dependent on the interaction between the computer and the learner, the task, and the context. Nevertheless, computer-assisted writing generally benefited ESL students more as they experienced reduced stress and memory load when they planned, drafted and revised on the computer (Pennington, 2003). This plus the earlier advantages have helped to induce positive attitude from the students toward writing.

Table 3.3 Potential Effects of Computer-Assisted Writing on ESL Students
(Adapted from Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004, p.347)

Positive Effects	Negative Effects
• Increased motivation to revise • Quicker, more fluent, less self-conscious writing • Increased writing quantity • Increased collaboration • Greater motivation	• Anxiety • Limited access • Limited word-processing ability • Increased focus on surface errors • Less attention for individual preferences

Questions have often been raised concerning whether the use of text analyzers such as spell, grammar and style checkers is helpful to ESL students (see, for example: Lewis and Lewis, 1987). Compared to the first generation text analyzers, the current software has inherited the accumulated knowledge and has become more sophisticated and ‘intelligent’. Nevertheless, the capacity of existing text analyzers is still limited in processing natural language, and often context or logic is not considered. As a text analyzer adheres strictly to pre-coded rules, it sometimes wrongly flags an error, or gives the wrong advice. ESL students, due to their limited meta-linguistic ability and overall lower proficiency, are not able to discern if a flag is wrong, and may run into the risk of learning wrong grammar. However, there is no way to stop students from using an analyzer as it is embedded in a word processor. Therefore, composition and ESL teachers must make it a point to discuss with their students the advantages as well as the drawbacks in using a text analyzer, so that students can use it more critically to tap the benefits from using the tool (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004).

3.4.4 Findings from Online Language Learning

In online English language learning, similarly, positive and negative findings have been reported. Regarding computer-mediated peer feedback, ESL students were more motivated and keener to interact and collaborate online when their writing was read and responded to by their peers (see, for example: Sullivan, 1993). However, networked writing does not necessarily produce “community, collaboration, or even conversation” (Myers-Breslin, 2000, p. 162). If students put their thoughts or ideas

online, it is called *brainstorming*. Only when students responded to one another's work through writing, *conversation* was supposed to have taken place. When they joined effort in working towards a certain goal, *collaboration* was involved, and the concerted effort or work brought forth the formation of an online community (Myers-Breslin, 2000).

In a real time CMC research study involving 25 ESL students interacting in a 90-minute IRC and another 90-minute asynchronous discussion through threaded bulletin board, Sotillo (2000) found that in these two online activities, the ESL students displayed language fluency, but not language accuracy or complexity. However, the language used in the synchronous chat contained less errors compared to the asynchronous discussion despite the time constraint. In another study involving 16 advanced ESL students that compared synchronous CMC and face-to-face communication, the students tended to use more complex language when they interacted online than face-to-face (Warschauer, 1996). This study shows that text-based CMC used more complex syntax than face-to-face interaction, but less complex syntax than writing offline (Wang, 1993). The observation has led Warschauer (2001) to suggest that CMC may serve as a useful linguistic bridge for ESL students in the transition from informal speaking to formal writing.

A few research studies have also shown that the online asynchronous environment is helpful especially to pre-advanced ESL learners. Firstly, the self-paced response feature allows them the time to think and plan their text replies before they click 'send' (see, for example: Sullivan and Pratt, 1996). Secondly, e-mail writers often paraphrase in responding to one another's e-mail, and this repetition helps ESL learners to understand better the message (Holliday, 1999). Also, the e-mail environment is less threatening to ESL learners because of the physical and psychological distance between the students and their interlocutors or whoever evaluating their writing (Mabrito, 2000). In addition, e-mails allow opportunities to communicate with real people in real situation and thus promote critical thinking, meta-cognitive awareness, and intra and intercultural understanding (Kern, 2000).

On the other hand, a common assumption among ESL composition teachers is that encouraging students in writing e-mails will lead to improvement in their academic

writing (Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth, 2001). However, the seemingly hybrid nature of e-mail discourse displaying both spoken and written and also formal and informal features may not necessarily improve academic writing. The extent of spoken or written language features depend mainly on the purpose and the context of the e-mail communication. In holding the purpose and the context constant by getting ESL students to respond to writing prompts by e-mail and word-processing, it was found that both e-mailed and word-processed written responses were more or less the same. However, the e-mailed texts were significantly shorter and the contextualization (background knowledge) was also lesser than the word-processed texts. Therefore, Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2001) were doubtful if e-mail was useful in developing academic writing.

Another possible drawback was that as students communicated more through online platforms such as emails and IRC, their language tended to become more informal or even colloquial (Pennington, 2003). There was a concern that such colloquial language might slip into their academic writing, and later, into their professional writing when they joined the workforce after graduation. Therefore, ESL writing instructors must guide students in both formal and informal writing, and the use of appropriate language in various genres. It is important to consider whether “the collaborative use of electronic writing spaces is helping our students write well”, or whether the technology is “distracting students from writing well” (Myers-Breslin, 2000).

In short, online CALL that offers a dearth of authentic materials, audience, purposes and activities including multimedia and collaborative authoring and publishing, is most relevant to the current workplace. ESL students, like all other learners, must be prepared for the future and should be trained accordingly in tapping the maximum benefits from online and offline CALL (Warschauer, 2000).

3.5 Epilogue

In line with student-centered approach, the subject of this study, ESL tertiary students, has been the discussion focus of this chapter. Three main characteristics of Asian ESL students have been identified. The reason for their writing difficulties in

English has been explored, and to help them write in English, one-to-one tutorials, attention to genre and authenticity are some plausible measures. The theory of congruence or learner-fit suggests that the character types, learning styles and learning strategies of ESL students must be considered in the planning of any instructional or support system. In empowering ESL students, the various dimensions of learner autonomy that include learner development and training should be attended to. As the main difficulty of ESL students is academic writing in English, the various approaches of writing including controlled and guided composition, current rhetoric, process, content-based, and genre approaches have been compared. Reasoned eclecticism has been proposed as a commendable method in teaching ESL writing, in the light of learner diversity and the discussed pedagogical issues such as the reading-writing relationship, and writer-based versus reader-based writing. In supporting and empowering ESL learners, additional language learning opportunities can be provided through SALL and CALL. A language advising system will encourage the optimal use of SALL and CALL facilities. SALL, language advising and CALL are proposed as alternative ESL learner support systems. Their positive and negative effects, derived from empirical data, should inform their critical application and adoption.

CHAPTER IV

INNOVATIONS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new order of things.
~Niccolò Machiavelli (16th century).

4.0 Prologue

One aspect of investigating the applicability of the WC and OWL theory and praxis in Malaysian tertiary education involves focusing on the demands and processes of innovations in tertiary education contexts. In this chapter, the rationale, typology and the process of innovation are explored including the identification of attributes of successful innovations. Following from this, a number of innovations in WCs outside North America are critically examined, drawing on issues relating to innovations developed in the chapter.

About a hundred years ago, Philo Buck innovated with the laboratory approach for the teaching of writing, and the idea of a WC germinated (Carino, 1995). Today, WCs have become widely understood in North America especially in institutions of higher learning. Indeed, the practice of WCs has become so institutionalized in the tertiary learning environment there that most Americans no longer question the existence of a WC. Had the innovative great teacher not seen the value in the laboratory method, and his successors who continued to experiment and improve on the innovation, there would be no WCs and OWLs today.

The innovation of WC is not limited to North America. The impact is international. In Europe, Asia, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, WCs and OWLs have been developed from the late 1990s (Inman & Sewell, 2000). However, an informal survey in May 2003 of all the public universities in Malaysia confirmed that the concept of WCs and OWLs had not been initiated or implemented in any way. This confirmation has led to the central thesis of this study: Are WCs and OWLs a viable innovation in Malaysia where English writing competence, especially academic writing

in English, has been an ongoing concern of the universities and their stakeholders? While Chapter VI seeks answers to this question, this chapter explores the issues and considerations pertaining to innovations in the tertiary education sector. The purpose is to consider how an education innovation from the West such as the WC and the OWL can be initiated, implemented and diffused in an Asian context.

4.1 Defining Innovation and Change

Most writers discuss innovation in the context of change (Armstrong et al., 1997; Goodman, 2001; King and Anderson, 2002). Change and innovation are often used almost synonymously. The two terms “had become key vocabularies in educational practice and policy by the 1980s” (Hannan and Silver, 2000, p.10). However, there is some distinction between innovation and change. For example, change “involves reworking familiar elements into new relationships”, while innovation is a “willed intervention” (Markee, 1997, p.47). Changing may not necessarily involve innovating. For example, when the position of the furniture in a reception area is swapped, a change to the lay out is made, but the traditional function of the furniture remains the same. However, when the table is tilted and used as a screen to divide the reception space into two areas, and the table legs used as hangers--a practice not done before--then an innovation has been introduced. The traditional function of the table has changed to an innovative one.

The distinction between innovation and change can be illustrated by stating what innovation is and is not. An innovation is an observable product, process or procedure. It is not an abstract entity. It must be new to the institution where it is introduced, but not necessarily new to the innovation initiator or elsewhere (King and Anderson, 2002). An innovation is intentional (similar to Markee’s “willed intervention”). An accidental improved new outcome is an invention and not an innovation. Perhaps *reinvention* is closer to the meaning of *innovation*, and Paech (2005) uses the term *renovation* to mean an improvement on an innovation. A change in routine or sequencing is not an innovation. In addition, an innovation is often motivated by a need to improve, and never by an intention to disrupt or destroy (King and Anderson, 2002). Furthermore, the effect of an innovation should be felt by the public. If the effect is only felt by an individual, then it is not an innovation. When the positive effect from the innovation is

felt by the public, the institution is said to have undergone some positive development (King and Anderson, 2002). Indeed in the context of curricular development, innovation is defined as “a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching (and/or testing) materials, methodological skills, and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by potential adopters” (Markee, 1997, p.46). In this sense, an institution cannot be said to develop or progress without any form of innovation.

To sum up, to change may or may not involve an innovation. However, to innovate will surely result in making certain changes. If we refer to the preceding definitions of innovation by Markee (1997), there is no doubt that the WC approach will be an innovation and not just a change if implemented in an Asian context, Malaysia. This is because the current practice of teaching writing is confined to classroom delivery through the traditional lecture method in Malaysian universities (see the next chapter for a detailed discussion). A number of instructors and students still believe in the lecture method for the supposedly good training in listening and concentration. Some instructors may organize small group activities and in-class peer review, but there is nothing close to the one-to-one student-centered tutoring of the WC. In addition, outside the classroom, students do not have a support system that they can turn to if they need clarification about a writing assignment, or to ask questions about their writing. This section on defining innovation and change serves to inform the operational definitions of *change* and *innovation* in subsequent discussion.

4.2 Rationale for Innovations

“Change is eternal” and “the only constant is change” are two clichés quite commonly found in innovation and change discourse. Usually, an innovation is introduced when there is a need for change. Although not all innovations bring forth better outcomes, introducing innovations is always motivated by the desire or intention for improvement, be it enhanced productivity or a more stimulating learning environment. Therefore, the ultimate aim of any innovation is improvement in the status quo, and the innovation must add value to existing practice. This explains why innovation should be part and parcel of daily practices in any institution of higher learning. Indeed the development of innovative competence should be incorporated into any professional training program, and as education is inseparable from nation building,

all educators must “develop their own critically informed tradition of innovation research and practice” (Markee, 1997, p.7).

With the advent of ICT, innovations are being introduced at an unprecedented speed, often, though not always, spurred by technology. ICT has changed our life in many substantial ways, and has consequently changed the macro environment. Correspondingly, tertiary institutions must respond to the changing terrain to stay competitive by producing and adopting innovations. Since the last decade, a few major factors have moved usually inert universities to become innovating and enterprising.

The first factor is international competition caused by globalization (CERI, 2000). Due to development associated with globalization, universities are being pushed to compete in a marketplace that is becoming more global (Robins and Webster, 2002). Indeed, the world is getting relatively smaller than before when people can travel to any corner of the globe within a few hours, and when news and information can travel by nanoseconds. In addition, as the human society becomes more affluent, the quest for the best, including education, has become a norm. If the best is not available locally, it will be sought for globally. As more parents send their children off shores for a presumably better education, universities must improve by innovating to remain competitive not only in the national market, but also in the global market.

The second factor is changes in student demography (Goodman, 2001; CERI, 2000). In recent years, universities have faced the need to change to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, and to meet the demand of non-traditional students. Universities in the USA and the UK at one time used to receive students from high schools. Today, student diversity is attributed to more working adults who seek retraining and better qualifications to improve their marketability by investing on education; more international students; and more women who re-enter tertiary education after child-bearing. This change in tertiary student demography is also happening in developing countries in Asia. In meeting the demand of the current diverse student demography, Malaysian universities, for example, have responded by innovating with distance education and executive programs that hold classes at night. Universities that innovate in distance education, modular learning, extra-mural programs, and flexible learning tend to attract more working students. In addition, the current and future

university students would have grown up with or experienced ICT and “edutainment” (Goodman, 2001, p.157) prior to tertiary education. Therefore, universities can no longer afford to remain traditional.

The third factor is more demand for practical education (Thompson, 1997). With new technologies replacing existing ones more rapidly than ever before, knowledge becomes obsolete faster (Armstrong et al., 1996). The need for retraining calls for more practical tertiary courses. As students and potential students become more career oriented, universities must change from offering traditional programs to more vocational-oriented ones.

The fourth factor is more flexible and shorter tertiary education programs. As working adults now form quite a substantial percentage in the overall tertiary enrolment, study programs also tend to become shorter, and modular. *Just-in-case* learning, i.e. learn every thing just in case you need it, has slowly been replaced by *just-in-time* learning or learning on demand, that is, learn just what you need when you need it (Warschauer, 2000), and at your place, your pace, and your time. Moreover, to achieve just-in-time learning, the learner should have already acquired some rudiments of learning such as problem solving and autonomous learning. Indeed, learning to learn (the skill) seems to be more significant than learning to know (the content). It is important to train learners not only to deal with existing knowledge, but also future knowledge (Simon, 2001).

The fifth factor is competition from emergent non-traditional education service providers. More and more private and for-profit corporations are venturing into the education market. For example: one of the biggest private universities, University of Phoenix, is owned by the Apollo Group, a NASDAQ listed corporation in the USA; and WEBCT, a major provider for online teaching and learning tools, has established a niche in web-based education with more than 800 tertiary institutions in over 40 countries (Larson and Strehle, 2001). For this reason, if traditional universities do not upgrade and update their structures and curricula through innovative measures, they will soon fall out of the game.

One more impetus is that the multi-fold increase in tertiary enrolment has spurred universities to innovate in coping with bigger student population. The Vice Chancellor of the Open University in England said in 1997 that half of the world population was under 20, and in the developing world, one university would have to open every week to cope with the demand for higher education (Larson and Strehle, 2001). In order to promote a *learning society* (the latest catchword after *knowledge society*), increased access to higher education is not only vital, but also a national agenda in ensuring a workforce that is knowledgeable and educated to serve the nation. Universities all over the world face the pressure of increased intake but usually without a relative increase in resources. Many universities have turned to innovative use of ICT to boost productivity. Distance education and off campus or extra mural learning are such innovations.

Finally, government policies especially those related to higher education may help to spur innovations. The ministry of education can motivate innovation and invention by fostering a climate of innovation through providing various incentives such as start-up funds or seed money and sufficient funding for various stages of the innovation, providing an incubation or experiment center, and recognizing the innovators for their contribution and commitment.

While the above are some general imperatives for why universities, at the macro or institutional level, need to actively innovate, every innovation must have an explicitly stated specific rationale to guide its initiation, adoption or implementation. At the micro or individual level, studies have reported specific reasons for teaching and learning innovations in higher education (for example, Hannan et al., 1999).

A study conducted in the UK in 1997-1998, interviewing why 103 academic and administrative employees in 15 universities introduced new ways of teaching and learning, found several impelling reasons (Hannan et al., 1999). The most obvious was the urge to improve student learning and to better prepare them for the future. Their initiatives were meant to “motivate students” because the “previous method did not work”, and to intervene students who were having problems. The new initiatives were also meant to empower students in taking “more responsibility for their own learning” (p. 283).

4.3 A Typology of Innovations

Generally, innovation can be either evolution or revolution. Innovation is an *evolution* when the change is incremental and involves ongoing small changes, like renovating an old house, or like growing up or aging. One may not feel the change in the process as it evolves, but notice it after some time. This type of innovation is the most common form of innovation within a university, and is usually initiated internally. Innovation becomes a *revolution* when a fundamental change occurs, like rebuilding an old house. This is what Goodman (2001) describes as *discontinuous change* where an existing system undergoes a major revamp. This kind of innovation usually happens when the macro environment of a university changes, for example, state funding tertiary education changes to self-funding that may implicate student enrolment, and calls for a more cost-effective tertiary system. These two main categories of innovation i.e. incremental (evolution) or discontinuous (revolution) can be either reactive or proactive depending on the change strategy (Goodman, 2001). Furthermore, an innovation is proactive when the change agent anticipates and plans for the change. It is reactive when the institution responds to the change.

Another way of categorizing innovations, from the perspective of modern diffusion theory, is based on who feels or identifies the need to change, and who initiates the change (Markee, 1977, p. 48-49). When an insider, someone from within the institution, recognizes a need to change, and develops an innovation to meet the need, this kind of change is “immanent” or “self-motivated”. In a “selective contact change”, the insider adopts an innovation that has been developed externally to meet the need of the institution. In an “induced immanent change”, an outsider (e.g. a consultant) identifies a problem in the institution, but an insider finds a way to resolve the problem. Finally, in a “directed contact change”, an outsider (e.g. the ministry of education) identifies an innovation, and directs its implementation in an institution or across all institutions. Table 4.1 summarizes these four types of innovations.

Table 4.1 Four Types of Innovations
(Adapted from Markee, 1997, p. 48)

	Internally Developed and Initiated by an Individual	Externally Developed and/or Externally Initiated
Insider or Self-identified /motivated	1. Immanent change	3. Selective contact change
Outsider identified/motivated	2. Induced immanent change	4. Directed contact change

Some writers (e.g. Hannan et al., 1999; Markee, 1997) feel that an immanent change is more likely to be sustained because of the strong sense of ownership by the initiators or change agents and the end users are from within the same institution. Others feel that strong leadership in effecting a directed contact change is more likely to sustain innovation, for example, the Australian ALL (Australian Language Learning) Project (Hamilton, 1996), where the Australia government effected the change with its new language policies. Clearly, due to the many variables associated with implementing and sustaining an innovation, it is difficult to say which type of innovation is more likely to develop and sustain.

4.4 Attributes of Successful Innovations

Why do some innovations take off with vigor while others die after some initial interest? Researchers have observed certain inherent attributes or qualities that either facilitate or inhibit an innovation. These attributes are found in the nature of the innovation, the organizational structure and culture of the adopting institution. Besides these generic attributes, factors such as top management support and availability of resources also affect innovation implementation.

4.4.1 The Nature of the Innovation

In the area of curricular innovations, ten attributes seem to encourage the successful implementation and sustainability of an innovation (Markee, 1997, p.59-60).

Among these ten attributes, five have been extensively discussed by Rogers (1995): relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability.

The first attribute is called *relative advantage*. The precondition to adopting an innovation is the concern for whether it brings advantages to all the stakeholders and, first of all, to the initiator and the adopter. An innovation is not likely to be adopted if it does not produce any benefits or perceived advantages to the adopter, either an individual or an institution. Moreover, the advantages resulting from the innovation should be relative to the time and resources invested on it.

The second attribute is *appropriateness* or *compatibility*. An innovation that is compatible to the adopter's culture, belief and value system, experiences, existing resources, logistics, and infrastructure is more likely to develop. For example, a WC well equipped with networked computers is more likely to innovate online tutoring than one without any networked computers. In addition, an innovation that has a moderate level of similarity to the status quo, i.e. within the "zone of innovation" (Stroller, in Markee, 1997, p.60), is more readily accepted. If an innovation is quite similar to existing practice, the need to innovate may not be felt. On the other hand, if it is too different or radical, it may be perceived as too novel and risky for adoption (King and Anderson, 2002).

The third attribute is *complexity*. This refers to the basic concepts of the innovation. If the innovation is too difficult to understand, then common sense says it cannot be implemented. Innovations involving new skills and new knowledge tend to be slower in adoption than innovations that build on existing skills and knowledge. For example, if a writing tutor does not understand the value and concept of non-directive writing conferencing, s/he is not likely to practice it.

The fourth attribute is *trialability*. An innovation that is incremental and can be adopted in stages is perceived as less difficult than wholesale adoption, and thus is more likely to be adopted. For example, an OWL innovation can start as a website to advertise on-site WC, or to disseminate online writing guides. Other features and functions such as e-publishing, synchronous and asynchronous tutoring can be conveniently added on in stages.

The fifth attribute is *observability*. An innovation that is highly visible or observable is more likely to be adopted. For example, if a newly innovated on-campus self-access center is located in a secluded corner, chances are it may not be noticed let alone used by end users.

The sixth attribute is the *form* of an innovation. A tangible innovation, for example new writing guide software, is more easily adopted by teachers than an abstract innovation such as a new method of teaching writing.

The seventh attribute is *explicitness*. An innovation that has an explicit rationale and a clearly stated plan of implementation is more likely to be adopted. It is important for end users to understand what they are supposed to adopt, and the reason behind the adoption, before any innovation can take off. End users may even resist any initial effort of introducing an innovation if they are suspicious of its rationale.

The eighth attribute is *originality*. The concept of whether the innovation is “home-baked” or “bought off the shelf” has some impact on an innovation. For example, if an online learning system is designed in house by its own team of professionals, it is more likely to be sustained long term than one that is designed by outsiders for two basic reasons. The first reason is that the software is tailor-made to the needs of the specific institution. The second is that the sense of ownership and pride will push for ongoing fine-tuning and therefore it is more likely to be sustained. “Ownership”, in the context of innovation discourse, is defined as “the acceptance of users of responsibility for implementing, sustaining, and further developing a personally meaningful version of the innovation” (Waters and Vilches, 2001, p.137).

The ninth attribute is *adaptability* of an innovation. Quite often, an innovation cannot be produced in house due to a lack of expertise or resources, or it may be more costly if it is self-made. In this case, an institution may out-source a suitable innovation. Therefore, an innovation that can be easily customized or modified to fit specific requirements will stand a better chance for adoption.

The last but not the least attribute is *feasibility* of an innovation. The question of a realistic match between an innovation and its available resources is equally important. If end users perceive that existing resources are unlikely to support the innovation, then the innovation will not take off.

Rogers (1995) sees the first five attributes as features that affect the rate of innovation adoption, and states that all the above attributes may be useful as a preliminary checklist in considering an innovation. For example, before innovating with a WC in Malaysia, the first step may be to check the generic attributes of a WC: is it beneficial for faculties and students? Is it compatible to existing beliefs and practice? Is it too complex for adoption? Can it be implemented on an incremental basis? In addition, will it be visible to the campus population?

4.4.2 Organization Structure and Culture

In this section, organization structure and culture are discussed together because the two entities are inter-related. Certain cultures tend to flourish in certain organization structures and vice versa. In considering an innovation for adoption in tertiary education, the following questions are pertinent. Is there an optimum organization structure and culture that promotes or facilitates the initiation or adoption of innovation and change? Is there a favorable environment where new ideas are more likely to incubate and germinate? What kind of attributes would most favor the growth and spread of new idea in a tertiary institution such as a university?

Several writers have observed some generic attributes of organization structure and culture that may serve as predictors of innovativeness. Sundbo (2001), for example, proposes four organization attributes that encourage innovations. The first attribute of an innovative organization is *self-manifestation*. A vibrant organization provides a work environment for individuals to demonstrate competence and capability in their roles in the organization. The organization has a clearly stated appraisal and reward system, and there is freedom for self-expression. The second is *interactivity*. The organization promotes interaction among its various departments and staffs. It favors cooperation and comradeship among its workforce. It is caring and supportive, professionally and socially, to its employees. New ideas tend to flourish in such a caring and supportive

environment. Next is *role pluralism*. An innovative organization has a tradition of incorporating different roles such as leaders, entrepreneurs, analysts, managers, coordinators, technician, clerical assistants, assessors, and critics, in the innovation team. The fourth attribute of an innovative organization is *networking*. While the second attribute, interactivity, stresses intra-organization interaction, networking means interaction with the external world or the macro environment. A culture of openness through networking in sharing and distributing information tends to facilitate innovations.

4.5 Resistance to Pedagogical Innovations

In relation to structure and culture of an organization, the biggest resistance to implementing a pedagogical innovation in a university is the belief and identity the faculty has attached to the institutionalized traditional classroom delivery mode (Jesse, 1998). The faculty is deemed a decisive factor to change as any top-down directive would “have little chance of being translated into action without faculty compliance” (p.23). This form of resistance needs to be investigated in the context of the prevailing culture of the university before an innovation can be successfully implemented, diffused and institutionalized. For example, in a university where the face-to-face lecture delivery mode is the dominant pedagogy, any proposed change that challenges this status quo will be met with high resistance. However, if the university were already practicing an alternative mode of delivery, then the resistance would be less intense. The first step in introducing an alternative mode of delivery, for example, virtual synchronous or asynchronous mode of delivery, is to change the perception, value and belief system of the faculty. A strategy to combat this form of resistance is by highlighting common problems related to the traditional lecture delivery that the faculty can appreciate, for example student passivity, the lack of participation in the “silent classroom” (Jesse, 1998, p.29), and over dependence on the faculty member as the sole provider of knowledge.

Another cultural factor, that of the student, is equally important. *Student culture* has been defined as “the experiences, beliefs and expectations of learning, teaching and assessment that students share and which influence their approach to learning” (Hocking, 2005, p.316). If students have been used to the kind of teacher-centered

classroom right from primary through secondary schools, they would have difficult changing when they move to the university. They would continue to practice the kind of *surface learning* that is more concerned with getting the answers the lecturer wants than understanding the issues (p.313). They would prefer to write down every word the lecturer says than to reflect critically on what the lecturer has said, or to relate the learning content to real life situation. They also would not be able or not want to critically question the lecturer or the textbook. Any effort to change this kind of surface learning culture to a more engaged one will be an uphill task.

In Malaysian universities, the prevailing academic culture places more importance on research and publication than teaching excellence. For promotion purposes, a university academic gets a heavier weighting for the number of research projects and publications completed rather than the quality of teaching. This existing culture somewhat discourages lecturers from innovating with new teaching and learning strategies (Hannan and Silver, 2000). Therefore, in the past, very few teaching and learning innovations have been initiated. If there was any pedagogical innovation, it was often in the form of a top-down administrative policy or directive, and seldom a bottom-up proposal from a lecturer. The prevailing student culture too does not favor any innovative effort from the lecturers in promoting student-centered or engaged learning. Students tended to regard lecturers who did not feed them with pages and pages of lecture notes as ill prepared, lazy or non-committal.

4.6 Implementing and Sustaining an Innovation

Many issues have been raised concerning the implementation and sustenance of innovations. Three main issues are of particular importance to innovations in tertiary education.

4.6.1 The Innovation Process

Many writers discuss the innovation process as made up of several stages. The stages each describes are different and are given different emphases. For example, the simple three-phase model of Sundbo (2001) comprises initialization (an innovation is

proposed to solve an identified problem), development (the innovation is analyzed and improved for implementation), and implementation (the innovation is put to practice).

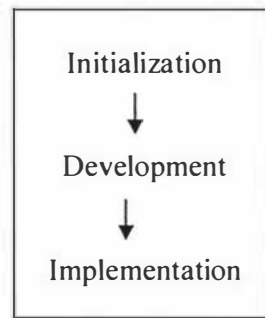


Figure 4.1 Sundbo's Innovation Process Model
(Adapted from Sundbo, 2001)

Goodman (2002) also proposes a three-phase model, but the manifestation of his three-phase model comprises one further step than Sundbo's (2001), that is, institutionalization (see Figure 4.2). The critical processes in the Goodman (2002) innovation model consist of planning, implementation, and institutionalization. First, the main tasks of planning are to identify the people who should be involved or might be affected by the innovation, and to coordinate the *change intervention* (a more sophisticated term for innovation) among the people, organization, and resources. Second, the main tasks of implementation include softening any possible resistance and different opinions, creating socialization processes among different stakeholders, creating feedback mechanism, and redesigning or modifying the innovation. Finally, the main tasks of institutionalization include motivating new and old participants through an organized reward system, ongoing feedback and redesigning in responding to unanticipated internal and external changes, changing knowledge, and diffusing the established innovation to other parts of the institution or partner institution.

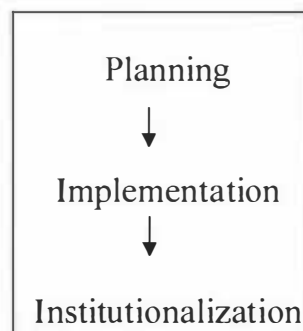


Figure 4.2 Goodman's Innovation Process Model
(Adapted from Goodman, 2002)

Markee's model (1997), in the context of curricular development, comprises five stages (see Figure 4.3). In planning for an innovation, goals are set according to priorities. The innovation is then developed by referring to the institutional and societal requirements. There is a need to adopt a forward approach in planning and developing an innovation as an innovation is meant to meet present and future needs. In formulating the action plan, national and institutional policies must be incorporated. The plan is then used to monitor innovation development effort. In developing and implementing the innovation, there must be ongoing communication with employers and superiors and among co-workers.

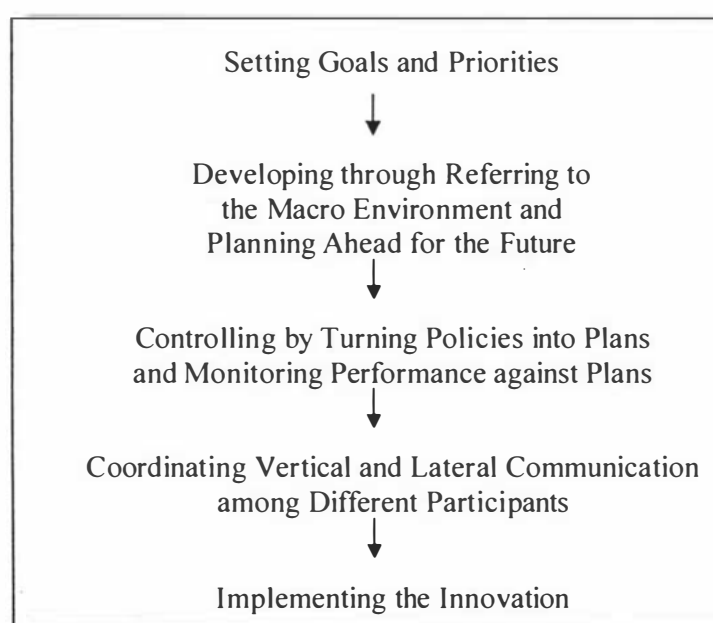


Figure 4.3 Markee's Curricular Innovation Process Model
(Adapted from Markee, 1997)

Taking a different approach, the innovation process development model proposed by Zaltman et al. (in King and Anderson, 2002) comprises two main phases of innovation (see Figure 4.4). The initiation phase is made up of three stages: i. Knowledge awareness – when the institution realizes a mismatch between the actual and the potential performance, and identifies an innovation to correct the problem or to improve the performance; ii. Formation of attitude – the people involved express their attitude to the proposed innovation; and iii. Decision – the innovation is analyzed and evaluated, and is consequently implemented or discarded. The implementation phase is

made up of two stages: i. Initial implementation – trial-and-error with the innovation, followed by modifying and fine-tuning the innovation; and ii. Continued-sustained implementation – the innovation becomes part of a routine practice in the institution.

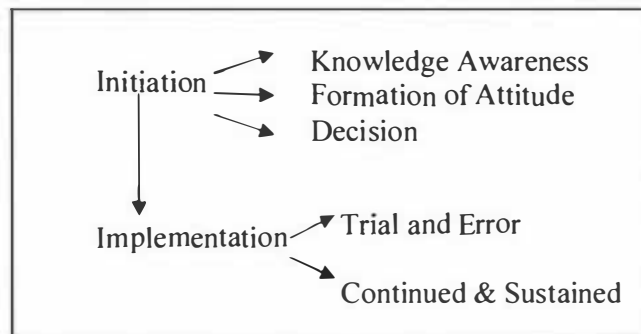


Figure 4.4 The Innovation Process Model of Zaltman et al.
(Adapted from King and Anderson, 2002)

Sundbo's and Markee's models seem to end at the implementation stage, while the Goodman's and Zaltman et al.'s models take innovation one step further by including how the innovation can be reutilized or institutionalized. In summing up, the stage-based models can be generalized into three common phases: *pre-adoption*, *while-adoption*, and *post-adoption*. These assumed stages of the innovation process are highlighted as a general guide, and not as a prescriptive norm. The purpose is to remind innovation leaders to consider all the possible actions and reactions in planning for and adopting an innovation. In actual practice, the stages of an innovation process are seldom discrete or linear (King and Anderson, 2002). In addition, not all innovations go through all the same stages.

While all the above models seem to see innovation as a linear process, some writers see it as a cycle. For example, King and Anderson (2002) call the final stage of an innovation life-cycle *exnovation*, as opposed to *innovation* (the beginning stage). To them, exnovation is the stage when the innovation becomes obsolete and is replaced by a new one to begin yet another cycle. Paech (2005) proposes *renovation* to mean the middle stage of an innovation where an innovation goes through redefinition, redesign, readjustment, reinvention, and re-implementation (see Figure 4.5).

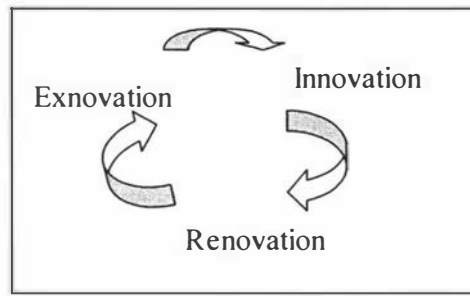


Figure 4.5 The Innovation Cycle

4.6.2 Innovation Diffusion Theory

In discussing the process of innovation, the innovation diffusion theory describes how a new idea spreads, and explains an observed predictive adoption pattern of an innovation by an s-shaped curve (Rogers, 1995). Everett Rogers defines it as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (in Inman, 2000, p.51). Different individuals or groups of individuals tend to perceive the same innovation differently, so the rate of adoption among them also varies.

The innovation diffusion theory categorizes innovation adopters into five groups (Rogers, 1995). The first to grasp a new idea is called *Innovators*, who usually form about 2.5% of the overall population involved in the innovation. Innovators are usually creative and enterprising. They also have a better capacity to cope with uncertainty and risks than the general population. They are always enthusiastic about the new idea they discover, and are equally keen to propagate the new idea. The second group is what Rogers called *Early Adopters*, who form about 13.5% of the overall population affected by the innovation. They are usually positive toward innovations, and confident users of innovations. Moreover, because they are well integrated in their social system, their opinions on an innovation often carry much weight. The third group is called *Early Majority*, who forms about 34% of the innovation population. They are not opinion leaders, but tend to adopt an innovation faster than the average members do. This group is crucial in forming the “critical mass”, that occurs “when enough people have adopted

an innovation to make the further rate of adoption assured or self-sustainable” (Robinson, 2002, p.23). The fourth group is called *Late Majority*, who also forms about 34% of the population. They are often cautious and doubtful in trying out any innovation, and are reluctant to risk their resources on anything new. They adopt only when under pressure. The last group is called *Laggards*, who form about 16% of the population. They are nearly invincible and are conservative. They feel safe with routine practices, and always refer to experiences.

This diffusion theory serves to inform innovation initiators that the initial stage of innovating is often more difficult than the rest of the innovation journey. However, if innovators can endure the teething period, and endeavor to build up the critical mass, the innovation is more likely to succeed. A few strategies have been found useful in accelerating the formation of the critical mass (Robinson, 2002), for example, offering rewards such as free service or products; involving whole group rather than individuals; engaging opinion leaders to campaign the innovation; and making the innovation the only way to conduct a task.

While the innovation diffusion theory categorizes adopters based on the different rates of innovation adoption, the Scott and Jaffe’s U-shaped curve (1990, in Szarina Abdullah, 1998, p.88) (see Figure 4.6) describes the transitional stages adopters usually experience in facing an innovation. The first square indicates that the first reaction is normally denial because experience does not know much about the external change. This is followed by resistance out of the response to protect oneself from the uncertainty or risks the change may bring. However, after some persuasion and getting more information regarding the change, the adopter tends to look to the future for benefits the change may bring. The initial exploration may then confirm the positive expectation that leads to commitment in the innovation.

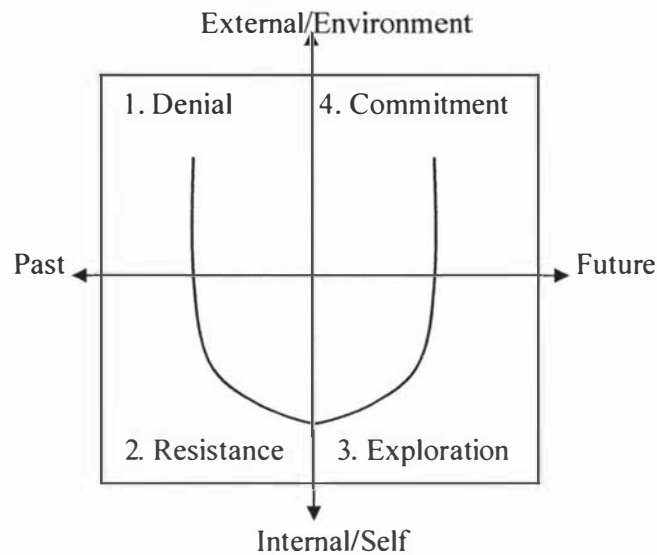


Figure 4.6 Transitional Stages in Innovation Adoption
(Source: Scott and Jaffe, in Szalina Abdullah, 1998, p.88)

4.6.3 Needs Analysis

The significance of needs analysis cannot be under estimated in the innovation cycle, as stressed in the following quotation (Waters and Vilches, 2001):

Implementing an ELT innovation involves analyzing a range of needs so that a sound strategy for maximizing the potential of adoption and ownership of the innovation can be developed. The quality of the implementation process, therefore, depends on the picture of needs underpinning it. (p. 133).

Indeed, needs analysis plays a vital role in all the three phases of innovation, that is, pre, while, and post adoption (see Section 4.6.1).

Waters and Vilches (2001) describe *when* and *how* needs are analyzed and how the analysis can be utilized in improving an ELT (English Language Teaching) innovation. They differentiate *levels* of needs from *areas* of needs. Levels of needs refer to a hierarchy of needs starting from the basic, then building up to the most advanced (represented by the vertical axis in Figure 4.7), while areas of needs refer to the different areas of development needs (represented by the horizontal axis). The four areas of needs in ELT are curriculum development, teacher learning, trainer learning, and ELT manager learning. Each area in turn has two levels of needs. The potential-

realizing needs can only be attended to after the foundation-building needs have been taken care of. For example in the area of curriculum development needs, Waters and Vilches (2001) argue that needs at the foundation-building level, i.e. the traditional approach of building up knowledge on forms, are essential in leading to the next level needs i.e. being able to manipulate language forms meaningfully as in the modern approach. In each level of each area, needs analysis is carried out through meetings, interviews, or questionnaires with innovation adopters (e.g. teachers) and end users (e.g. students). The feedback is then used to modify and adjust the innovation to fit specific local needs.

Besides needs analysis, strategies such as utility assessment in checking utility trends such as *who* use *what*, *why*, *when* and *how* (Markee, 1997), and ongoing evaluation on the effects of an innovation are equally important.

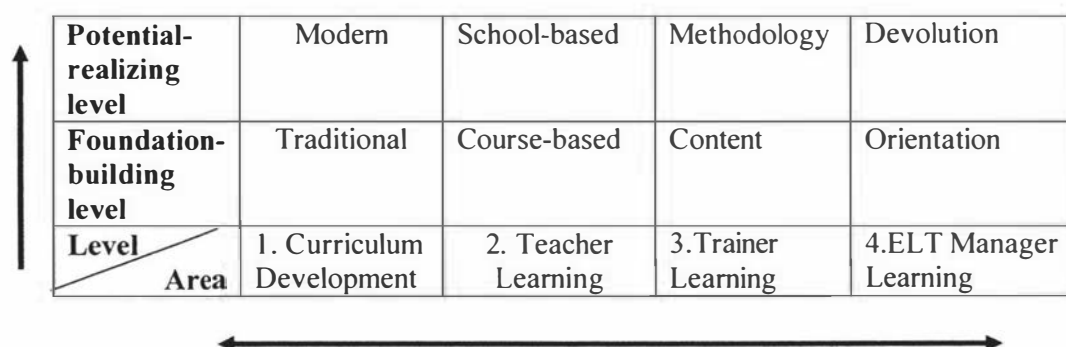


Figure 4.7 Levels and Areas of Needs
(Source: Waters and Vilches, 2001, p.133)

The Waters and Vilches' (2001) dual-level model of formative needs analysis in different areas of an innovation is similar to what Holliday (1994) describes as *means analysis*. He defines means analysis as:

An ongoing survey of the cultural, sociological, logistical, administrative, psycho-pedagogic and methodological features of the host educational environment as it changes in time before and during the process of innovation. (p. 199).

Therefore, a means analysis is made up of several needs analyses that shape the features of the various systems in the environment adopting the innovation. Although Holliday's (1994) proposed means analysis is for the process of syllabus design, the same can be applied in any curricular innovation process. For example, in Holliday's means analysis (1994), constraints are confronted from the very beginning of any innovation (see Figure 4.8), and constraints are not viewed negatively as problems or limitations. Instead, constraints are viewed as *conditions for design*. Modeling after Munby's (1978) syllabus specification and Holliday's means analysis (1994), *innovation specification* in the adapted innovation cycle (see Figure 4.8) means a listing of the people, the resources and the relationships (for example, who do what, when, how and why) that are involved in the micro and macro innovation environments, for the stages of innovation identification, planning, and implementation. *Innovation adjustment* means identifying any misfit between the innovation and the observed outcome or effects through *evaluation* after implementing the innovation. This evaluation includes Markee's (1997) utility assessment. There may be a need to redo the means analysis and to find a means to overcome any constraint, and to readjust the innovation specification and modify implementation details until the evaluation finds positive effects resulting from the innovation. The innovation is then diffused and institutionalized until it becomes obsolete for the initiation of yet another innovation.

The idea of needs analysis has been applied in this doctoral research project. In investigating whether a WC will support the development of academic writing competence of ESL undergraduates in a Malaysian university, a needs analysis questionnaire was administered to students and staff at Universiti Putra Malaysia. The purpose was to source empirical data to support if a WC will be congruent to the faculty and student expectation, perception, and needs (see Chapter VI).

Having reviewed the innovation rationales, typology, process, diffusion and attributes of successful innovations, the second part of this chapter now examines specific examples of innovation transfer in Asian universities, followed by WC innovations in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. Particular emphasis is placed, in the analysis of each example, on features of successful innovations.

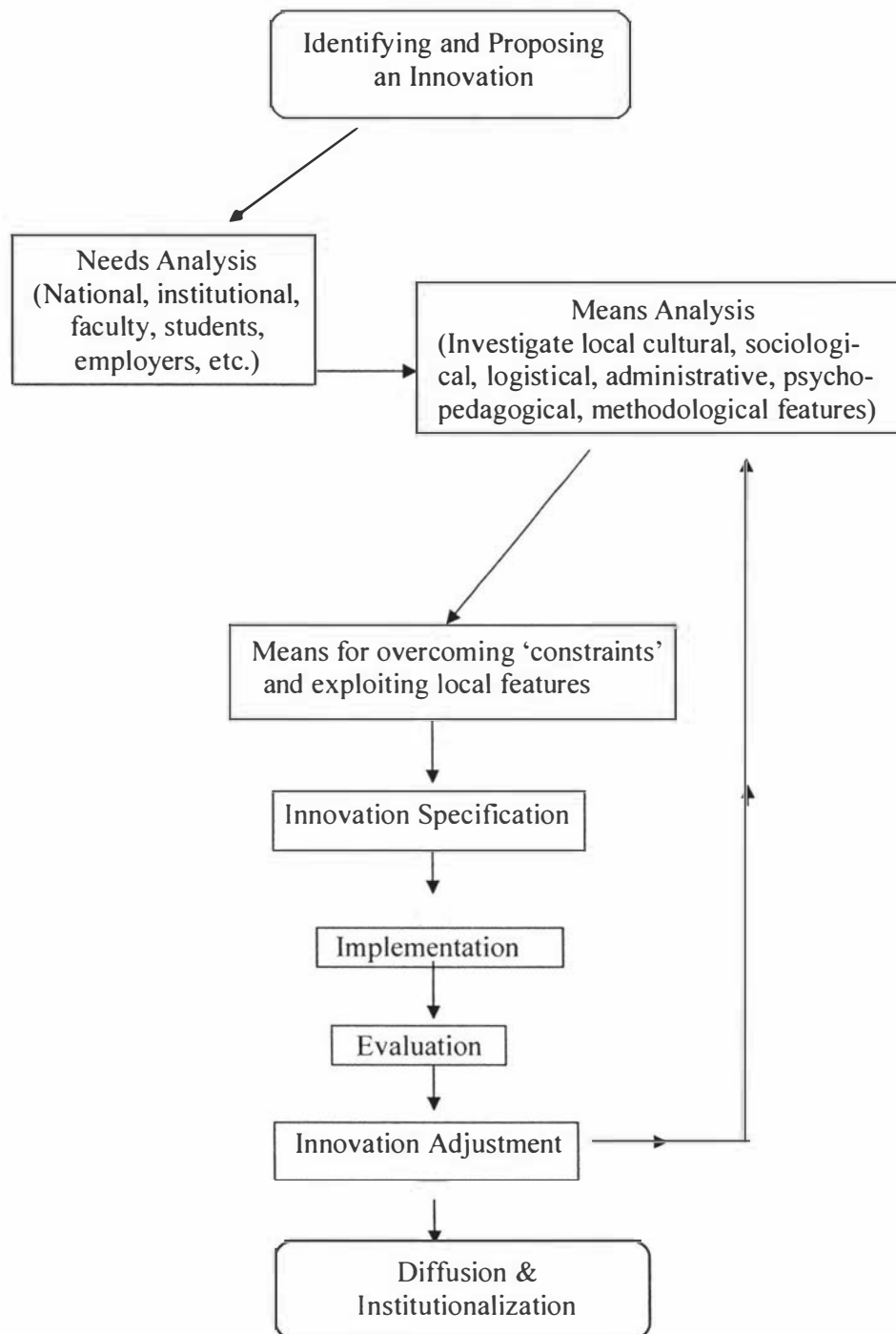


Figure 4.8 An Innovation Means Analysis Model
(Adapted from Holliday and Cooke 1982, p.135,
in Holliday, 1994, p.200)

4.7 Innovation Transfer in Asian Universities

Innovations in education occur in a *systemic ecology* i.e. an organic and dynamic environment comprising different systems such as institutional, educational, administrative, political, and cultural systems (Markee, 1997, p.4). For any innovation to operate, it must be congruent to these systems. This is what Goodman (2001, p.168) describes as “the alignment of multiple systems” comprising human, technology and organization. As Goodman’s work (2001) focuses on technology-enhanced learning, the technology system is the innovation. In comparison, Goodman’s innovation sphere seems to highlight just the human and organization issues, whereas Markee’s innovation ecology covers much wider sphere. Indeed, besides the endurance and persistence of the change leader, the success or failure of an innovation depends very much on the social, cultural, political, and economic factors that facilitate or inhibit the change. In transferring western innovations into eastern contexts, the main obstacle lies in the difficulty in achieving socio-cultural congruence, i.e. appropriateness or compatibility discussed in Section 4.4.1.

An example of political culture affecting language innovation is the Malaysian Project funded by the British Council in the late 70s. It was intended to promote the notional-functional syllabus in Malaysian schools that had a tradition of ELT focusing on grammar (Markee, 1997). The project was launched at about the same time when Malaysia government implemented the language planning policy that changed the medium of instruction from English to Malay. Due to the reduced contact with English, the standard of English competence among the students declined drastically. However, critics were quick to attribute the decline in English to the new syllabus innovation for not teaching grammar.

The notional-functional syllabus innovation did not take off well in Malaysia mainly because it did not have one of the five important attributes of successful innovations (Rogers, 1995; see Section 4.4.1), that is, compatibility to the existing political climate, and cultural, educational, value and belief systems. The timing of introducing the curricular innovation was also not quite right, as the nationalistic movement in promoting the national language and downgrading the English language was going on. The incongruity of all these factors contributed to the poor uptake of the

syllabus. Besides lacking in the compatibility feature of a successful innovation, the notional-functional syllabus comprised new ideas in teaching, hence the form of the innovation was intangible, that has proven to be more difficult to implement than a tangible innovation such as a CD-ROM for teaching reading skills (Rogers, 1995). The intangible form of the notional-functional syllabus also rendered the ideas less visible and more complicated to teachers who had deep-rooted experience with teaching English using the structural syllabus, and who did not appreciate the relative advantages of the new notional-functional syllabus.

In relation to existing culture in a system, the practice, belief and value of the parties involved in an innovation also substantially impact on the adoption and implementation of an innovation. Such an example can be seen in an INSET (In Service English Teachers Training) course conducted some time ago in Indonesia (Lamb, 1995). In this case, the theory of *teacher culture* was a decisive factor (Jaffee, 1998; see discussion in Section 4.5). Although the local English language teachers were enthusiastic and positive about the new ideas on reading methodology they learned from the course, each interpreted the new ideas differently according to their “mental parameters” that Lamb (1995) described as “individual teacher’s theory” (p. 73). Due to the different interpretations or beliefs, the new ideas the INSET course aimed to disseminate received various reactions, ranging from no uptake to confusion, merely using labeling and appropriation to account for a change in a classroom practice, wholesale assimilation, adaptation, or total rejection. The unanticipated outcome led Lamb (1995) to suggest more awareness-raising activities be included in future INSET courses. It was realized that simply supplying “ready-made solutions for predetermined problems” would most probably result in no uptake if the teachers could not relate the solutions to their deep-rooted values and practice.

For this instructional innovation, the relative advantage of the innovation was appreciated by the organizer and the participating teachers of the INSET course. However, as each of the participants had their own mental parameters, they appropriated the new ideas from the innovation according to their own beliefs and contexts. Hence, there were varying degrees from zero to limited uptake. This innovation transfer case illustrates that existing teacher culture and learner culture (see Section 4.5) are crucial to the successful uptake of any curricular innovation. Again, similar to the notional-

functional syllabus innovation in Malaysia, this innovation lacks compatibility to local culture and belief systems. The results suggest that congruence to adopters' ecology is the most important attribute of any innovation. In addition, the new ideas, being intangible, might be too complex for the teachers to grasp within a short span of the course duration of ten days. Therefore, follow-up reinforcement or refreshment training and support are essential in improving the innovation uptake and implementation.

In the area of ELT in tertiary education, a number of innovation transfers from western culture to eastern contexts have taken place. One such example is the big innovation project in The Philippines, known as Philippines English Language Teaching (PELT) project (1995-99), where the two authors, Waters and Vilches (2001), who proposed a needs analysis framework (see Section 4.6.3), were involved. Waters functioned as the Western consultant, while Vilchers was the local expert. Together they complemented one another's cultural knowledge, and this contributed towards a more locally compatible innovation, as the innovation had been modified in adapting to local practice and culture. A lesson learnt from this innovation transfer is that any wholesale adoption of a Western innovation in an Eastern context may not be a good idea.

In Malaysia, an example of a big innovation transfer project involved a local university, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), collaborating with two universities in Australia, an open learning agency in Canada, and two international aid agencies (Dhanarajan and Guiton, 1993). The purpose of the collaboration was to 'transfer' the techniques of designing and writing distance learning modules. Faculty members from USM were sponsored to attend technique courses in Australia and Canada, and consultants from Australia and Canada visited USM to conduct training seminars and workshops. This innovation transfer was a great success due to several favorable factors. The main driving force was the favorable political climate in Malaysia. There was a national agenda to leapfrog tertiary access by distance learning, and this has met the compatibility attribute of a successful innovation. Another factor was the strong leadership in the well-planned top-down management of all the innovation collaborators. Although all the institutions involved had differing cultures and management styles, they were able to achieve understanding through open dialogue and acknowledging the diversity in their systems. These organizational factors were attributes of an organization where innovations have better chances to flourish (see Section 4.4.2).

However, the most important contributing factor was that the transfer only involved techniques and knowledge pertaining to designing and writing distance learning modules, and not the content of the modules. This arrangement had cleverly avoided cultural sensitivity that might have arisen if western content had been used.

All these examples raise issues pertinent to the question of, if the concept of WCs and OWLs is to be implemented in Malaysia, how should it be best introduced? Perhaps importing the techniques not the content, and adjusting the techniques to local environment instead of wholesale adoption might be a viable option.

4.8 Innovating Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs outside North America

From the late 1990s, cases of innovating WCs outside North America have been heard in a few Asian and European countries. In Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea, the infusion of WCs and OWLs has been effected by Westerners who took up a teaching or professional contract at the institutions. For example, Ted Knoy at the National Chiao Tung University of Taiwan (see http://www.cc.nctu.edu.tw/~tedknoy/html/w_eng.htm), Julia Gardner at the National University of Singapore (see <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/feedback.html>), and Adam Turner at the Hanyang University of Korea (see <http://ctl.hanyang.ac.kr/writing/>).

A thorough web search through an online list of universities in Thailand and Philippines and an exhaustive check through the full list of public universities in Malaysia (see Appendix 4.1) did not return any hit based on the search term *writing center* or its British spelling. However, the possibility of WCs and OWLs or their prototypes of sort existing in these Asian countries cannot be ruled out, given that universities and colleges of these Asian countries have sent faculty members to pursue doctoral studies in North America, and these overseas postgraduate students are likely to bring back ideas about WCs and OWLs. Another possibility could be the exposure to WC and OWL literature, as the field has existed since the early 20th Century.

For the purpose of comparing North American and non-North American (Asian and European) WC innovations, three WC innovations in Hong Kong, and one each in Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Korea are discussed before considering WC innovations

in Europe. For a list of Asian WCs, please refer to Appendix 4.2, and European WCs Appendix 4.3.

4.8.1 Writing Center Innovations in Asia

A few universities in some Asian countries, e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore have some kind of organized support to help their students learn the art of academic writing. The writing support is usually subsumed under a broader service, e.g. a self-access centre or a learning centre. Some of these writing support systems have gone online to disseminate information about the physical centers, or to provide downloadable writing references.

Kathy Hayward (1994) reported two WC innovations in Hong Kong. The Baptist College in Hong Kong started the WC known as Writing Enhancement Service when the teaching staff found that their students had problems with writing their term papers and theses despite going through a first year EAP course. The WC employed four full time tutors to provide voluntary help in all aspects of writing for students who were writing up projects in their major fields. Although the WC was generally successful, it faced some major problems. Students tended to ask for proofreading help, or help with other skills such as listening or speaking. Some teachers used it as a “dumping ground” for students who were generally weak in English.

The WC at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) was established as part of its Independent Learning Centre (ILC) for several reasons. Housing the WC in the ILC helped save tutorial time. Students could work independently in areas where they could work by themselves by referring to available resources such as writing models and guidebooks. This arrangement helped students see tutors as someone “who help them to help themselves”. In addition, counselors at the ILC could direct weak students to relevant resources at the centre. The WC in ILC also helped to attract students who are normally only concerned with academic writing to visit ILC, and thus opened their eyes to other services of the ILC. These students would then function as informants of the ILC to other students. Most importantly, the presence of the WC in the ILC sparked interest followed by commitment in improving academic writing by students and faculty staff across all departments at the CUHK.

Today, universities in Asia that had started some form of writing support initiatives years ago have generally extended this kind of support online, and the CUHK is no exception. Its English WC website at <http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk> stresses that the WC does not provide proofreading service, and the tutors will help on style, and not the content of writing. The website also gives the opening hours of the WC, and other services such as self-access and CALL language resources provided by the ILC.

Another university of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) has developed very impressive online writing support in its English Center (see <http://ec.hku.hk/>). Although HKU does not have a name like WC or OWL, its online writing support is provided via two online self-access and fully guided websites known as The Writing Machine and The Writing Turbocharger. The Writing Machine helps students master the process of writing academic essays based on 10 online self-help sections on writing skills such as writing the introduction, paragraph development, referencing skills, proof-reading and editing, while The Writing Turbocharger shows students how to tap potentials from ICT in writing better essays right from their very first essay in the university. The systematic guide teaches writing skills alongside computing skills.

In language learning technology, numerous innovations have been initiated out of the enthusiasm of individual innovators, and not from top management directives. For example, in the old days of CALL, a British professor named John Higgins designed a number of English language software out of his strong personal interest. Similar personal interest and commitment has prompted Ted Knoy to design the very first Chinese OWL when he was a faculty member at the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan. When he took up a new position in another university, he took the OWL with him. The Chinese OWL is now resided at http://www.cc.nctu.edu.tw/~tedknoy/html/w_eng.htm. His OWL website is bilingual, in both English and Chinese. Other than providing online resources such as downloadable guides for various writing skills in particular technical writing that seems to be his stronghold, and advertisements for various language skill courses, the unique feature is the online tutoring request submission form. He is extending this free service to anyone, and is inviting submission of manuscripts for his online tutors to provide general comments within 48 hours.

In addition to the writing support initiatives discussed in the preceding sections, the IWCA website shows two links to two non-American tertiary WCs in Asia. One is the Japanese WC at Osaka Jogakuin College, the other is the Korean WC at Hanyang University, Seoul. The Japanese WC reflects the features of an Information OWL described by Koster (2002), and its physical WC resembles the Extracurricular WC described by Hilgers and Marsella (1992). Out of its eight writing resource links, one is to the IWCA homepage and a listening practice site, the rest are all grammar resources with two links that provide explanation in Japanese (see http://www.wilmina.ac.jp/studylink/Writing_Center/index.htm). The homepage encourages students to visit the physical WC, located in the Self-Access and Study Support Center, to improve their writing. Students can make appointments online by clicking on the 'Appointment' link just below the Writing Resources link. A possible reason for the Appointment link in Japanese is perhaps to make it more visible to students. In the Index panel, the Writing Guidelines, Plagiarism and FAQs are in both English and Japanese. This bilingual OWL might be good for Japanese students with very limited English to get started.

Efforts to start a WC at the University of Tokyo have also been initiated since mid-2005. It was reported that a Japanese professor invited a North American WC practitioner to provide consultancy in establishing a WC at the University of Tokyo (Diamond, 2005).

The website of the National University of Singapore WC also has a simple design, reflecting that of an Information OWL too (Koster, 2002) (see <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/>). The information given includes the philosophy, scope and nature of peer tutoring, opening hours of the WC, event and workshop announcement, the work of a writing assistant, application for the post of a writing assistant, FAQs, feedback from users, and links to academic writing resources, conventions and styles, dictionaries, concordances and other WCs. The WC offers free individual face-to-face peer conferencing to only undergraduate students who are following the University Scholars Program (USP). Hence, the WC is Cocurricular (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). The USP program of the National University of Singapore aims to nurture "the intellectual, leadership, and personal potential of promising students" through "a rigorous broad-based multidisciplinary curriculum and

exciting local and overseas research and beyond-the-classroom learning opportunities” (USP, 2005). The USP WC does not offer phone or online asynchronous conferencing. Students from various semesters and working at various stages of their writing assignments can make an appointment through e-mails to consult a Writing Assistant. The Writing Assistants are selected from USP students who are either in the first or second year, and who have performed well academically especially in the Writing and Critical Thinking Module. The short-listed applicants will be trained and they normally work three paid hours per week. The WC also conducts workshops of writing concerns occasionally.

Different from the WC at the National University of Singapore that serves only undergraduates of a specific program, the Korean WC at the Hanyang University Center for Teaching and Learning serves both faculty members and graduate students. According to the website, the WC offers “free individual help editing English writing for content, organization, flow, logic, and style.... Important differences between Korean and English writing style can also be explained.” (<http://ctl.hanyang.ac.kr/writing/>). Like the WC at Singapore, the Korean WC too does not proofread a paper for minor errors in grammar or spelling. The WC also does not correct assignments or coursework. Instead, its OWL provides proofreading tools for users to self-check their works. Users can either submit their work on paper or by e-mail before they confer face-to-face or via e-mail with the WC director to discuss their writing. The WC does not seem to employ peer tutors, and it is more of an Extracurricular WC (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992).

As compared to the Singaporean OWL, the Korean OWL is more sophisticated in terms of static contents and interactive tools. It reflects the Interactive OWL model Koster (2002) describes as it has a Writing Tips Bulletin Board to display answers to users’ questions, and editing via e-mail. Besides a good variety of online writing tools including some worthy of mention such as the Visual Thesaurus, the concordance and the bilingual Korean-English dictionary, the OWL also has a rich array of linked and self-created resources to help with writing for journal research papers for various disciplines, thesis or dissertation, college or job application, essays, letters and e-mails. The WC also conducts workshops, and the workshops’ PowerPoint (PPT) files and handouts plus other PDF and RTF¹ files are uploaded to the OWL.

The unique features of this ESL WC/OWL include some bilingual resources in both English and Korean, for example, the directions for receiving WC services. This application of bilingualism is also practiced at the Japanese OWL. The Korean OWL also has graphic organizers to aid mental mapping, for example, a visual Thesaurus and Different Types of Documents. Furthermore, the director practices contrastive rhetoric to help his clients see the difference between English and Korean writing.

4.8.2 Writing Center Innovations in Europe

About WCs in Europe, the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) provides some links to the members' websites or OWLs (see www.ewca.org). The EWCA was founded in 1998 and accepted as a regional affiliate of the IWCA in 2000. Initially the EWCA consisted of American tertiary institutions operating in Europe such as American College of Thessaloniki, American University of Greece, and American University of Paris, but it now has members in most European countries. Interest on the application of WC as writing support reached its height when EWCA organized a Peer-Tutors Training Workshop in 2002 held at Halkidiki, Greece. The workshop was conducted by two WC experts from the USA, namely Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail (Challenger et al., 2003). A positive result of the workshop was an increase in the number of WCs in Europe. Three of these WC initiatives are discussed here for establishing some differences between North American and non-North American WCs or OWLs.

The University of Antwerp in Belgium has an OWL but not a physical WC (see http://extranet.ufsia.ac.be/calliope/En_Calliope.html). The reason given for the absence of a WC is that students only have a limited number of writing assignments, thus maintaining a physical WC might not be as cost-effective as maintaining an OWL (Opdenacker, 2003). This Belgian OWL is called Calliope, and its design and development started from 2001 (Opdenacker, 2003).

The main purpose of Calliope is to serve students of the Faculty of Business Economics, who are required to take business, academic or technical communication courses in four languages including Dutch, English and French plus either German or

Spanish (Opdenacker and Van Waes, 2003). Hence, the WC is Cocurricular (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992) in that it complements courses taught by the Faculty. The Calliope prototype is being designed for the mentioned five languages, with the first three in use at present while the German and Spanish sites are still under construction (as of August 2005). The designers intend to develop Calliope to complement and not to replace classroom teaching. They propose that more complex interactive group tasks are best conducted in class, while the more personal self-access type of skills can be learned from the Calliope (Opdenacker and Van Waes, 2003).

To cater for different learning styles based on the guided problem-solving modular approach, each self-access module comprises three components: Theory, Practice, and Case study (Opdenacker and Van Waes, 2003). The Theory component is the subject matter where the what, how and why of a writing task, for example press release, is explained. The Practice component is made up of exercises for students to work on, for example rewriting a press release in plain English. A model answer will appear by clicking the Key button for students to check and compare their answers. The Case component presents a real-life case and questions that require the mastery of related sub-skills to solve a problem. Students are free to start from any of the three components (http://extranet.ufsia.ac.be/calliope/En_Calliope.html).

An overview of the Calliope shows that it belongs to the category of a simple Interactive OWL (Koster, 2002) as users have the chance to interact with the online modules and receive feedback by comparing their answers with the model answers. However, there is an absence of interaction via e-mail or any other form of asynchronous or synchronous tools.

The WC of the Central European University (CEU) is called the Center for Academic Writing (see <http://www.ceu.hu/writing/mission.htm>). Unlike the Belgian Calliope that only serves students, this WC serves faculty and both graduate and undergraduate students across disciplines. Students can make an appointment for an individual one-to-one consultation within an Academic Writing course conducted by the WC (in this respect, it is a Curricular WC as defined by Hilgers and Marsella, 1992), or they can meet a writing consultant for help with a writing assignment, a term paper, a thesis, an article for publication, or any career oriented writing such as a resume or a job

application letter. In this respect, it is an Extracurricular WC (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992). The appointment can be made by physically signing up at the WC or via e-mail.

However, the OWL does not conduct e-mail or online consultation. Hence, it is an Information OWL (Koster, 2002). The online self-access resources comprise, for example, discipline specific writing advice, writing the various parts of a research paper, citation styles, critical reading, research proposal, thesis, revising and editing, time management, oral presentation, reading skills, concordancers, career and study, grammar and punctuation, and international language tests (CEU Center for Academic website, 2005).

The WC also conducts language courses such as Hungarian, French and German for staff and students. It also collaborates with the University's Special Extension Program to train teachers in the region to teach writing skills. The website has an exit feedback form to collect and analyze data from users (CEU Center for Academic website, 2005). From this perspective, this WC is also an R&D WC (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992).

The WC at Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey, administers four well-defined writing programs for staff, graduate and undergraduate students. The Undergraduate Program aims to "strengthen students' writing skills in interdisciplinary studies" (see the OWL at <http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/writingcenter/undergrad.php>) through workshops, individual writing tutorials with academics or peer tutors, a writing contest, and an online Writers' Forum. The themes of the workshops are decided through a student needs assessment and consultation with the faculty. Such themes include writing process series, rhetorical styles series, word power, effective presentations, creative writing series, and essay exams. The online support materials comprise handouts, worksheets, charts, PPT slides for each workshop, and additional practice materials for each tutorial (Sabanci University WC Website, 2005).

For the Graduate Program, the aim is to teach research principles and scholarly writing, and to foster a community of writers. Activities include an adjunct course conducted by the faculty, workshops on expository and persuasive essays, netiquette, presentation skills, and report writing; individual tutorials for dissertation; and online

support materials such as the Handbook for the Preparation of Dissertation, and the Manual for the Preparation of Project Reports (Sabanci University WC Website, 2005).

The third program, Academic and Career Advising Program, aims to help staff and students with their overseas university applications or job applications. Activities include study groups for graduate entrance exams such as the GRE and the GMAT, workshops for computer-based TOEFL, and tutorials on writing CV, application letters, interviewing strategies, and English proficiency assessment (Sabanci University WC Website, 2005).

Lastly, the Administrative English Program is a four-week summer intensive course aims to “reinforce the bilingual characteristics of the University) (see <http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/writingcenter/administrative.php>). The course is designed based on feedback from a needs questionnaire and a placement test for the administrative staff. For the Beginners level, the focus is more on spoken and reading skills, and for the more Advanced level, the focus is on writing skills. In addition to the administration of the four writing programs, the OWL has various archived materials in PowerPoint and multimedia formats, a Bulletin Board for announcements, FAQs, Useful Links, Workshop Evaluation, Essay Feedback Checklists, English Plays, and a recommended Reading List. Due to the presence of the Online Forum and the Bulletin Board, the WC website fits into the description of an Information OWL (Koster, 2002), and the WC plays all the four roles of the Extracurricular, Cocurricular, Curricular and R&D WCs.

4.8.3 Comparing North American and Non-North American WCs and OWLs

Both North American (for example, Harris, 2004; Breuch, 2005) and non-North American (for example, Opdenacker and Waes, 2003) WC advocates have expressed the difficulty in producing a representative model of a WC or an OWL. After careful analyses of four Asian and three European WCs through their websites or OWLs, and browsing through all those listed on Appendix 4.2 and 4.3, it is clear that every WC or OWL is as different as every individual human. Therefore, it is difficult to decide on the features that constitute a North American or a non-North American OWL, and to

pinpoint the differences. After all, the North American WCs and OWLs are also being used to support ESL and EFL learners from all over the world.

Nevertheless, some generalizations can be made. The most obvious is that the non-North American OWLs are either monolingual (in English or the native language), bilingual or multilingual, while the North American OWLs are 100% monolingual and English. The OWLs in Asia are either monolingual (usually English, for example, the Singaporean OWL) or bilingual (English and the native language, for example, the Chinese OWL in Taiwan), while those in Europe are usually bilingual or multilingual. This serves to confirm that away from the native country, the WC approach has also been used to teach writing in other languages.

Another possible difference is that most North American WCs use peer tutors, but the Asian and European WCs seemed to use more academics or faculty members than peer tutors. The third possible difference might be the absence of e-mail and real time tutoring in Asian and European WCs. The fourth might be the lack of local content as most of the Asian and European OWLs seemed to organize their online static resources through establishing links to the North American OWLs. The reason might be that most of these WCs have been developed recently from the late 1990s or early 2000s, and they need time to develop local content and to incorporate technology incrementally in their WCs.

On the other hand, from the similarity perspective, most Asian and European OWLs declare the policy of no proofreading service just like the North American OWLs do. Most of these non-North American WCs offer face-to-face individual tutoring, themed workshops, and a rich collection of online support materials. Some of the European WCs play an active role in R&D and staff development besides supporting students' writing process. A final similarity is that most of these non-North American WCs also have academic writing as the main focus, although a number of them also include oral presentation, reading and writing for career purposes in their list of functions.

4.8.4 Lessons from Asian Writing Centers

As part of the enquiry, and because very little published material is available on Asian WCs and/or OWLs, contact was made with a number of Asian WC directors or coordinators to gain insights into their experience of introducing and developing a WC and/or OWL in their tertiary contexts. In addition, the problems and constraints they experienced and the limitations in the process of innovation were a focus of interest, together with more successful aspects of the innovation process and of the WC itself. The following discussion is based on in-depth personal communications with three Asian WC directors. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of the directors are not revealed here.

Of these three Asian WCs, the earliest established was the City University of Hong Kong (CUHK) WC in 1994. The idea was initiated by a faculty member of the English Language Teaching Unit and supported by the university Management. From September 2005, the CUHK WC became an independent entity by ending its affiliation to the English Language Teaching Unit, and it is now a component of the Independent Learning Center (ILC) of CUHK. According to the WC director of the CUHK, an average of 500 students uses the WC services every year. The writing problems students sought help for are mainly related to resumes, application letters, personal statements, and academic writing. Thus far, the WC has not conducted any form of formal evaluation. As part of the on-going effort in promoting autonomous or independent learning, students have been encouraged to identify and rectify their mistakes in writing. This self-learning factor has complemented the WC counselling, and students were found to become autonomous learners based on informal observation. On the whole, the CUHK students who visited the WC to seek help in reading, speaking and listening, like the advice and materials recommended by the WC consultants. However, the students felt pressurized when they were asked to edit their own writing because they expected the consultants to proofread their work. In overcoming this problem, the WC has to reiterate that the consultants do not function as editors but resource persons who help them edit their work and solve their own learning problems.

The second Asian WC was from the Korean WC at the Hanyang University of Seoul (HUS). The WC and its website were established in March 2004. The initiative

came from its current director, who was a westerner employed by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at HUS. The WC is funded by the CTL, which is a separate entity from the Department of English. Being the only writing consultant at the WC, the director could only serve an average of one graduate or faculty client per day. The writing conference is usually intensive and may take up to two hours per conference. The intensive conference covers both higher and lower order concerns of writing. Most WC clients were initially only interested in getting “correct expressions”. Some of them changed their views on writing after the WC conference experience. Similar to the WC of CUHK, the WC of HUS has not been able to conduct any formal assessment due to the lack of human resources in tracking hundreds of clients. However, judging by the repeated visits and the high increase in publication rate, the WC might have made some positive impact on the clients’ writing.

The writing consultant of HUS felt that his application of a corpus analysis approach in the WC conferencing, that is, by analyzing language expressions in published journal articles in disciplines such as engineering and medicine, was convincing in getting his clients’ trust of his expertise in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The genre-based approach has enabled the writing consultant to see the difference in various types of research writing, and to provide a good source of authentic examples to serve better his clients who major in various disciplines. Another positive aspect of the WC support was the small group workshops on specific writing skills. In the last academic term, about 25-44 faculty and graduate students attended five such workshops organized for them.

The main problem faced by the WC of HUS was similar to that experienced by the WC of CUHK, that is, clients’ demand for proofreading or grammar check. The director of the HUS WC has been explaining the difference between WC approach and grammar check to his clients. Another problem experienced by the HUS WC was the absence of administrative personnel to support the WC director’s work, for example, in tracking the WC usage and justifying the WC work.

In addition to the above responses, the director of the HUS WC commented that ESL tertiary students in Asia generally lacked support for helping them write in English. Such a support mechanism was greatly needed given the fact that Asian tertiary students

did not usually have a good foundation in writing in their first language such as Korean or Japanese (see also, for example, Kobayashi and Rinnert, 2002; “Interdependence Hypothesis” in Cummins, 1980). The director also commented that a WC is better positioned in a learning support center than a department of English. Firstly, students weak in writing were also found to be weak in learning strategies, and by being a part of a learning support center, related problems to writing such as learning could be tackled as well. Secondly, the director had personally observed a lack of confidence in the English Department’s competence in tutoring writing in the sciences. On top of the above, the director commented that a traditional classroom approach to writing was not effective in helping students write in English compared to the WC approach. Furthermore, a non-directive peer model of conferencing was more difficult to implement in an Asian context than a directive apprentice model.

The third and the last Asian WC was the WC of the National University of Singapore (NUS). It became operational in January 2003. The WC is affiliated to the Writing and Critical Thinking domain of the NUS University Scholars Program (UPS). According to the current NUS WC director, the Writing and Critical Thinking domain was modeled after the Expository Writing program of the Harvard University. Logically, the WC of NUS is also modeled after the WC of Harvard. At the initial stage of setting up the Writing and Critical Thinking domain, the NUS faculty worked closely with Professor Nancy Sommers, who was the then director of the Harvard Expository Writing program. Professor Nancy Sommers was probably the first person to suggest that the USP of NUS establish a WC. The Dean of the UPS supported the initiative, and a faculty member, Dr. Julia Gardner, volunteered to set up the WC. Since its establishment, the WC at NUS has always been a part of the USP and it is funded by the USP. The director of the WC usually also coordinates the Writing and Critical Thinking domain.

With regard to usage, the WC of NUS conducted about 160 conferences over a period of about 20 weeks in the 2005 academic year. Some of these conferences were conducted for students who sought help repeatedly. Students who enrolled in the USP tended to seek help with higher order concerns in writing such as thesis, motive, structure, evidence and analysis. Similar to the WC of CUHK, the WC of NUS has so far not done any formal measurement on the improvement in writing of students who

use the WC. However, the anonymous evaluation forms students filled in after conferences suggested that the experience was highly positive. Examples of such positive comments from student clients can also be viewed at <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/feedback.html>.

The director of the NUS WC felt that students' writing improvement was a joint effort and could only be realized when the WC worked closely with the writing faculty, who prepared the writing modules. The WC does not have problems in terms of technical, IT or administrative support. At present, most students who visit the WC tend to seek help with their assignments for their first-year writing modules in the USP. The WC staff plans to promote the WC as a place for other writing classes as well through more outreach and publicity.

Referring to the contexts of these three Asian WCs, the National University of Singapore WC seems to be closest to Malaysia as the status of English is that of an important or a second language, that is, ESL. The contexts of Korea and Hong Kong are more towards EFL, where English is not as widely used as in Singapore and Malaysia (Dudley and Evans, 1998). However, the Singaporean WC serves only one specific group of students enrolled in the University Scholar Program, who need help in academic writing and critical thinking (see Section 4.8.1). The Hanyang University of Korea WC serves both graduate students and faculty members from the disciplines of engineering, medicine, sciences, mainly with writing journal articles in English, and the director acknowledged that Korean undergraduates are required to write very little in English and even in Korean (Turner, 2006). The City University of Hong Kong (CUHK) WC serves all students. The WC proposed for Malaysia intends to serve undergraduates initially as this is the group who needs writing support the most, before extending the service to graduate students and faculty members. In this aspect, the CUHK WC model should be the closest.

Most of these Asian WCs are located in and administered by a bigger entity. For example, the Korean WC is part of the Center for Teaching and Learning, the CUHK WC is part of the Independent Learning Center, and the Singaporean one is an adjunct service to its USP program. Therefore, in terms of management and cost-effectiveness, the proposed Malaysian WC may gain from being situated in a bigger entity such as a

Student Learning Center (which is quite a common student support service practiced by New Zealand universities). The advantage of situating WC in a bigger entity is that the writing support becomes more visible to the student population, and being part of a bigger entity also ensures funding (see also other benefits reported by CUHK WC in Section 4.8.1; Hayward, 1994).

Concerning tutoring, the Korean and Hong Kong WCs employ teaching staff as writing tutors, while only the Singaporean WC trains students who have excelled in the USP program as tutors. The director of the Korean WC commented that a peer tutoring model is not possible for Korean culture as “age differences of even a year must be respected”, hence tutors are seen as tutors and the interaction is that of a teacher and a student, and not peers (Turner, 2006). Another factor might be that, for non-native students of English, tutoring writing in English is a very complex skill, and may not be mastered by students who do not have any teaching foundation and with only a brief period of tutor training. Due to this complexity, most Asian WCs engage faculty members as tutors. This model will also guide Malaysia in considering the appointment of tutors and tutor training.

With regard to tutoring strategies, the director of the Korean WC (Turner, 2006) and the director of the Waseda University WC of Japan (Yasuda, 2006) both commented that a collaborative, facilitative and non-directive tutoring strategy is not likely to work with their EFL clients who not only have to learn the art of writing but also English. Hence, they expect WC tutors to play the role of experts in telling them exactly what is wrong with their writing (Yasuda, 2006). In considering the tutoring strategy that will work for ESL or EFL clients, the stage of learning of the student can be used as a guide (Vygotsky, 1978). If the student is at the beginning stage of learning to write, a more directive approach will be more effective. For more advanced learners of writing, a facilitative or non-directive approach is necessary to give room for learners to develop their own writing strategies and their own voice (see also Powers, 1993; Williams, 2004).

Both the Hong Kong and Korean WCs reported the problem of students asking for proofreading help, which is in practice against the WC founding principle of improving the writer not the writing. Indeed, most WCs have experienced students

requesting proofreading as such reports have often appeared in the Writing Lab Newsletter and the Writing Center Journal (see, for example, Myers, 2003; Purcell, 1998). Logically, the proofreading need would be more acute among ESL clients as they have more language problems. For example, at UPM, faculty members and students are willing to pay for proofreading services in return for an error-free report, article or dissertation in English. All these are evidence of the genuine need of ESL students for proofreading, and a WC would be counter-productive in resisting the need. Therefore, a WC proposed for UPM must be able to mitigate this “problem”, and this issue will be taken up again in Chapter VII (see Section 7.5.5)

In addition to the limited usage statistics reported by the three Asian WC directors in the earlier sections, some glimpses of the Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) WC utility were obtained from the WC news published on the OJC OWL. The news (OJC WC News, October 25, 2004) reported that 158 students sought help from the WC in the academic year of 2004. As OJC had a total of 752 students, the percentage of students who had used the WC worked out to be 21%. The bulk of the clientele was from first year junior college (39.9%), followed by second year junior college (34.8%). The statistics is in line with the usage pattern of a North American WC that reported first year students made up the bulk of their clientele (Lerner, 2001). The statistics from the OJC WC also revealed that the type of help most sought for by students were organizing papers (34.4%), grammar and mechanics (21.1%), and vocabulary (17.5%) (OJC WC News, November 20, 2004). While these statistics may be useful for comparative purposes, it is based on just one Asian WC. Therefore, it is not suitable for use in indicating any usage trend in other Asian WCs.

These WCs and their OWLs continue to thrive, and their success can be attributed to several features linked to successful innovations (see Section 4.4; Markee, 1997; Rogers, 1995). The most important attribute is the perceived relative advantage of the WC and OWL. These WCs and OWLs have been useful in helping faculties and students improve their writing skills, and thereby contributed to increased publications internationally (in the case of the Korean WC), and improved academic performance (Turner, 2006; Yasuda, 2006). The attribute of compatibility has also played an important role. All of these Asian WCs have been modified in adapting to local culture and practice, and there was no wholesale adoption of a North American WC or OWL

model. The adaptation of the WC has also given it a sense of originality, that it is not a complete 'copy' work and thereby enhances the sense of ownership. It was also not too complex for these Asian universities to initiate a WC or OWL as they have teaching staff who are well versed with teaching ESL / EFL writing, and instructional experts who can help with WC tutor training. There is trialability as the services of the WC or OWL can be incremental, for example, from serving a small group of clients to several groups, and the resources can be added on as time goes. This incremental feature has also contributed to the feasibility of the WC, as it can start small scale, and hence budgeting and logistical considerations are less complicated.

There is also visibility as the physical space of the WC is often publicized by the virtual OWL, and faculties who want students to hand in better written assignments also help in publicizing the WC. The form of an innovation can also determine the uptake. In this case, the WC and the OWL have tangible forms. They can be felt, visited and utilized. Due to these inherent attributes of a WC and OWL to any adopting institution, the poor uptake risk can be relatively minimized. It would seem that the future is bright for the initiation of a WC in Malaysia.

While this section has provided only a limited look into Asian WCs that are still under development, this aspect of the enquiry has revealed the uniqueness of the WC in each context. The contribution of lessons from Asian WCs is to continue to provide more background to understand the theory and actual praxis of WCs and OWLs for Malaysian tertiary education.

4.9 Epilogue

As WCs and OWLs are new to a number of Asian countries including Malaysia, concepts and issues pertaining to innovations are investigated. Universities, used to be inertia to change, must now actively innovate to remain competitive and relevant to changing tertiary demography. The various principles and attributes of successful innovations should inform any innovation planning, adoption and implementation. Lessons can also be learned from successful transfers of western curricular innovation to Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

From the end of the twentieth century, countries outside North America started to innovate WCs, OWLs, and some related online initiatives for ESL tertiary learners. In comparison, North American and non-North American OWLs are not too different. The reason may be that North American WCs and OWLs also serve ESL students.

The online initiatives in Asian universities are evidence to a trend of using the web to teach and to support English language development in Asia. In most cases, the online resource complements the physical resource and not as a stand-alone. However, other than the limited information gathered from the websites and the e-mailed questionnaire, there is very limited literature regarding the history, development, utility patterns, problems and challenges of these ESL writing support initiatives outside North America, as these initiatives are still new and undergoing development. Therefore, the present research has to rely mainly on WCs developed in North America to conceptualize a WC framework for universities in Malaysia.

Footnote

1. RTF (Rich Text Format). An interchange format for the exchange of documents between Microsoft Word and other document processing systems (Dictionary.com, 2005).

CHAPTER V

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA

Learning the English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country...True Nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language.

~Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, 1999

5.0 Prologue

Having discussed the theory, practice and contribution of WC and OWL in North American tertiary education in Chapter II, ESL academic writing development and learning support for ESL students in Chapter III, and issues pertaining to innovations in tertiary education in Chapter IV, we now turn our attention to the tertiary educational contexts in Malaysia, for which this whole enquiry on WC and OWL innovations was intended and designed. In investigating if WCs and OWLs are relevant and applicable to Malaysian ESL students, the status of the English language and ESL instruction in Malaysia are investigated to establish the extent of congruence of this innovation to the Malaysian educational ecology. This is the focus of this chapter.

5.1 Malaysia and Writing Center Innovation

The literature has recorded numerous examples of the applicability of WC/OWL on ESL students since its inception in North America (for example: Myers, 2003; Powers, 2001; Severino, 1998). In the USA, ESL students are either immigrants or of immigrant descent and international students who are learning English after acquiring their native language plus or minus another language or languages. The academic and social environments of these students are that of using English as the main language, and a great majority of the people around them speaks English. Therefore, these ESL students are highly motivated to learn English as it is a 'survival' tool. They also have round-the-clock exposure to English through the mass media or their immediate environment.

By comparison, the scenario for tertiary students in Malaysia is very different. During the British colonial rule in Malaysia from 1909 to August 1957, English was the official language and the medium of instruction in most urban schools and all tertiary institutions (see Section 5.2 for further discussion). When the country achieved its independence in 1957 from the British colonial rule, the dominant indigenous Malay language was legislated as the National Language that later became the only official language and the medium of instruction in all national schools and public universities (Lee, 1997). English has then been used as a second or foreign language. Naturally, its use is much less in Malaysia than in its native countries, and consequently students in Malaysia, especially those in the rural areas, have less exposure to English. Moreover, English has also not been a compulsory subject for admission into tertiary education since 1988 (Chan and Tan, 2003). As a result, students generally do not see English as a survival tool as their social and academic needs are met by their first language, and therefore they are less motivated to learn the language. There is a perception that English proficiency among the tertiary graduates has subsequently deteriorated.

In the 1970s, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing Centers (WCs) were implemented as an intervention to curb Why-Johnny-Can't-Write crisis in the USA (Sheils, 1975). In Malaysia, since English lost its status as an official language in 1967 and later as a medium of instruction in all public education institutions from 1984 (David, 1997), the same crisis has also been felt. Negative comments from employers, especially those in the corporate or professional sectors, on Malaysian graduates' inability to communicate in English often appear in the mass media. An awakening remark came from the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, who warned that the poor command of English would result in Malaysians remaining laggards and would hamper the creation of a competitive ICT-based government and society ("Nationalism not limited to language", *New Straits Times*, August 19, 1997).

In view of the success of the writing center approach in supporting developing writers in North American tertiary education, Malaysia may stand to gain from this approach too. Thus, it is the aim of this study to explore the applicability of WCs to

the Malaysian tertiary education through relating to favorable factors in the macro environment and through a survey study at a micro context, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). In exploring the applicability of the WC approach in an ESL environment like Malaysia, the socio-political status of English in the country is a relatively significant factor. If English literacy is perceived as important, the stakeholders would be more receptive to new ideas and innovations in promoting and developing English. And, to understand the status of English in Malaysia, one has to know Malaysia and its people, and how its history has impacted on the education system and the English status.

5.2 Malaysia in Brief

As this dissertation might be read by people who may not know Malaysia, a brief geography and demography of Malaysia is presented in this section, followed by an elaboration on the history and current events that have impacted on the development of English in the country.

5.2.1 Geography and Demography

Malaysia is made up of West Malaysia (also called Peninsular Malaysia) and East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah) that are separated by the South China Sea (see Figure 5.1). The capital city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia is located near the Equator in Southeast Asia, thus it has a tropical climate that is generally hot and humid. The daily temperature throughout the year is normally in the range of 24 – 34⁰ C. Malaysia is rich in natural resources such as tin, petroleum, rubber, palm oil, and coconut. About 80% of Malaysia is still covered by tropical rainforest (Faaland et al., 2003). The strategic location of Malaysia being at a busiest crossroad of the world has made it a trading center between the East and West. Peninsular Malaysia's neighboring countries include Thailand in the north and Singapore in the south (see Figure 5.2). Other nearby countries are Indonesia, Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Philippines, and Laos. These nine neighboring countries together with Malaysia formed the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in 1967 (Andrews and Freestone, 1972).



Figure 5.1 Peninsular (West) Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah)
(Source: http://www.abcmalaysia.com/tour_malaysia/m_states.htm)



Figure 5.2 Malaysia and Neighboring Countries in Southeast Asia
(Source: <http://www.maptown.com/malaysiamaps.html>)

According to the Population and Housing Census conducted in 2000, the total population of Malaysia was 23.27 million, and the gross per capita income as in the third quarter of 2004 was RM16,133 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2005). The main racial composition of the population is 65% Bumiputra (literally means ‘princes of the soil’ in Malay) comprising mainly Malays in Peninsular Malaysia and the indigenous tribes such as Iban and Kadazan in East Malaysia, 26% Chinese, and 7.7% Indians (Department of Statistics, 2005). Each of the main ethnic groups is

made up of numerous clans who speak different dialects. For example: the Malays comprise clans such as Javanese, Bugis, Minangkabau; the main clans of Chinese are Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka; and the Indians such as Tamil, Malayalee, Telugu and Sikhs (Asmah, 1979; Faaland et al., 2003).

The main languages spoken in Malaysia are Malay, Mandarin, and English. Educated Malays are usually bilinguals who speak Malay and English, and educated Chinese are usually trilinguals who speak Mandarin, English and Malay. Since the implementation of the National Language Act in 1957 and the medium of instruction gradually changed to Malay from English starting from 1970 from Primary Year One, most non Malays can interact quite well in Malay. In government offices or agencies, the spoken and written language used is Malay, since it is the official and national language. However in the private sector especially among the big corporations, the language choice is still English. When the Malays are interacting among themselves in either formal or informal situations, the language choice is usually Malay even if both parties are competent in English. This could be due to their national and ethnic pride. Among the educated Chinese, if both parties are competent in both English and Chinese, the language choice is usually English. It could be that the Chinese in Malaysia attach a higher level of prestige to English than Chinese. If a party does not speak English, then Chinese or a Chinese dialect such as Cantonese or Hokkien is used. For the younger generation of Chinese who have gone through Malay-medium education throughout, the language choice is either Malay or a common Chinese dialect, but seldom Chinese as they did not have a chance to learn Chinese. Cross ethnic communication among the less educated is usually Malay (Asmah, 1992).

5.2.2 The Past

Before the formation of Malaysia, the current East Malaysia, comprising Sabah and Sarawak, was made up of different countries. Hence, East and West Malaysia have a different past as they started to share a common base only from 1963 with the formation of Malaysia. Therefore, I shall present the main historical events of only the West or Peninsular Malaysia.

Early Malaya

The present day culturally diversified Malaysia can be traced from its interesting history woven by various ethnic groups. Before the formation of Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia was called the Federation of Malaya or simply, Malaya. It was often referred to as the Malay Peninsula. From the First and Second Century, numerous Malay kingdoms dotted the peninsula, separately ruled or as tributary states of the then more powerful Thai empire in the north, or the Sumatran empire off the western coastline (Windstedt, 1988; Baker, 1999).

The Malay Peninsula became renowned through the flourished entrepot of Melaka (or Malacca in English), founded in 1402 by Parameswara, a Hindu ruler who fled from Temasek (now Singapore) due to constant attacks from Majapahit (now Java Island, Indonesia). Parameswara took the name of Iskandar Shah when he became a Muslim through marriage. Parameswara's visionary rule ensured a stable and progressive Melaka Sultanate. Also, due to the strategic location of Melaka, merchants from the West, India, Arabia, Siam, Cambodia, China, and many more flocked here to trade and later made Melaka their home (Mohammad Yusoff Hashim, 1992).

During its prime time, Melaka attracted both welcomed and unwelcomed foreign powers. The first recorded diplomatic tie between Melaka and China happened in 1405 when Admiral Cheng-Ho from the Ming Dynasty visited Melaka. In 1511, Melaka was conquered by the Portugese. The rule was taken over by Dutch in 1641, and the British in 1795. Prior to taking control of Melaka, the British had already established its very first Straits Settlement at Penang in 1786 (Mohammad Yusoff Hashim, 1992; Windstedt, 1988).

British Malaya

During this period, other than the three British Straits Settlements of Penang, Melaka and Singapore, the Malay Peninsula had a number of independent states each having its own form of government. At first the British adopted a policy of non-intervention by not interfering with the local governance of the Sultans. However, as

civil wars became rampant among the tribal chiefs, Britain's commercial and trading activities were affected, so the British had no choice but to intervene. With the signing of the Treaty of Federation in 1895 and the Bangkok Treaty in 1909, the Malay Peninsula became a protectorate colony of the British.

The British colonial rule in Malaysia brought forth a plural society that is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multilingual, and an educational dualism that allows English and vernacular schools to co-exist until today (Tan, 2002). Under the British colonial rule, Malaysia underwent fierce development. The British practised an open-door policy in encouraging immigrants especially Chinese and Indians to fill the labor shortage and to make Malaysia their home. The Chinese were engaged in tin mines or infrastructure construction in urban areas, and the Indians were mostly engaged in rubber estates. The indigenous educated Bumiputras, mostly Malays worked as civil servants, or in the military or police forces, and the less educated were mostly fishermen or farmers in the rural areas, or craftsmen, factory workers, guards or drivers in the urban areas. Wittingly or unwittingly, the British seemed to practice a kind of 'divide and rule' policy (Mahathir, 1970). The three major races were demarcated by their occupations and locations, with more Bumiputras found in the rural areas, and non-Bumiputras in the urban areas. In training the locals to work for the British, the British built schools that used English as the medium of instruction in the urban area, while allowing vernacular schools that used their ethnic languages such as Malay, Chinese or India to co-exist. The British also allowed the building of missionary schools that also used English as the medium of instruction (Baker, 2003).

Pre and Post World War II

The British colonial rule in Malaysia was interrupted by the Second World War in 1941 when the British military was defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army who occupied Malaysia for three and the half years. At first the Malays, deeply moved by the Japanese slogan of 'Asia for Asians', thought the Japanese were their 'liberators' from the British rule. However, their dream was short-lived as the Japanese enforced Japanese language, Japanese currency and the Japanese way of life through cruelty and terrorism. The suffering of the people ended with the defeat of the

Japanese Army when America dropped two atomic bombs onto Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan on 15 August 1945 (Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid, 1970a).

After the Japanese occupation in Malaysia, the nationalistic sentiment among the Malays intensified. The myth of the British invincibility was broken and the Malays gained confidence that they could rule their country without any intervention. Moreover, the tremendous economic and infrastructure development and modernization achieved during the British rule did not benefit most Malays who remained as farmers and fishermen. The British only built roads, schools and hospitals in places where they had commercial interest such as big towns and seaports (Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid, 1970a).

In 1946, the British proposed a centralized government called Malayan Union, but it was opposed by the Malay nationalism movement named UMNO (United Malays National Organization). In the face of the strong opposition, the British relented, and alternatively proposed the formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 (Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid, 1970b).

Independence

The new Federation was immediately faced with disorder and violence caused by the Malayan Communist Party who cooperated with the British in fighting the Japanese, but was forced to go underground after the Second World War when the British did not want the Communists in the government. When the death toll rose, a State of Emergency was declared with curfew imposed nationwide from 18 June 1948 (Ongkili, 1985).

Facing pressure from the mostly Chinese communists and the Malay nationalists, the British introduced a system of democracy through voting from 1951. In the 1955 general election, the Alliance, comprising the three major parties of UMNO, MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and the MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) won a sweeping victory to form a coalition government headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman. The Alliance initiated talks with the Communist Party to end the

emergency, and with London to negotiate independence. Finally, on 31 August 1957, Malaya announced *merdeka* (Independence) (Ongkili, 1985).

To become a country in its own right, the major races compromised to foster peace and harmony. One of the compromises written onto the Malayan Constitution was that the non-native immigrants were to be granted citizenship for not questioning the sovereignty of the Malays or Bumiputras (Faaland et al., 2003).

5.2.3 The Present

In 1961, the idea for an expanded federation named Malaysia was proposed. The objective was to foster closer regional cooperation among the neighboring land of Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. After much negotiation, Malaysia was officially formed, comprising the Federation of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore on 31 August 1963. Due to ideological differences, Singapore left Malaysia to form a republic on its own in 1965.

With the formation of Malaysia, the social-economic disparity created during the British colonial rule between the Malays and the non-Malays did not improve but worsened. Only a small percentage of the Malays, notably the aristocrats, who were English educated or graduated overseas were in the top rung of the socio-economic ladder. The majority of the Malays were poor peasants or fishermen in the rural areas. This socio-economic imbalance erupted into a horrifying racial riot on 13th May 1969. This infamous riot taught Malaysians a lesson: the special position of the Malays in the country must not be contested, and until a socio-economic balance between the Malays and the non-Malays was achieved, there would be no racial harmony in the country (Baker, 1999). In this context, the government initiated the New Economic Policy (NEP) to eradicate poverty and to correct socio-economic disparity (Second Malaysia Plan, 1971). The education sector was also restructured to reflect the national goals and identity. As a result, the status of English, seen as a colonial language, declined greatly. This topic will be discussed separately in Section 5.3.

In 1981, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad became the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. He jolted the whole country into fierce reform and development in all

sectors. His visionary bold reforms on the economy included the national car, steel and petroleum projects. He also succeeded in increasing Malay participation and ownership in the business and corporate sector, and in nurturing a new breed of Malay entrepreneurs (Faaland et al., 2003).

To project Malaysia positively to the world, Dr. Mahathir initiated the construction of the KL (Kuala Lumpur) Tower, the then third tallest telecommunication building in the world, and the Petronas Twin Towers, the then tallest twin-tower in the world. During his administration, Malaysia became the first country in Asia to host the 16th Commonwealth Game in 1998. Malaysia was also the second country after Japan in Asia to host Formula One Motor Racing from 1999. A new state-of-the-art international airport called KLIA (Kuala Lumpur International Airport) was also built (Cheah, 2002; Hwang, 2003).

To ensure the country stayed competitive in globalization, Dr. Mahathir masterminded Vision 2020, a blueprint to propel Malaysia in attaining a developed country status by the year 2020. Under this blueprint, several mega initiatives were implemented. The most notable was the Multimedia Super Corridor, meant to attract foreign ICT technocrats in initiating technological innovations in the various sectors. The federal administrative capital was moved to the intelligent garden city of Putrajaya to pave way for an e-government. Two MEASATs (Malaysia East Asia Satellites) were launched to facilitate the expansion of telecommunication endeavors in the region (Cheah, 2002; Hwang, 2003). In transforming Malaysia from an industrialized to a knowledge economy, Dr. Mahathir far-sightedly revitalized the use of English. This topic will be discussed separately in Chapter VI.

In 2003, this charismatic architect of modern Malaysia retired and passed the leadership baton to a modest and moderate Abdullah Badawi, the current premier of Malaysia. The Abdullah-led regime won an unprecedented overwhelming victory in the 2004 general election. With this strong mandate, Abdullah is confidently leading Malaysia toward fulfilling Vision 2020. Thus is the political, social-cultural as well as economical backdrop that has impacted on the present day English language status in Malaysia.

5.3 English Language in Malaysia: Past and Present

The historical and pragmatic development of Malaya (now Peninsular Malaysia) from the golden era of the Melaka Sultanate, British colonial rule, independence, formation of Malaysia, to the Mahathir-led and now Abdullah-led modern Malaysia, has been impacting on the role and functions of the English language in Malaysia. In general, the status of English in Malaysia has gone through three dramatic phases of up, down, and up again, each time being greatly affected by the political might at play, and recently also by global dynamism.

5.3.1 The Peak

The status of English was at its peak during the British colonial rule from the day Francis Light, a representative of the British East India Company, set foot in Penang in 1786 till the independence of Malaya in 1957. When the British first arrived in Peninsular Malaya end of the 18th Century, the country did not have any organized education. The small cottage schools were administered by the different ethnic communities. Malay children attended religious teaching on Islam at a village mosque or a cottage school where the instruction was in Malay. Chinese children attended a community-run private school at a tin mine settlement or a new village where the instructional language was either Chinese (Mandarin) or Cantonese (a Chinese dialect). Indian children also attended a cottage school usually in a rubber estate, set up or funded by the owner of the rubber estate company, and the instruction medium was Tamil. Most of these cottage schools were poorly run as the teachers were not trained, and the facilities were inadequate (Mohd Yusoff Hashim, 1992).

With the British establishing greater political control in the 19th and early 20th centuries, English medium schools were built. The main aim was to produce workers who could speak English so as to work for the British or be their trading partners or friends. Generally the British were sympathetic towards the Malays as the British were ruling the country 'for' the Malays. In 1905, the British built an English medium school called the Malay College Kuala Kangsar, nicknamed the 'Eton of the East' (Baker, 1999, p.189,) to specifically educate the Malay ruling class and aristocrats. Later the British built the Sultan Idris Teachers' College at Tanjong Malim in 1922 to

provide trained teachers for Malay cottage schools. These two colleges later produced two factions of Malay nationalists with one faction fluent in English and more willing to negotiate with the British, and another with more extreme approach who spoke only Malay who later formed a Malay opposition party called PAS (*PARTI Islam Se-Malaysia*) in the 1950s.

Initially the British had little concern for the education of the main immigrant race, Chinese. However, when the Chinese cottage schools were used by the Chinese communities as propaganda grounds to support either the Chinese Communist Party or the non-communist Kuomintang Party who were fighting to rule China with the fall of the Ching Dynasty in 1911, the British had no choice but to exert control over these schools by appointing a Chinese school inspectorate in the 1920s. The British government started to give financial aid to the vernacular schools from the 1930s. With the financial aid, the British were able to exert more control over the administration of the cottage schools (Baker, 1999). As described in the first paragraph of this section, the cottage schools were vernacular, and each used the language of the ethnic community.

With the British came the missionaries to spread Christianity in Malaya. The Christian missionary activities were confined only to the non-Malays and were out of bounds to the Muslim Malays. This was the understanding reached between the British and the Malay Sultans (Asmah, 2003). The Christian missionaries also helped to set up English-medium schools such as the Catholic High School, Convent Girls' School, Methodist Boys' School, and Methodist Girls' School. Far-sighted parents, who saw the social and economic benefits that accompanied the learning of English, sent their children to the English medium schools for a so-called western education. Many of these children had the opportunity to further their studies in the UK, USA, or Australia. After their overseas education, they returned to become highly influential people either as professionals, chief executives of international corporations, successful business partners of the British, or as articulate politicians. These English medium schools were built mostly in urban areas where the British had commercial activities, and as such benefited the Chinese who were mainly found in urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Melaka. The Malay aristocrats and the descendants of the Sultans benefited too but not the general Malay commoners who

were mainly found in the rural areas. In fact by 1921, only about 6% of the Malay population lived in town (Baker, 1999).

As the English medium schools were more systematically planned and administered, they had better facilities and were more effective than the community cottage schools. Moreover in the early days of British rule, most community cottage schools provided only primary education. Therefore, for further studies, students had to continue in English medium secondary schools, and the bright and lucky ones stood a chance to attend the then only university in the country, University of Malaya (established 1949), or a foreign university, usually in England. As a result, in the early 20th Century there was no surprise that a number of urban Malaysians could speak English with near native proficiency, and a good number could interact in English albeit in a local variety called “Malaysian English” (Wong, 1981). The first sixty years of the 20th Century was the golden era of English in Malaysia. The various ethnic groups regarded English as a neutral language, and they preferred to use English as the common language for inter-ethnic communication (Asmah, 2003).

5.3.2 The Decline

By the time Peninsular Malaysia achieved independence in 1957, English had already been strongly established in the government machinery, trade and commerce, and also education. The ruling Alliance coalition government, although keen to create an independent national identity different from one that reminiscent of colonial rule, realized that enforcing Malay as the national language and the only official language had to be gradual. The Language Act in the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya of 1957 stated that Malay was to be the national language. English was to remain an official language together with the Malay language until 1967. After that Malay would be the only official language, and English would be an important second language (Solomon, 1988). In elevating Malay to the status of the new national language, slogans such as ‘*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*’ (Language is the soul of the nation/race) and ‘*Hidup Bahasa Hidup Bangsa*’ (Prosper the language to prosper the nation/race). In contrast, English was given the derogatory labels such as ‘colonial language’ and ‘language of the imperialist’ (Asmah, 2003, p.6).

With similar aims, the Education Act of 1961 stipulated that Malay was to be used as the medium of instruction in all national schools from 1969, while a vernacular language, either Chinese or Indian, was allowed to continue as a medium of instruction in national-type schools (only primary level). All schools, regardless of the language of instruction, must follow a common curriculum to promote national integration. The gradual transformation of the English medium national schools to the Malay medium started from 1969 with Primary Year One. The transformation was completed by the end of 1982 when students who were ready for university admission were all educated in Malay or at least in the Malay medium secondary schools, with English taught only as a compulsory subject (Solomon, 1988). From 1983, all public universities were required by law to use Malay as the instructional medium. Foreign lecturers were given the flexibility to teach in English, but permission must be sought from the King before the commencement of the taught course.

The gradual transition in relegating English from being the official language to a second language took ten years from 1957 to 1967. The slow relegation of English from being the instructional medium to a compulsory subject took fourteen years from 1969 and ended 1983. The extended grace period was necessary to ensure efficient language planning, human resource training, and the development of a Malay corpus for science and technology (Gill, 2002).

Although the government has made English a compulsory subject for all public schools and institutions, a pass in the subject is not required for admission to the next level of education. For example, students can fail English in the High School Certificate Examination and still gain university admission. Hence there is no incentive for students to strive for excellence in English. By contrast, a good grade in Malay in the High School Certificate Examination is a prerequisite for public tertiary admission such as universities or teacher training colleges. It is also a prerequisite for a job application in the public sector or the civil service and scholarships. Those who were already in the civil service had to take a Malay language test and obtain a good grade before they were eligible for promotion. These were but some incentives handed out by the government to ensure the successful creation of the national identity for the purpose of integration and unity, and in reducing the prominence of English in the then independent country.

In addition, in ensuring an adequate resource of textbooks and references in Malay, the government set up *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Institute of Language and Literature) to translate as many English texts as possible into Malay. Moreover, when the grace period for English to remain an official language was up in 1967, Malay was the only language accepted for official matters in all government offices including schools and universities. It was compulsory to conduct meetings and correspondence in Malay. Those who could not speak in Malay and those who still spoke in English were regarded as unpatriotic by the Malay community. Under the pressure of language change, there was an exodus of non-Malay professionals to English speaking countries such as the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s (Gill, 2002).

Due to the successful implementation of the National Language Policy, much at the expense of reducing the use of English, the standard of English among students across all levels deteriorated. After just a few years, many non-Malay students could speak Malay fluently but not English (Asmah, 2003). This effect was acutely felt from the mid-70s. The status and the standard of English of most Malaysians were at an all time low. This drop in general English proficiency became more and more serious as time passed. Complaints and criticisms regarding the inability of graduates to function in a service or corporate environment that used English often appeared in the mass media (David, 2003).

5.3.3 The Resurgence

In the light of deteriorating English proficiency that might affect nation building, the government began to reemphasize the importance of English. This reversion is evidenced in the Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980 that argues that English is needed for scientific and technological developments and for effective participation in international trade and commerce, and therefore English must be effectively taught as a strong second language (Third Malaysia Plan, 1976).

The status of English in Malaysia began to improve when Dr. Mahathir became the Fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. Realizing the Malays would lose

competitiveness if they remained contented with just Malay, Dr. Mahathir tried to change the mindset of Malays by reassuring them that learning English would not make them less patriotic or less Malay. He aptly reversed the earlier adage of "*Hidup Bahasa Hidup Bangsa*" to "*Hidup Bangsa Hidup Bahasa*" (Prosper the race to prosper the language". He continued to argue that Malays must survive against all odds so that their language would live on (Asmah, 2003). In convincing the hardcore Malay nationalists, he articulated that "True nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language." (Mahathir Mohammad, 1999).

In addition to local development in the domestic context, the advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) and globalization from the mid-90s have also motivated the revitalization of English in Malaysia. With ICT speeding up globalization, Malaysia sees the significant advantage of a K-economy and a knowledge-based society. In following this global development, mastering English as a global language for international communication and a language of ICT is an urgent national imperative as outlined in the Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005 (Economic Planning Unit Website, 2005). The Mahathir-led government felt that with the national language having established a stronghold, the time was right to revitalize English. To continue maintaining extreme nationalistic language policies might lead to economic and technological isolation from the global market if Malaysians were not competent in the global language to communicate with the rest of the world (Gill, 2002).

The revitalization of the English language was also motivated by three mega development plans initiated by the government. The first was Vision 2020, a blueprint masterminded by the Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (1991) to propel Malaysia into attaining the status of a developed nation from the current status of being a developing country. This meant Malaysia must modernize and develop "economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally" (Gill, 2002, p.40). The second was the establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiated in 1996 with the aim to cultivate a knowledge-rich society and a knowledge economy in Malaysia, and the third was to establish Malaysia as a regional center of education.

Both Vision 2020 and MSC required that Malaysians command the use of English for them to compete in the global market and be among the first to acquire ICT knowledge that was mostly in English. To realize the third aspiration of becoming a regional hub of education, the government encouraged big corporations to set up private universities. For example, Multimedia University of Malaysia (MMU) was set up by Teekom (Telecommunication Company of Malaysia), and Universiti Tenaga was set up by Tenaga Nasional (National Electricity Board of Malaysia). Private colleges were also allowed to partner with established foreign universities mostly in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in offering twinning programs for foreign degrees. These twinning programs allow part of the program be conducted locally, and the remaining in the foreign institution. The government has also encouraged foreign universities to set up branch campuses in Malaysia. At the moment, Monash University of Australia and Nottingham University of the UK have both set up a branch campus in Malaysia. To promote such education partnerships, the government has allowed the use of English as the medium of instruction and Malay is taught as a compulsory subject in private institutions. The private education sector has been generating substantial revenues for the country, firstly by curbing the outflow of revenues in reducing the number who study overseas and secondly by attracting more foreign students to study in Malaysia (Tan, 2002). As of December 2004, the number of foreign students studying in Malaysia is 40,686, of which 25,939 were enrolled at private higher institutions, 6,315 at public higher institutions, and the rest at private schools.

However, by imposing Malay as the medium of instruction in public higher institutions while allowing English in the private institutions, a bifurcation was unwittingly created. Two main differences were seen between the graduates from the public and private institutions. Firstly, private higher institutions were more expensive than the public as the latter were heavily subsidized by the government. Therefore, students attending private institutions were usually from better income families than those in the public. Secondly, because of the medium of instruction being English, graduates from the private institutions were more competent in English than those from the public. Also, due to the quota system based on racial composition practiced in public institutions, more Malays were in the public while more non-Malays were in

the private. Upon graduation, the non-Malays from private institutions who were more competent in English fared better in terms of employability in the private sector (Gill, 2002). This unemployment difficulty of mostly Malay graduates motivated the government to pass a legislative amendment in allowing the use of English in teaching science, engineering and medical subjects in public universities from 1993. This amendment was strongly rejected by the Malay intellectuals who saw no reason for the government to revert to English because the Malay language had been firmly established as the instructional medium of the mentioned disciplines, with the related corpora developed. They also feared that the sovereignty and nationalism of the country would be affected. Facing such vehement opposition, the government relented and let the individual university decide the implementation by stages (Gill, 2002).

The seeming victory of the Malay intellectuals in rejecting the use of English in the varsity had serious implications. English was seen as not important or less important than Malay, and thus the standard of English in Malaysian universities and their graduates continued to decline. High rates of graduate unemployment continued to be a problem, and lack of English competence continued to be cited as one of the two main reasons. The other was the lack of ICT skills (Raslan Sharif, 2005). There seemed to be a positive relationship between English and ICT, that the immersion in ICT might have improved English proficiency or vice versa.

5.4 Initiatives in Improving English Language Proficiency

When the standard of English among Malaysian students continued to drop, the government realized that teaching English as a compulsory subject in the various levels of education was not enough to bring about the desired change in the overall English competence required by the demand of the job market for graduates. Also, the switch to English in teaching certain disciplines only at the tertiary level might be too late because students had learned the basic terminologies in Malay from schools and hence were more resistant to change to using English in the university. After much consideration and planning, in 2002 the Minister of Education announced a drastic measure to teach Science and Mathematics in English from the academic year of 2003 in all National Schools starting from Primary Year One and Secondary Form One. An ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course called English for Science and

Technology was also introduced to Secondary Form Four. The pragmatic purpose of the Ministry in effecting the instructional language change for Science and Mathematics was to make sure that Malaysians had the linguistic competence to follow the advancement in science and technology that was mostly in English. In addition, teaching Science and Mathematics in English provided opportunities for real language use that was in line with the theory of second language acquisition (Pandian and Ramiah, 2004). The announcement received the full backing from the Prime Minister who commented on the impossibility of translating all works and the Internet into Malay. He urged all to learn English in order to navigate cyberspace (Chan and Tan, 2003), and to contribute toward nation building and the realization of the K-Economy Master Plan and Vision 2020.

Another bold initiative by the government in lifting the standard of the English language was the implementation of a standardized English university entrance test. Starting from 2003, all public university applicants are required to sit for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) that was designed by a team of testing consultants from various local varsities. Universities have often complained about students being under-prepared for the kind of English literacy required by tertiary education. The purpose of the MUET is to gauge the English proficiency level of students before they enter a university. Students are to sit for the MUET after they have sat for the secondary school exit test. After that they have one or two years of pre-university education to improve on their English performance.

In this sense, the MUET serves a diagnostic function, and the test aims to provide overall indicators for general English proficiency (Zuraidah Mohd Don, 2003). In essence, the MUET measures beginning to advanced proficiency in both productive and receptive skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (see Table 5.1). The Multiple-choice format is included to ensure objectivity and reliability of measurement, while the writing and speaking tasks are meant to assess testees' communicative competence by requiring them to use language in simulated authentic situations.

Table 5.1 Structure of MUET
(Source: Zuraidah Mohd Don, 2003, p. 23)

Component	Time	Questions	Weight	Max. Score
Listening	0.5 hr.	15 multiple choice reading comprehension questions	15%	45
Reading	2 hr.	50 multiple choice questions: 8 th word cloze -15 blanks; Information transfer – 7 items; Reading comprehension- 28 items.	45%	135
Writing	1.5 hr.	2 writing tasks: summary and essay writing	25%	75
Speaking	0.5 hr.	2 guided tasks: an individual presentation and a group discussion.	15%	45
Total:	4.5 hr.		100%	300

Although a pass in the MUET is not compulsory for university admission, the result will decide applicants' eligibility into the various disciplines and programs offered by each university. Faculties of various universities set their own requirement of the MUET band, the highest being Band 6 and the lowest 1 (see Appendix 5.1 for banding details). For example, a medical faculty may require Band 5 or higher while an ecology faculty may require Band 3 or higher. The MUET band also decides the number of English proficiency courses an undergraduate must complete at a university. For example, UPM requires undergraduates with MUET bands 1 and 2 to pass at least three English proficiency courses, each from the Foundation, Levels 1 and 2 groupings. Band 3 undergraduates must pass at least two English courses each from Levels 1 and 2, and Band 4 at least one course from Level 2. Those with MUET bands 5 and 6 are exempted from taking English proficiency courses if they so wish (see Appendix 5.2 for more details).

The positive effects of the MUET include that students, parents, teachers, education administrators, and in fact the whole society, are more aware of the significance of English. They know a good level of English proficiency will help students get the discipline they want to study in. Also, because of the diagnostic nature of the MUET, students and educators know which areas students are weak at, and thereby can take remedial measures to improve their deficiency before their university application is processed. The first batch of MUET testees entered

universities this year (2005), and at this stage studies have not been done to establish whether these students have been better prepared to cope with the tertiary demand of English as compared to the formerly non-MUET undergraduates.

Nevertheless, with the above initiatives by the government, English has regained its attention and significance in the Malaysian society and education system. Undeniably, the attribute of key political figures in the country, pragmatic development such as globalization, and the speedy advancement in ICT have all played an important role in bringing back English to its current visibility in Malaysia.

5.5 Epilogue: Imperatives for Change

With the increased attention given to the study of the language across all education levels by the government, educationists and parents, English proficiency among students should improve. However, a worrying fact remains that a good number of Malaysian graduates still cannot function in English, let alone use English effectively, in the workplace. This poor command of English has affected productivity in at least two significant ways. The first is the human resource wastage caused by an increasing number of unemployed graduates. As of 2004, government statistics showed that graduate unemployment was a staggering 80,000 (see “PM concerned with growing graduate unemployment rate”, *The Star*, 22 March 2005), and the lack of English was cited as the main reason (see “Master English to get jobs”, *The Star*, 20 June 2005; “Those with poor command ‘of English not being hired”, *The Star*, 2 April 2005; and “Najib: Language a barrier for those wishing to surf Net”, *The Star*, 19 February 2005). Secondly, for graduates who are employed either by the public or private sector, the lack of English has also affected their performance productivity, for example, when they cannot speak convincingly about their organizations or products to the international market, or read reports in English with full comprehension.

These worrying scenarios lead to the question of whether Malaysia can expect to realize Vision 2020 without initiating a more drastic change to this vital language tool. A challenge of Vision 2020 of Malaysia is to establish “a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward looking, and one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and

technological civilization of the future” (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991). With the abundance of scientific and technological knowledge in English and a good number of utility software tools also in English, there is a valid concern that the perpetual problem of limited English will hamper the realization of Vision 2020. Thus is the imperative and urgency to initiate a curricular innovation that will improve the English competence of Malaysian graduates.

CHAPTER VI

WRITING NEEDS SURVEY

...the existence of an idea consists in being perceived.

~George Berkeley, 1948

... no two people see the external world in exactly the same way. To every separate person a thing is what he thinks it is. In other words, not a thing, but a think.

~Penelope Fitzgerald, 1990

6.0 Prologue

The decline in English language standard in Malaysia has led to a critical question on the country's ESL education system: What must be done to improve the English standards of Malaysian graduates? In answering this question, an investigation of English writing skills at a local university, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), was conducted. UPM has been used as the subject for the investigation because it is one of the oldest, the most established, and the most reputable public university in Malaysia. In a survey conducted by Asiaweek (30 June 2000), UPM was ranked the second among all the local universities in Malaysia. Also, due to its huge and diverse student demography and its multidisciplinary structure, it is reflective of most public universities in Malaysia. An introduction to the English language instruction and the context of the survey, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), is presented before the survey study is discussed.

6.1 English Language at Universiti Putra Malaysia

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) or Putra University of Malaysia, formerly known as Agriculture University of Malaysia, was established in 1973 at Serdang, a small town in Selangor, through a merger of the College of Agriculture and the Faculty of Agriculture of Universiti Malaya. It initially started with only three faculties: the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Forestry and the Faculty of

Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. Today the university has become multidisciplinary and diversified in having 16 faculties, 6 institutes, 2 academies, 2 graduate schools, 9 centers, and 14 residential colleges (UPM Homepage, 2005). The student population has increased from 1,559 in the inception year to about 30,000 in February 2005 (Personal Communication with the Head of Enrolment Office, 22 February 2005).

From 1983, UPM followed all public universities in switching to using Malay as the medium of instruction with the enforcement of the Language Act of 1963 (Asmah, 2003). Before this, English had been the medium of instruction since its establishment in 1973. An outcome of this instructional language switch was that students graduated with limited English competence, and their marketability or employability was affected (Ain Nadzimah Abdullah and Chan, 2004).

In UPM, all the English proficiency courses are designed and administered by the Department of English of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. In the current year (2005), 10 English proficiency courses are offered to students across all disciplines (UPM Semester 1 Timetable Handbook, 2005). These courses are: English for Academic Purposes (the usual enrolment for this course per semester is approximately 2,500 students), Skills in Grammar (usual enrolment is 700), Reading and Discussion Skills (usual enrolment is approximately 800), English for Academic Writing (usual enrolment 800), English for the Workplace (usual enrolment 400), Interactive Speaking (usual enrolment 800), Report Writing (usual enrolment 200), Business English (usual enrolment 200), and Public Speaking (usual enrolment 200).

Since the enforcement of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) from 2003, the number of English courses or credit hours undergraduates must sign up for depends on their MUET results (see Appendix 6.1). For every semester, the highest number of enrolments is for BBI2409 English for Academic Purposes, which is the foundation level course students with MUET band 1 or 2 must take. This implies that more students are entering UPM with lower MUET bands (1-2) as compared to higher bands of 3-6, and this has been reflected by the highest number who needed to take the foundation level English course. Usually the annual full time undergraduate

student intake is between 4000-5000 students (Personal communication with Mr. Asbullah Bin Hj Mohd Yusof, Head of Intake Unit, Registrar Office, UPM, on 15 November 2005). Hence in general, UPM undergraduates have limited English, and they depend very much on English proficiency courses to improve their English.

However, they are limited by the university to take only one course from each level, that is, three courses in total, to fulfill the English language requirement for graduation. For each course, the contact hours or class time per week is three hours. The set time span to complete a course is 14 weeks excluding an exam week and a one-week mid semester break. But usually students do not get 14 weeks of class time due to public holidays or the constraint of arranging a teacher that may delay the timely commencement of a class. With the shorter time span for each English course, acquisition can be affected.

The administrative and academic unit in charge of conducting English proficiency courses is the English Language Proficiency Unit within the Department of English of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. As of January 2005, the number of full time teachers in this Unit is 16 including 4 on study leave. For a team of about 12 full time teachers to teach a total of between 6,000 to 7,000 students per semester, the Unit has to rely heavily on the service of part time teachers, who are usually graduate students of MA (English) or English language teachers from nearby schools or colleges. In catering to the part time teachers' full time work hours, half of the proficiency classes are held after 5 pm. An example is the English for Academic Purposes course. For 2005 Semester 1, this course had a total of 82 groups of which 44 had classes after 5 p.m. (UPM Semester 1 Timetable Handbook, 2005). If given a choice, students generally prefer morning or afternoon but not evening classes. This preference has been reflected on the generally better class attendance for the morning or afternoon classes as compared to evening classes.

On top of the negative factor of less favorable class hours, large class size is another problem. Due to cost constraints, most classes have between 30 to 50 students, thus reducing interaction between students and the teacher, and the amount of individual attention that the teacher can afford to each student.

Another not so favorable factor is related to pedagogy. The prevailing teaching methodology is generally lecture style and using a prescribed text. More creative teaching methods might have been discouraged by fixed theatre seating of most classrooms. The nature of the seating has inconvenienced the practice of group work, language games or activities that require students to sit together or move about.

Given the less favorable class hours, limited time, large class size, and the generally monotonous methodology, it is difficult to expect a quantum improvement in students' proficiency level by taking just three English courses throughout the whole undergraduate program of three to four years. Students would need to have strong intrinsic motivation to initiate learning English on their own outside class hours to see a drastic improvement on their entry proficiency level. This leads to the question of whether there is an adequate support system, for example, facilities to support students in self-directed language learning, within the faculty or the university. The answer to this question will be explored through a survey on writing needs and writing support in Section 6.5.

The Department of English also conducts Bachelor (BA) and Master of Arts (MA) programs for English Studies and Literature in English. It also offers a Ph. D. in English program. The MA programs comprise coursework and a research project paper, while the doctoral program is solely based on research and a dissertation. In general, the BA (English) students are quite well sought after by the private sector as they are generally good in English compared to the non English majors (Alumni and Career Services Center, 2005). Students in the postgraduate MA and doctoral programs are usually in-service teachers/lecturers or practitioners in related fields who are keen to improve their credentials. Due to the current emphasis on English by the government and the subsequently shortage of English teachers, the MA (English) program has attracted a small percentage of non English major students. These students are required to take at least three pre-requisite BA (English) courses such as Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics before they begin the program proper. In addition, the Department also offers its BA (English) program through distance education, and an executive program conducted at night (8 – 11 p.m.) for working adults. These non-traditional programs are quite popular among working adults, and there have been enough enrolments to start a class every semester. The popularity of

the various English programs may be a result from the government's reemphasis on the English language.

For the teaching of the writing courses offered by the Proficiency Unit such as Writing for Academic Purposes and Report Writing, and those offered through the BA English program such as Expository Writing, Professional Writing and Writing Research Reports, the genre-based approach is generally adopted as required by the specific focus on particular text types in each course. A typical writing class usually begins with the instructor explaining the theory of a particular genre and giving input such as language expressions, rules and convention. Students then either work on a writing task individually followed by exchanging their drafts for peer reviews, or work collaboratively in small groups to complete a writing task before presenting it to the whole class for comments and further improvements.

However, despite a variety of English proficiency courses being offered, the English proficiency of the general student population does not seem to improve as much as desired. This statement can be supported by three types of documents. The first is the continuous complaints of graduates having atrocious English in the mass media (For example: "Musa Hitam: Too much ad hocism", *The Sun*, 20 June 2004; "Review language policy before it's too late", *Malaysiakini*, 13 April 2005). The second evidence can be inferred from the English retraining program for graduate students conducted by the Ministry of Human Resources (see "Free English classes to go on", *The Star*, 28 July 2005; "Master English to get jobs, Fong tells grads", *The Star*, 20 June 2005; "English courses to help graduates gain confidence", *The Star*, 20 May 2005). The third evidence is from a survey study conducted by the Alumni and Career Services Center of UPM in May 2005 regarding the employability and marketability of its graduates from different disciplines. The survey questionnaire was distributed to graduates when they returned for the convocation approximately six months after graduation. The survey found that of a total of 43 programs offered, the BA (English) graduates were among the most employable: 70% were employed within the first three months upon completion of their studies, 5% more were employed within the next three months, while 10% continued with further studies. The only graduates with better employability than BA (English) were from eight programs in education. They were mostly in-service teachers and thus had assured

employment upon graduation, and those from medicine, veterinary, computer engineering, and communication. The program with the highest unemployment was BA (Malay and Linguistics) as the graduates were known to have very limited English, or they might have opted for BA (English) or other programs that required a higher MUET band as an entry condition. The survey also found that the graduate respondents perceived English as the most important criterion their employer would look for (Alumni and Career Services Center of UPM, May 2005).

Based on the aforesaid evidences that accounted for the limited English literacy of the undergraduates, educators in Malaysia have questioned the effectiveness of the English teaching methodology and the adequacy of language learning support in UPM. Related issues have often recurred in MELTA (Malaysian English Language Teachers' Association) and MICELT (Malaysian International Center for English Language Teaching) conferences (see <http://www.melta.org/> and <http://www.micelt.com.my/>). In the light of these factors, this research study was conceived, and the following survey was designed.

6.2 Background to the Writing Needs Survey

This survey study, as a needs assessment of the required English writing skills and appropriate pedagogy of undergraduates in a Malaysian university, has been designed to explore the applicability of WCs and OWLs in an ESL tertiary context. The motivation came from the constant complaint of UPM lecturers that students could not write proper English albeit having learned English for at least thirteen years (six years in the primary school, and seven years in the secondary) (see, for example, Jamali Ismail, 1991; Malaysiakini, 21 August 2002).

With the increasingly recognized importance of English as an international language and a language of the Internet, science and technology, diplomatic corps, and trade and commerce, more and more undergraduate courses had been taught in English from the mid 1990s. While this was a positive move towards adequately preparing undergraduates for the job market, lecturers often received poorly written assignments. Despite wanting to help students write better English, lecturers found that teaching course content had consumed much of their available time, and they did

not have time to teach English writing skills even if they wanted to, or had the know-how to do so. These expressed opinions were often heard at university gatherings and at local conferences (for example: MELTA and MICELT). The truth is most of the subject area lecturers have not been trained to teach writing. Other than the lecturers of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication who teach TESL and English Studies programs, most lecturers in the remaining faculties at UPM are subject specialists who do not have formal teacher training let alone being trained to teach writing in English. This can be seen from the mid 1990s when UPM required new lecturers who did not have formal teacher training to attend an intensive course in general teaching methodology. Such courses were conducted by experienced professors from the Faculty of Educational Studies in UPM. The training was on general teaching methods and techniques and not specific pedagogy for writing in English. Hence, there was a need to collect empirical data related to lecturers' perception and opinions to the teaching and learning of writing in English, and to establish the extent of the problem related to the difficulty, needs and support students required for improving writing in English from the lecturers' perspectives.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most UPM students find writing in English a difficult task, and that they wish that they could be given more help and support in their writing tasks, and not being left alone to struggle by themselves. Therefore, it is equally imperative to conduct a more empirical study into the views and perception of students regarding their attitudes, difficulties, needs, support and pedagogical preferences when proposing or planning an intervention strategy to mitigate the problem.

All public universities in Malaysia are governed by the same tertiary education policies and legislation, and student admission is processed and managed by a Central Processing Unit (CPU) of the Ministry of Higher Education that assigns applicants to the various universities based on student profiles and programs applied for. The CPU also ensures a fair distribution of applicants to the various universities based on entry requirement, ethnic and gender composition. Hence it can be inferred that the lecturer and student demography in the various universities are broadly similar, and therefore

the results obtained from a representative sample of a public university may reflect the situation in the rest of the public universities in Malaysia.

The design incorporated two needs assessment questionnaires because the questions were mainly related to necessities, lacks and wants of the respondents (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The needs and required support as perceived by the lecturers can be categorized as “objective needs”, as opposed to “subjective wants” or preferences perceived by the students (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 125). The sampling scope is that of a single case (UPM) where generalization can be extended to institutions of the same nature, that is, public universities in Malaysia.

In conducting the survey study, the survey procedure of Cohen et al. (2000) (see Figure 6.1) was generally followed.

6.3 Survey Instruments

For this investigation, two survey questionnaires were designed based on the guidelines of Cohen et al. (2000), Dillman (2000), and Sudman and Bradburn (1982). The first questionnaire was to explore the perception and opinions of UPM lecturers toward the writing performance that includes writing ability and writing difficulties, writing needs, and possible writing support, of their undergraduate students (see Appendix 6.2). The second was to find out from the undergraduates their language background, writing ability in English, their opinions toward writing in English, and their perceived writing needs and useful writing support (see Appendix 6.3).

The questionnaire method was used because it was an appropriate instrument and the most widely used in collecting data from a population or a sample (Dillman, 2000). Usually, questionnaires can be used to elicit information from respondents who form the sample of the study. They can also be used as a structure to an interview so that all respondents are asked the same questions in the same sequence and manner. In addition, questionnaires provide a consistent format for recording data from all respondents, and also ease data processing and analysis (Hague, 1993). These four main purposes or reasons convinced that the aim of this study on writing needs and writing support could be met by a questionnaire method.

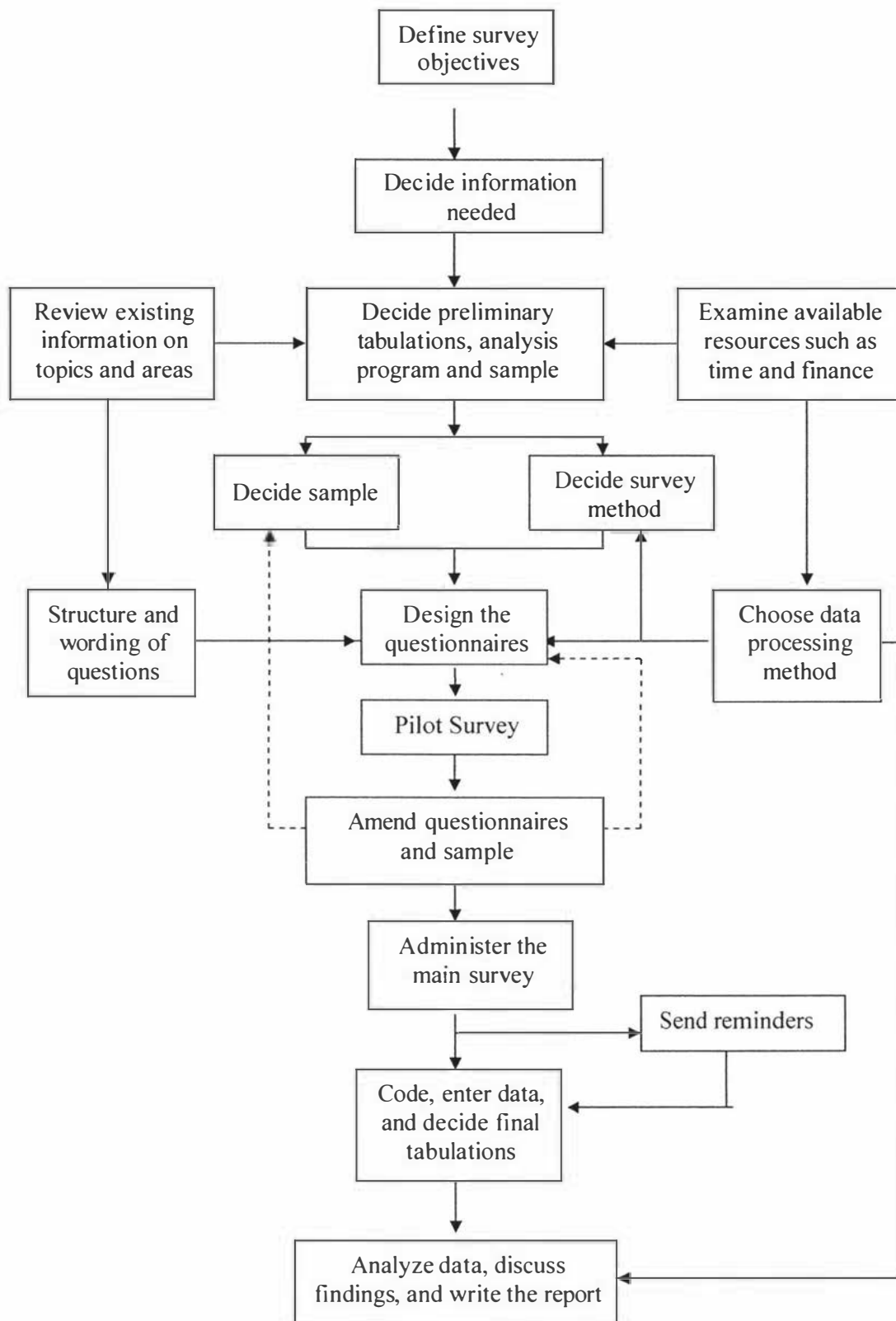


Figure 6.1 The Survey Procedure
(Adapted from Cohen et al., 2000, p. 170)

Before designing the questions, the type, structure and delivery mode of the questionnaires were considered. Questionnaires can either be self-completion which means the respondents read and answer questions by themselves, or administered by an interviewer who asks respondents the set questions and records down the answers. Care must be taken in deciding whether a questionnaire is to be self-administered or interviewer-administered, as the result can be significantly different. Two possible reasons that can account for such a difference are *social desirability* where respondents are more likely to give socially desirable answers in an interview, and *acquiescence* where respondents have the tendency to agree with the interviewer because it is easier to agree than to disagree in most cultures (Dillman, 2000). In considering these effects and also because interviewer-administered questionnaires would be more time consuming and hence more expensive to conduct, it was decided that the two questionnaires would be self-administered. It was also agreed that the questions about writing needs and writing support were straight forward and therefore did not warrant administration by an interviewer.

The structured format sets out the precise wording and order to ask each question, and it also provides predefined options for respondents to pick as answers. It has been efficient in data collection and analysis for large quantitative self-administered surveys. The semi-structured format also uses the same questions and order for all respondents, but the questions are based on predefined options and also open-ended answers, which may require probing or assistance from an interviewer for such answers to be useful. The unstructured format makes use of a checklist of questions rather than a formal questionnaire. This format allows the most flexibility in asking and answering questions, and it is often used in interviews with small samples (Cohen et al., 2000). As it had been decided earlier that the questionnaires would be self-completion, the structured format was adopted. Also, it was decided that the questionnaires would be printed and hand-delivered to the respondents. This was to prevent any loss that might happen if delivered by post.

Question type was an important consideration in questionnaire design. Generally, four main types of questions can be used depending on the kind of information investigated such as knowledge, behaviors, attitude and class/group

(Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). Knowledge questions are usually asked to investigate the literacy level or educational achievement of a specific group. Such questions are also used “for designing and implementing information programs or advertising campaigns” (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p.88). This type of questions can also be used to filter out respondents who do not have adequate knowledge about the issue under investigation, before proceeding to ask behavioral or attitudinal questions.

The second type, behavioral questions, seeks factual information such as what the respondent is, does or owns. The questions determine respondents’ actions in terms of what they have done. Behavioral questions can be further divided into threatening and non-threatening types (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). Non-threatening questions may relate to behaviors such as learning preference and reading habits, while threatening questions may relate to socially undesirable behaviors such as plagiarism. In general, phrasing questions in the third person is less threatening than in the second person (Berdie et al., 1986). In asking behavioral questions, researchers must take note that memory errors might occur. Usually, issues of recency and primacy can be remembered with greater accuracy compared to more distant and less important issues.

The third type, attitudinal questions, seeks information regarding respondents’ attitudes, opinions or basic beliefs. Attitudes and opinions are important in research studies as they give clues to respondents’ motivations and their likely actions. Such questions are related to a certain object that can be an item, a person, or an issue, and the object must be clearly defined in the question (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). Attitudes also exist in different degrees, and the strength can be measured by building a strength dimension into the question such as “Do you feel very strongly, quite strongly, not too strongly, or not at all strongly about?” (Gendall et al., 1991).

The last type, classification questions, seeks information that can be used to group respondents such as race, age, gender, social class, income and location. This type of question is important because it can check whether the required number of respondents has been met. It can also be used to compare and contrast the answers of different groups, for example, respondents from different social backgrounds.

For the two questionnaires administered in the survey study, the focus was on finding out lecturers' and students' opinions about writing in English. Therefore, most questions were of the opinion type, followed by behavioral type, and a few classification and knowledge questions.

These four types of questions can be further categorized into open-ended, close-ended or scalar depending on the type of answers sought (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982; Hague, 1993; Dillman, 2000). For open-ended questions, respondents are free to give any answers expressed in their own words. The free answer may be as short as one or two words such as in blank-filling questions, or as long as a few sentences. This type of questions has both advantages as well as disadvantages. The open format often elicits "vignettes of considerable richness and quotable material that will enliven research reports" (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p.150). It is useful for in-depth investigation and also allows exploration of all aspects of the research topic. On the other hand, open-ended questions take longer time to answer. The data collected also takes longer and more effort to process and analyze. Strictly speaking, the questionnaires used in this study did not include any open-ended questions. The open-ended format was only used as an "Other/s. Please specify" option in case the options given were not exhaustive.

The second category is close-ended questions. The answers have been anticipated, so a list of predefined options is given for respondents to pick the answer. The closed format can be dichotomous, allowing one out of two possible responses such as 'yes' or 'no'; multiple options where more than two options are given; or ranking where respondents are asked to rank the given options based on a given criterion. When a closed question is asked, care must also be taken to ensure all reasonable alternative answers are listed. This is to avoid under-reporting of omitted alternatives that are lumped into an 'other, please specify' category (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982; Dillman, 2000). All the questions designed for this survey study were closed –ended except for the last option of "Other/s (Please write)". Ranking was also used for respondents to indicate their preference priority.

The third type, scalar questions, is a special type of close-ended questions where respondents are given a scale, for example, a Likert Scale (5 options) or a

Semantic Differential (7 options), to pick their answers (see Figure 6.2). This type of question is especially useful because it allows the researcher “the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.253). For the two types of scales, both sides are balanced by having an equal number of options on each side of a middle position. However, having a middle number can be problematic as the option is neutral and thus does not contribute toward decision making. For this reason, the scale designed for this study had an even number instead of an odd number.

An example of a Likert scale:						
1 = strongly disagree						
2 = disagree						
3 = neither agree nor disagree						
4 = agree						
5 = strongly agree						
An example of a Semantic Differential:						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strong -	-	-	-	-	-	- weak

Figure 6.2 Likert Scale and Semantic Differential
(Adapted from Cohen et al., 2000, p. 253)

6.4 Data Collection

The two questionnaires were piloted in mid-July, and administered in August 2002 at UPM. Before piloting the survey instruments, the questionnaires were reviewed by the project supervisor and a professor. A few peers were also invited to check on the questionnaires. The draft questionnaires were then posted online, and the WCenter listserv community was invited to comment on them. The response from the listserv was disappointing as only one member e-mailed me to comment that the questionnaires were very well constructed.

The lecturer questionnaire was piloted on ten lecturers from three departments: Communications, English, and Malay and Linguistics. The student

questionnaire was piloted with a class of Foundation (Level 1) students. Attention was given to language comprehensibility and the time they took to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were requested to circle words or expressions they did not understand, or to ask for clarification. The questionnaires were not translated to the respondents' first language (Malay or Chinese), because all the respondents had basic English competence being either university lecturers or undergraduates as they have to pass the English paper in the High School Exit Exam or MUET before they can be accepted by UPM. The piloting further confirmed that translating the questionnaires into Malay or Chinese was not necessary as the questions were readily understood by the pilot respondents.

The questionnaires were improved further after the pilot at UPM, based on reviewers' and respondents' feedback. Recommended changes from reviewers included improvement on the exact wording to reflect more accurate meaning and replacing a few words with simpler ones. For example, one reviewer found that the options *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* were very close, and recommended the options be changed to *Agree In Part* and *Strongly Disagree* (see Question 6 in Appendix 6.2). Two reviewers who taught Statistics in UPM recommended that the sequencing/numbering of the options be changed from 1 for *Strongly Agree* and 4 for *Strongly Disagree* be reversed, that is, 1 for *Strongly Disagree* and 4 for *Strongly Agree*. This is to simplify data analysis especially in comparing the means of *Agree* and *Disagree* in that a bigger number would reflect more agreement from the respondents, and a smaller would show the reverse.

In administering the pilot and the actual questionnaires, ethical guidelines recommended by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC, 2002) were followed strictly. Respondents were informed that they had the right to decline or withdraw from participation in the survey study at any time. They were also informed of the beneficence of the study, and were given the guarantee of anonymity in the survey, and also the study would not harm them (Cohen et al., 2000). Information and objectives of the study were set out in the information sheets, and respondents signed a consent form to confirm their informed consent prior to answering the questionnaire (see Appendices 6.2 and 6.3).

In conducting the survey, the suitability of various sampling strategies was studied, and factors such as representativeness and generalisability were considered (Cohen et al., 2000). For the student questionnaire, it was decided that data was to be collected only from students who needed to attend English proficiency classes, and thus it did not represent the overall student population that also included a small percentage of students who were exempted from taking English proficiency courses for getting a MUET band 5 or 6. As the purpose of the survey was to investigate writing needs and writing support, the target population was logically students who were less proficient in English, for example, students whose MUET band was four or below and thus required to take English courses (see Appendix 6.1). Those who were exempted from taking proficiency courses were probably quite proficient in English with less need for writing support, and were therefore not included in the survey.

For the sample to be representative and generalisable to similar student population, the sample must comprise an equal number of respondents from each level of proficiency. In meeting this requirement, the *stratified* sampling method was followed (Cohen et al., 2000, p.101). Also, a valid sample size for a survey study should have 100 cases or more in each main subgroup (Cohen et al., 2000, p.93); therefore at least 100 respondents from 3 classes were randomly picked from each level (Levels 1, 2 and 3). Permission to conduct the survey and the timetable for these classes were obtained from English proficiency course coordinators prior to the questionnaire administration.

Before the administration of the lecturer questionnaire, letters were sent to all the deans requesting a name list of lecturers who conducted their courses in English, and also permission to administer the survey questionnaire at their faculties. Out of the 13 faculties at UPM, 3 (Agriculture, Design and Architecture, and Forestry) did not use English to teach undergraduate courses at all, and were therefore not included in the survey. Another faculty not included was the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, as it was somewhat similar to the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science because both were related to the medical discipline and both conducted all their courses in English.

The survey with the lecturers was more like a census because every lecturer in the name list provided by each faculty was sent a questionnaire. Census instead of random sampling was used because it was difficult to decide who to leave out. Moreover, the total number of lecturers who conducted their courses in English was not too big (only 350); therefore it was still affordable to send every lecturer a questionnaire. The questionnaires were eventually mailed to the 350 lecturers together with a cover letter and an addressed return envelope.

For the survey of the undergraduates, the questionnaire was administered in each class after some arrangement with various course instructors. Because the class enrolment was between 30 – 40 students, three classes for each level eventually gave a total number of 399, as questionnaires were given to everyone in the class. While the return of questionnaires from the undergraduates was 100%, that from the lecturers was disheartening. The incentive of a lucky draw prize did not seem to entice respondents. An initial return after one week was just 40 out of 350. It might be that these lecturers received many questionnaires throughout the year, and they were no longer willing to spend time answering still another one. Nevertheless, after making numerous phone calls, sending personalized reminders, e-mail requests, and knocking at almost every door, the return eventually reached 118, a rate of 33.7%.

6.5 Analysis and Results

The data collected from the lecturer and student questionnaires were computed by the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. The results were categorized in specific sections, guided by the objectives of each questionnaire. For the lecturer questionnaire, the results were analyzed in six sections including Teaching Profile, English Requirement in Writing Tasks, Perceptions of Writing in English, Student Writing Performance in English, Support for Writing in English, and Summary of Results. For the student questionnaires, the sections include Student Profile, Student Language Background, Student Perceptions of Writing in English, Student Needs and Difficulties in Writing in English, Preference for Learning Writing Skills, and Summary of Results.

6.5.1 Lecturer Questionnaire

The purpose of the lecturer questionnaire was to investigate the following aspects:

1. Do UPM lecturers view writing in English as an essential study skill in the university?
2. Do UPM lecturers view the teaching of writing in English to be one of their professional responsibilities?
3. What kind of writing tasks do UPM lecturers require students to write in English?
4. Which areas of students' writing in English do UPM lecturers perceive as problematic?
5. What kind of writing support for writing in English do UPM lecturers think will help improve the writing ability of undergraduates?

To obtain the desired responses, questions were formulated and organized into five sections: Teaching Profile, English Requirement in Writing Tasks, Perception on Writing in English, Writing performance of Students, and Support for Writing in English. These sections are discussed below.

Teaching Profile

The largest group of respondents was from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, followed by Economics and Management, Science and Environment, Engineering, and Modern Languages and Communication (Table 6.1). Lecturers were identified according to their respective faculties to investigate if there was any correlation between a faculty and, for example, the extent of English usage in taught courses, or the perception of the English writing ability of their undergraduate students. Nevertheless, this faculty specific inquiry involved faculties with a respondent total of 10 or above. Those with less than 10 respondents were not investigated (see Table 6.1) as the small number could not represent the whole of the respective faculties. This correlation will be addressed when the variables or issues are being discussed in later sections.

Table 6.1 Respondents by Faculties
(n=118)

Faculties	Percentage of Respondents
Medicine & Health Science	27.1
Economics & Management	22.9
Science & Environment	15.3
Engineering	11.9
Modern Languages & Communication	11.0
Computer Science & Information Technology	4.2
Human Ecology	3.4
Food Science & Biotechnology	2.5
Educational Studies	1.7

The teaching experience of these lecturers ranged from 3 months to 30 years. As most of them were in the 5 years and below range (Table 6.2), the data was organized into two categories: above 5 years, and 5 years and below to simplify analysis of any possible relationship, for example, age and perception. The majority (65.25%) of the lecturers had a teaching experience of 5 years and below, while only about one-third (34.75%) had a teaching experience of more than 5 years (see Figure 6.3).

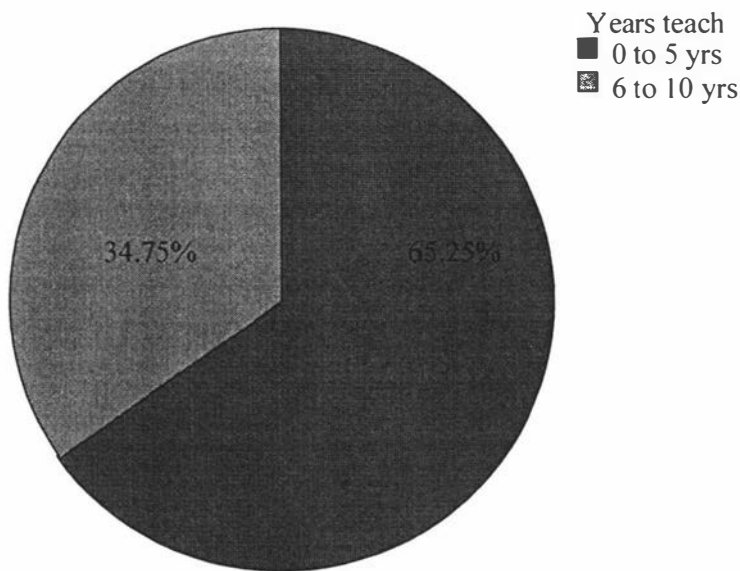


Figure 6.3 Teaching Experience: Collated Categories (n=118)

Another demographic question was regarding the teaching load of the respondents. Most of these lecturers (86.4%) taught two courses or less per semester

(Table 6.2). Four lecturers did not teach any courses, and were possibly new lecturers, who were yet to be assigned courses to teach. Because of the small number of respondents who taught more than two courses, no investigation of correlation between teaching loads and other variables was conducted as the result would not be convincing.

Table 6.2 Average Teaching Load per Semester
(n=118)

No. of Courses	Percentage of Lecturers
.0	3.4
1.0	23.7
1.5	1.7
2.0	57.6
3.0	5.9
4.0	3.4
4.5	.8
5.0	2.5
6.0	.8

English Requirement in Writing Tasks

In analyzing the data to account for the extent lecturers required their students to write in English, the Faculty of Modern Languages and the Faculty of Educational Studies were excluded from the computation because the respondents were lecturers of Bachelor of Arts (English) and Bachelor of Education (TESL) who taught 100% in English. This exclusion was necessary to avoid skewing the data. After the exclusion of these two faculties, the total respondent number was 103 (see Table 6.3). Slightly more than half of the lecturers (52.4%) allowed students to submit assignments for the courses they taught in either Malay or English, while about one-third (33%) required students to write only in English. The English-only lecturers were mostly from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (68.8%); and the lecturers who allowed either English or Malay were mostly from the Faculty of Science and Environmental Studies (72.2%), Engineering (71.4%), and Economics & Management (63%) (Table 6.4).

Table 6.3 Percentage of Lecturers Requiring Students Write in English
(n=103)

Write in English	Percentage of Lecturers
Some Courses	11.6
Half	1.0
Most Courses	2.0
Malay or English	52.4
All Courses	33.0

Table 6.4 Lecturers and English Requirement Cross-tabulation
(n=103)

English Requirement	Some Courses %	Half %	Most Courses %	Malay or English %	All courses %
Faculty					
Medicine & Health Science	6.3		3.1	21.9	68.8
Engineering				71.4	28.6
Economics & Management	11.1	3.7		63	22.2
Science & Environment	27.8			72.2	

Among the most common writing tasks lecturers required their students to perform in English were tests (59%), reports (59%), research papers (56%), theses (48%), essays (47%), and answers to essay questions (40%). Note that these writing tasks did not include e-mail messages or online discussions. The absence of electronic response might imply that the respondents did not use online technology in their teaching.

Other tasks not included in the list but provided by the lecturers included patient case write-ups, writing for tutorial presentations, proposals, critical comments on newspaper articles, practical examinations, and speech outlines.

Perception on Writing in English

The opinion that the ability to write in English is an essential study skill was supported almost unanimously with 74.6% *Strongly Agree* and 20.5% *Agree* (Total=95.1%) (see Table 6.5). However, only slightly more than half of these lecturers (53.4%) strongly disagreed that the ability to write effectively in English does not contribute towards academic success of their students. In other words, they agreed that being able to write effectively contribute towards academic success. (Perhaps the double negative in this statement had confused them, but a practice in questionnaire design is to include both positive and negative statement to induce thinking from the respondents). Compared to their almost unanimous agreement to *the ability to write in English is an essential study skill* (Statement a), the response to *the ability to write effectively in English does not contribute towards academic success* (statement b) was somewhat unconvincing. The culprit might be the word *effectively*. These lecturers might feel that a *basic* writing ability in English is essential, but *effective* writing in English was not required for academic success as the Malay language was still the dominant language used in the university. However, the majority of them (64.4% *strongly agreed* and 27.1% *agreed* = total 91.5%) were of the opinion that *effective writing in English will contribute to the professional success of their students* (Statement c).

The majority of the lecturers agreed that *they should not be expected to teach writing skills in English* (Statement d) as only 18.6% *strongly disagreed*. However, they considered *helping students write in English one of their professional responsibilities* (Statement e) as only 16.9% strongly disagreed. The reason could be that most of these lecturers were not trained to teach writing, let alone writing in English. Three respondents felt that students were already taught writing skills at the secondary schools, and thus there was no need to repeat teaching such skills at the tertiary level. However, the majority (81.4%) strongly felt that students should be

given assistance and support for them to master the skill of writing in English (Statement f, Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Percentages of Lecturers' Opinions on Writing in English (n=118)

Opinions	Strongly disagree %	Agree in part %	Agree %	Strongly agree %	No answer %
a. The ability to write in English is an essential study skill in a university	0.8	2.5	20.5	74.6	1.7
b. The ability to write effectively in English does not contribute towards academic success of my students	53.4	23.7	19.5	1.7	1.7
c. The ability to write effectively in English will contribute towards professional success of my students	1.7	5.1	27.1	64.4	1.7
d. Being a content specialist in my discipline, I should not be expected to teach writing skills in English	18.6	29.7	25.4	24.6	1.7
e. Helping students to write in English is one of my professional responsibilities	16.9	41.5	27.1	13.6	1.7
f. Students should not be given help and support to master the skill of writing in English	81.4	11	3.4	3.4	0.8
g. Other/s (Please write.)	-	-	1.7	12.7	85.6

Under the *Other/s (please specify)* option, several significant opinions were expressed (see Item G, Table 6.5). Firstly, the ability to teach in English is essential to help students perform in English. The respondent who held this opinion encouraged lecturers to teach in English so as to give students increased exposure to the English language. The second opinion was that objective questions, especially multiple-choice format, are the antithesis to the mastery of writing skills. This respondent discouraged lecturers from using the objective format in setting examination questions. S/he felt that the only way to improve students' writing was to require them to write more in English. Thirdly, students should take their own initiatives by reading more extensively and by improving their writing in English. This opinion confirmed the positive link between reading and writing (see, for example, Badger and White, 2000; Section 3.3.1). The next opinion was that writing in English is most

crucial if students work in the corporate sector later in life. The respondent endorsed the importance of English as a language of trade, business and commerce.

The fifth was teaching English from day one. This opinion, albeit a little confusing, just showed how urgent the respondent felt toward the need to raise English competence standards. Currently, students are taught English as a subject from day one in the public national primary schools. The respondent who expressed this need might mean using English as a medium of instruction from day one in the primary school.

Next was the suggestion to make writing in English compulsory. At the time of writing this dissertation (September 2005), English is not compulsory for non science and technology courses in universities. In this light, it may not be possible to make writing in English compulsory in public universities. The seventh suggestion was that every faculty should have its own English experts. This opinion pointed out the need of English language advising – a popular practice mainly to help ESL students especially in British universities (see, for example, Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, 2001).

Lastly, a serious opinion expressed was plagiarism caused by the inability to write in English. The respondent pointed out a serious side effect caused by students' difficulty to write in English. According to him, when students were under the pressure to write in English and having no one to guide them, they might unwittingly turn to plagiarism as the last resort. Therefore, it is imperative that universities provide special support and assistance in helping students who have difficulty in writing in English.

Student Writing Performance in English

An attempt was then made to determine whether there was any difference among the opinions of lecturers from different faculties regarding their students' writing ability. As the highest agreement was reached on the perception that few of their students could write effectively in English (Table 6.6), this figure was compared across faculties and presented as percentages in the column *Few Can Write* in Table

6.7. The data showed that the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences had the least number of lecturers who felt that only a few of their students could write effectively in English. As this faculty was the most stringent in terms of entry requirements that included a good grade in English in the high school exit examination and MUET, it was no surprise that relatively fewer faculty members endorsed the opinion that *Few Can Write*. On the other hand, it was a surprise that the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication had the highest number (84.6%) to opine that only a few of their students could write, because one would expect students must have a strong grade in English to be eligible for the BA English program. It may be that the English Studies lecturers had higher expectation as their students were English majors, and being English Studies lecturers, they were more critical in assessing their students' writing performance in English.

Table 6.6 Perception of Lecturers on Students' Writing Ability
(n=118)

Perception on Writing Ability	Percentage of Lecturers
All can write	0.8
Most can write	7.6
Half can write	20.3
Few can write	63.6
None can write	5.1

Table 6.7 Faculty and Writing Performance Cross-tabulation
(n=118)

Faculty	%	None can write	Few can write	Half can write	Most can write	All can write
Modern Languages & Communication			84.6	7.7	7.7	
Science & Environment			83.3	16.7		
Economics & Management			74.1	25.9		
Engineering			64.3	14.3	14.3	
Medicine & Health Science	15.6		31.3	25	18.8	3.1

The next question asks the lecturers to rate 12 common problems of writing in English of their students (see Table 6.8). All the listed writing problems drew high percentages in the *Quite Common* column. However, only one of them, i.e. Wrong Grammar, showed a higher percentage for being *Always a Problem*. This higher percentage indicated that grammar was felt to be the main concern at this level.

A number of other problems were suggested by the respondents under *Other/s* (see Item m, Table 6.8), and included such notions as lengthy sentences, plagiarism, lacking strategies, direct translation from Malay to English, poor vocabulary thus unable to elaborate, unable to summarize or conclude, mixing British and American English, and lacking cohesion. A few respondents also commented that inaccurate spelling was, however, not at all a problem because all word processors have an automatic spell check. However, slightly more than half of the lecturers thought that the problem of inaccurate spelling was, to the contrary, quite common. This might imply that students probably did not know or simply did not have the habit to spell check their writing, or the Spell Checker they used might not have functioned effectively.

Table 6.8 Lecturers' Rating on Students' Common Writing Problems in English (n=118)

Item	Writing Problems	%	Never occurs	Rarely occurs	Quite common	Always a problem
a.	Inappropriate style	-		11	63.6	18.6
b.	Inaccurate word choice	-		5.9	63.6	25.4
c.	Lack of logical organization	-		15.3	61	15.3
d.	Lack of central thesis or focus	-		14.4	57.6	16.1
e.	Monotonous sentence structure	-		12.7	55.1	18.6
f.	Insufficient content	.8		21.2	54.2	14.4
g.	Poor development	-		12.7	53.4	22
h.	Incorrect format	.8		22.9	53.4	12.7
i.	Inaccurate spelling	-		23.7	52.5	18.6
j.	Incorrect paragraphing	1.7		33.9	50.8	5.9
k.	Misuse of punctuation marks	2.5		29.7	48.3	11.0
l.	Wrong grammar	-	-		42.4	55.9
m.	Other/s (Please write.)	-	.8		5.1	7.6

Support for Writing in English

The lecturers were then asked to rank, according to their preference, five possible services that may provide support in assisting undergraduate students write in English. The results are given in descending order from the most to the least preferred in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 Lecturers' Ranking on Writing Support Options
(n=118)

Location	Rank	Most Preferred-----Least Preferred				
	%	5	4	3	2	1
Specific writing classes conducted by the Department of English.	55.1	17.8	13.6	6.8	4.2	
Specific writing classes conducted by the Department of TESL.	27.1	34.7	16.1	11.9	6.8	
A tutorial service unit at each faculty.	38.1	17.8	20.3	14.4	8.5	
A tutorial service unit at each residential college.	11.9	22	12.7	25.4	27.1	
A university writing tutorial center.	21.2	16.1	18.6	11.9	31.4	

There were two parts to this inquiry. First was the choice between specific writing classes and tutorials, and the second was who or where was the most preferred service provider. The fact that specific writing classes ranked first and second showed that the lecturers believed that specific writing classes would help students more than tutorials, and the better preferred support provider was the Department of English in the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. The strong preference for specific classes conducted by the Department of English was a testimonial to the recognized expertise of the Department in designing and teaching English language courses among this group of lecturer respondents. The Department of TESL is in charge of training students who are mostly in-service teachers to teach English in secondary schools. Hence their expertise in English was recognized by the respondents too. In terms of tutorial services, the preference was for a tutorial service

attached to each faculty instead of each residential college. A centralized tutorial center was the least preferred. In the context of UPM, tutorials are often conducted by teaching assistants who are students and seldom by lecturers, and such tutorials have fixed hours and are conducted for groups of 20-40 students. This might have accounted for the tutorial service being less preferred. The same respondents, however, reacted favorably to one-to-one and face-to-face tutorials (see the next paragraph).

The lecturers were also asked the kind of instructional method they perceived as useful or effective in teaching writing. The results (see Table 6.10) showed that the highest percentages reported in the *Essential* and *Very Helpful* columns were for individual face-to-face tutorials, followed by tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester using small group workshop methodology. Note that the credit-bearing small group workshop method was preferred over the non-credit-bearing. Possibly these lecturers had observed that students tended not to take a course seriously if it did not contribute towards their Grade Point Average (GPA). In the *Not Helpful* column, the highest percentages were for two lecture method options: specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing and credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester. This finding has somewhat supported the general view that the lecture is the least effective method compared to small group or individual instruction (Bundy, 2004). Other options suggested by the respondents included integrating writing in all courses, initiating the effort in improving English from primary and secondary schools, and paying more attention to the writing of final-year and postgraduate students as they needed to write their thesis in English.

Table 6.10 Lecturers' Rating on Instructional Methods for Writing
(n=118)

Instructional Methods	%	Not Help- ful	Quite helpful	Very Helpful	Essen- tial
a. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by lecture method.	28	37.3	22	11.9	
b. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by small group (up to 10 students) workshop method.	5.9	21.2	46.6	26.3	
c. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by lecture method.	39	36.4	16.9	5.9	
d. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by small group workshop method.	17.8	31.4	37.3	12.7	
e. Individual face-to-face tutorial for any writing task in English that a student requires help.	5.1	19.5	43.2	32.2	
f. An immersion academic writing program upon entry to the university.	14.4	28	30.5	25.4	
g. An immersion workplace writing program prior to exit from the university.	22.9	27.1	26.3	18.6	

Lecturers were then asked about their preferences with regards to on-site and online support, although the figures in the *Essential* column did not draw any high percentages (see Table 6.11), quite a number of writing support options were perceived as *very helpful*. These included a face-to-face tutor (51.7%), a web forum on writing (44.9%), a website with downloadable materials (44.1%), an electronic journal (42.4%), a print journal (41.5%), a self-access lab (35.6), and a resource center (33.9%). Note that when an online tutor was compared to a face-to-face tutor, preference was shown for the latter. As for Item C (Table 6.11) that suggests the use of guidebooks, a respondent cast her doubt by commenting, "My students can't even read. How do you expect them to consult guidebooks?"

Table 6.11 Lecturers' Rating on On-site and Online Writing Support Options (n=118)

Writing Support	%	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a A tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments face-to-face individually during certain hours.	2.5	21.2	51.7	22	
b An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet any time.	7.6	40.7	38.1	13.6	
c A resource center that provides guidebooks to effective writing.	16.9	31.4	33.9	17.8	
d A self-access lab that provides worksheets with self-checking answers for students to work on a specific problem area.	16.1	35.6	35.6	12.7	
e A telephone hotline for students to ask questions about their writing assignments.	29.7	41.5	26.3	2.5	
f A website that provides electronic materials such as handouts, guidebooks, and other references.	7.6	33.1	44.1	15.3	
g A print journal that publishes students' writing in English.	17.8	33.1	41.5	6.8	
h An electronic journal that publishes students' writing in English.	16.9	33.9	42.4	5.9	
i Connection to a web forum on writing.	10.2	36.4	44.9	6.8	

The next question asks respondents to rate online writing support options (Table 6.12). All the highest percentages were found in the *Very Helpful* column, which means that all the proposed online supporting facilities were perceived as *Very helpful* by these respondents. From the lecturers' perspective, online support were favorable options in helping students improve writing in English.

Table 6.12 Lecturers' Rating on Online Writing Support Options
(n=118)

Online Support	%	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet	3.4	26.3	51.7	16.9	
b. Downloadable electronic handouts on various aspects of writing.	11	23.7	50.8	13.6	
c. Interactive online quizzes on English grammar.	6.8	29.7	47.5	14.4	
d. An online discussion forum on writing.	10.2	32.2	43.2	12.7	
e. Links to writing resources such as online dictionaries, thesauruses, and style guides.	4.2	22.9	48.3	23.7	
f. Online search engines.	9.3	33.1	39.8	16.9	
g. An online publishing environment for student writers.	8.5	27.1	53.4	8.5	
h. Online modules on specific writing skills.	3.4	23.7	56.8	14.4	
i. Examples of various writing tasks.	-	21.2	52.5	25.4	
j. An online editing service.	5.1	22.9	45.8	23.7	

Summary of Results from Lecturer Questionnaire

A good number of the lecturer respondents involved in the survey at UPM were from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science, Economics and Management, Science and Environment, Engineering, and Modern Languages and Communication. About two thirds of them were junior lecturers with teaching experience of five years and below, and most of them (86.4%) had a teaching load of two courses or less per semester.

About one third of the respondents required students to write only in English for all the assigned written tasks, and this involved mostly the Medicine lecturers. About half of them (52.4%), mostly from Engineering, Economics and Science, allowed students to write either in Malay or English. This implied that English was

used in a good number of courses taught at UPM, besides those offered in BA English and TESL programs. The common writing tasks in English, other than written tests or examinations, were reports, research papers, theses, essays, and answers to open-ended questions. Most of the 118 respondents (95.1%) perceived writing in English an essential study skill in the university. They also thought that the ability to write in English would contribute to the professional success of their students. They generally perceived that teaching writing in English should not be their responsibility as they were subject and not English specialists.

About two thirds of these respondents (63.6%) thought that only a few of their students could write in English effectively. The students' common writing problems, as seen by the respondents, included wrong grammar, inappropriate style, inaccurate diction, and lack of logical organization. The lecturers strongly felt that their students needed help and support to master the skills. Among the options of specific writing courses and tutorial support, the respondents ranked specific writing classes conducted by the Department of English as the most preferred. In addition, they also perceived individual tutorials as essential for their students. In fact, both on-site and online individual tutorials were perceived as very helpful, but with stronger preference (51.7% versus 38.1%) for the former.

Other facilities perceived as very helpful included a web forum, print and electronic journals, online resources, a self access lab and a resource center. On top of the above, the respondents perceived all online support facilities such as online modules on specific writing skills, examples of various writing tasks, downloadable handouts on various aspects of writing, links to online resources, online publishing environment, interactive quizzes on English grammar, and online discussion forum on writing in English as very helpful. In short, the lecturers recognized the importance of writing in English and that their students needed additional help and support to write effectively in English.

6.5.2 Student Questionnaire

The purpose of the student questionnaire was to investigate the following questions:

1. Do UPM undergraduates have sufficient English language background to enable them to write well in English?
2. How do UPM undergraduates view the skill of writing in English?
3. What kind of writing tasks in English do UPM undergraduates perform in their studies and daily interactions?
4. In which areas of writing in English do UPM undergraduates need help?
5. What kinds of writing support do UPM undergraduates think will help improve their ability to write in English?

To achieve this purpose, questions were formulated and organized into five sections: Personal Details, Language Background, Perception on Writing in English, English Language Writing Needs and Difficulties, and Preference for Learning Writing Skills.

Student Profile

In composing the student profile, several demographic questions were asked. The undergraduate respondents were asked to identify their faculties. Almost all the faculties, except the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, participated in the survey. The largest group of respondents came from the Faculty of Educational Studies, followed by the Faculty of Human Ecology, and the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (Figure 6.4).

Among the respondents, only about 10% were studying a diploma, while the rest were in various undergraduate degree programs. Because of the small percentage of diploma students, it might not be justifiable to compare the two groups (diploma and non-diploma) as to whether the diploma students experienced more writing difficulties or needed more writing support than the other group.

As explained earlier in Section 5.6, the student subjects were randomly picked from three levels of proficiency based on their MUET results. Among the respondents, 30.58% were in Level One, 31.08% Level Two, and 38.35% Level Three.

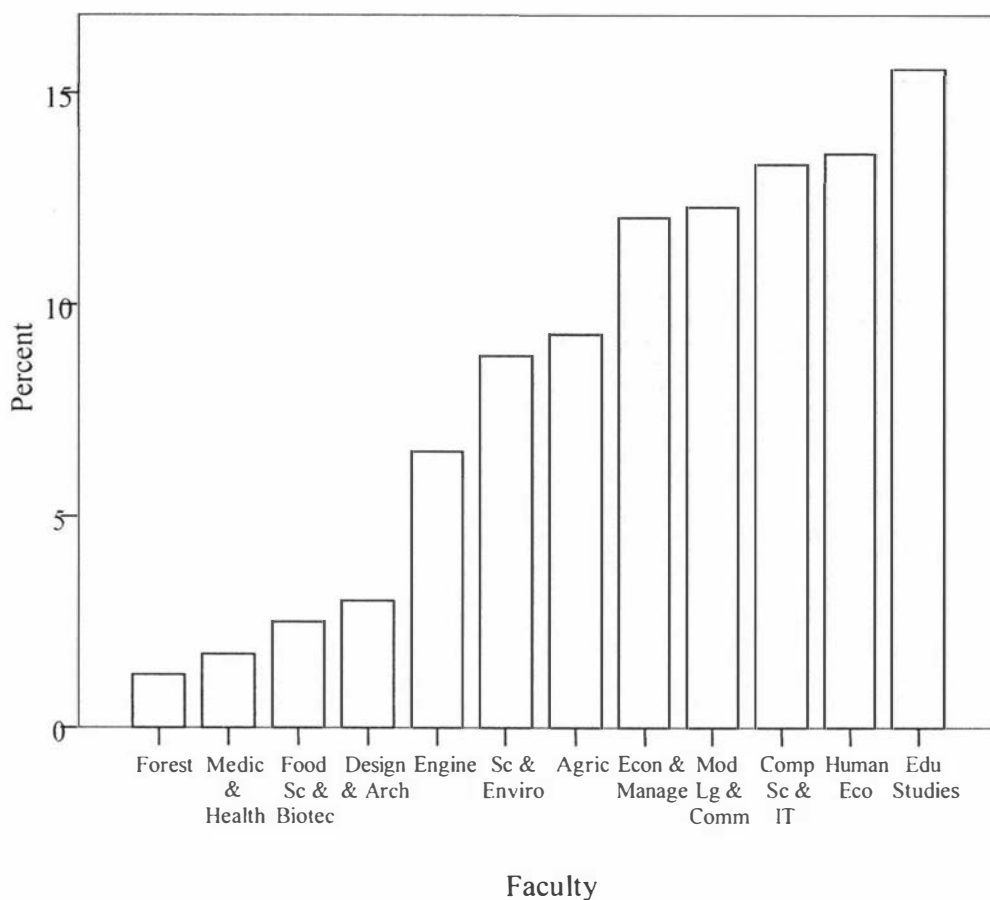


Figure 6.4 Percentages of Undergraduates by Faculties (n=399)

The respondents were also asked to identify their current semester (Table 6.13). The largest group of respondents were in their third semester, followed by those in their fifth semester and the first semester. There was one subject in the sixth semester, and seven in their seventh semester. The latter could be the students who had not followed any English course in the first semester because they had either not been aware of the English language requirement, or had experienced timetable problems. It was hypothesized that final-semester students should have a better

command of writing in English than beginning students for two reasons. Firstly, they had completed a number of English courses, and secondly, they had more experience in writing in English in an academic environment. However, this hypothesis was not tested because the number of students in final semesters, i.e. semesters 6 and 7, was too small, and therefore would not have produced convincing results.

Table 6.13 Percentages of Students by Semesters
(n=399)

Semester	Percentage of Students
1	24.6
2	6.8
3	32.3
4	7.5
5	26.8
6	.3
7	1.8

The respondents were also asked to identify their gender. The information was useful to validate the growing concern that the gap between the number of university male and female students was widening. More male school leavers tended to opt for entering the job market rather than continuing their studies in institutions of higher learning. This trend was confirmed in the responses to this question: the number of female (66.4%) was almost double that of male undergraduates (32.8%).

The gender identification served an additional purpose, that of testing the assumption that women were less likely to adopt computer or network technology than men. When *gender* was cross-tabbed with *Internet Time*, the result showed that more male (52.5%) than female undergraduates (41.7%) spent above 4 hours per week on the Internet (Table 6.14), and the difference is significant based on a correlation statistical test ($t=1.97$, $p<0.05$). When *Gender* was cross-tabbed with *Computer Usage*, more female (20.8%) than male respondents (13.7%) were worried about using a computer, while more men (53.4%) than women (47.3%) were looking forward to computer use (see Figure 6.5). However, a correlation statistical test found that the relationship between gender and computer usage was not significant ($r = .074$,

$p>0.05$). Therefore, these findings might inform only to a limited extent that men were probably more ready to adopt computer and network technology than women.

Table 6.14 Gender and Internet Time Cross-tabulation
(n=399)

Internet Time		Gender	
		Male	Female
4 hours and below	%	47.5	58.3
above 4 hours	%	52.5	41.7

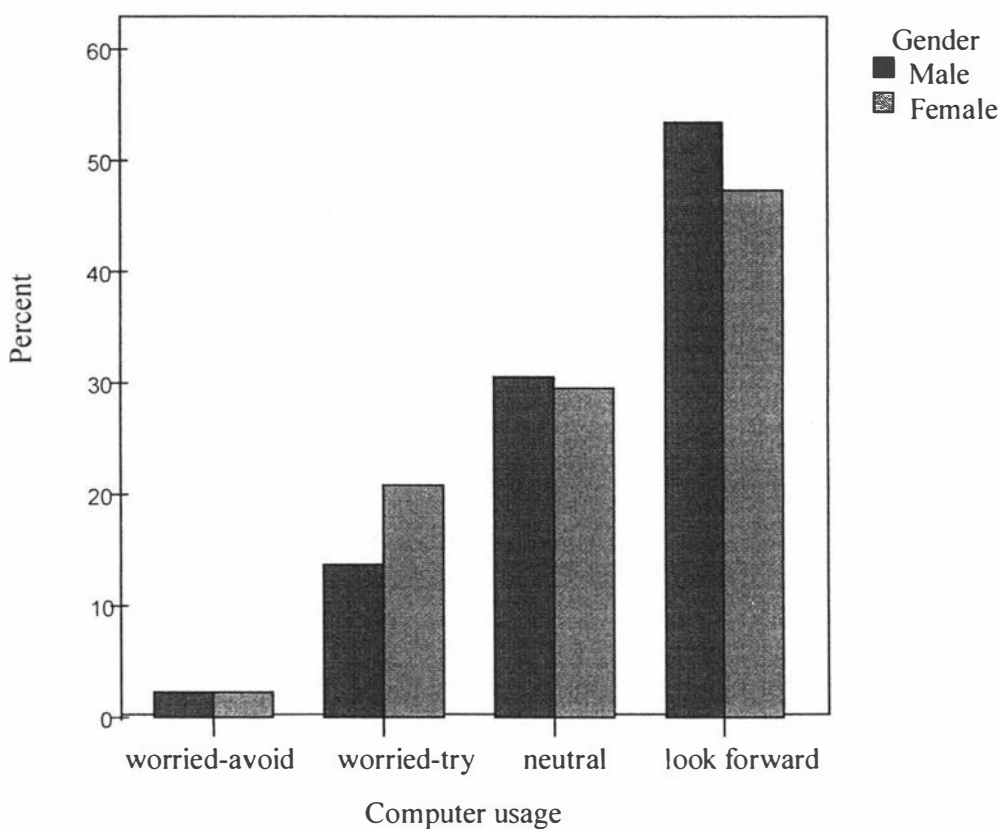


Figure 6.5 Gender and Attitude towards Computer Use (n=399)

The age level of the respondents ranged from 18 to 51. However, the majority (92.2%) were found in the 24 years and younger range, with only 7.8% (30 subjects) above 24 years of age. As well as the suggestion that Internet technology was gender-

related, age was also hypothesized to be a contributing factor to the adoption of the technology. However, because the sample size for the higher-aged group was too small, the age factor could not be tested.

Student Language Background

Most respondents (61.9%), being ethnic Malay, picked Malay as their first language (see Table 6.15). They considered Malay to be their best language, the most frequently used spoken language in studies and daily interaction, and the most often used written language in studies and daily interaction.

The same could not be said in regard to Mandarin. As Mandarin was not used at all as the medium of instruction in the university, except when it was taught as a foreign language, its use was quite limited as a spoken and written language in studies as compared to its use in daily interaction.

There were only 8 respondents (2%) whose first language was Tamil, and 10 (2.5%) whose first language was English. However, Tamil was missing in all areas whereas English showed its significant presence especially as a spoken and written language in their studies though not in their daily interaction.

Other first languages included Iban and Bidayuh (the languages of two indigenous people of East Malaysia), Telegu (a language of the Indian ethnic group other than Tamil), and Cantonese, Hakka, and Hokkien (dialects of major Chinese clans). Many Chinese are born speaking their dialects or regional languages and not Mandarin, which they later acquire from the environment, kindergartens or primary schools. Therefore, Chinese students often claim that the regional variety or dialect is their first language.

Table 6.15 Language Background and Language Use (n=399)

Questions as in Appendix 6.3	Malay	Mandarin	Tamil	English	Other
%					
Q6 What is your first language?	61.9	27.3	2.0	2.5	6.3
Q7 Which language do you use best?	64.2	25.1	.8	8	1.5
Q8 Which spoken language do you use the most in your studies?	72.4	3.8	-	22.3	1.5
Q9 Which spoken language do you use the most in your daily interaction?	63.9	26.8	.8	6.8	1.8
Q10 Which written language do you use the most in your studies?	71.9	1.5	-	25.6	.8
Q11 Which written language do you use the most in your daily interaction?	65.9	13.8	-	19.3	.8

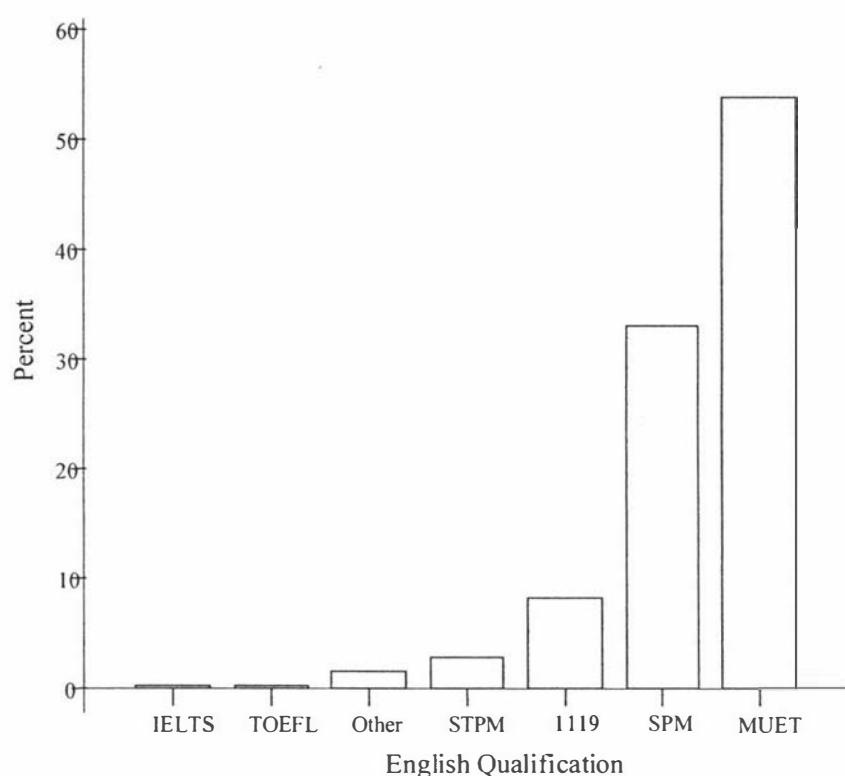


Figure 6.6 Highest English Qualification (n=390)

More than half of the respondents (54%) claimed that MUET (Malaysia University Entrance Test) was their highest English language qualification (see Figure 6.6). For MUET, testees were graded into 6 bands of proficiency, ranging from the highest Band 6 *Very Good User* to the lowest Band 1 *Extremely Limited User* (see Appendix 5.1 for a more detailed description of MUET bands). Although the respondents were asked to submit their test grades, out of the 210 subjects who had

taken MUET, only 167 students specified the grade. Their band distribution is shown in Table 6.16. The performance of these students on MUET was mostly average (40% Modest Users) or below average (25.8% Limited Users).

Table 6.16 Performance on MUET (n=167)

Band	MUET Classification	Percentage
6	Very Good User	0.0
5	Good User	12.6
4	Competent User	18.0
3	Modest User	40.0
2	Limited User	25.8
1	Extremely Limited User	3.6

32.3% of the respondents said that *SPM (Sijil Persekolahan Menengah* or Certificate of Secondary Education) was their highest English qualification. However, only 76 of them specified their grades on the questionnaire, and the grade distribution of their SPM performance is as Table 6.17. The second lowest grade (P7) had the biggest number (17), while the strong credit grade (C3) attracted the next biggest count (19.74). This SPM grade distribution coupled with that of the MUET indicated that the English competence of this group of respondents was quite heterogeneous, and this might pose a challenge to the commonly used uniform methodology and materials in UPM English proficiency classes.

Table 6.17 Grade Distribution of SPM English (n=76)

Grade	Percentage
A1	3.95
A2	7.9
C3	19.74
C4	11.85
C5	13.16
C6	17.11
P7	22.37
P8	3.95

For the remaining respondents (see Figure 6.7), only 8% respondents sat for the test paper 1119, an English language entrance test accepted by British universities on top of IELTS and TOEFL. Only about 3% of the respondents sat for STPM (*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Menengah* or Higher Certificate of Secondary Education), and one subject each (0.26%) for IELTS and TOEFL. Under the 'Other' option, 3 subjects (0.77%) took English courses in their Diploma program and 2 in their Matriculation program, the remaining one subject did not specify the qualification.

Student Perceptions of Writing in English

The perception of the importance of the English language often determines the motivation to learn the language. The Expectancy Theory of Vroom (1964) stipulates that the three factors that spur motivation are perceived probability of success, connection of success to reward, and the value of obtaining goal. Therefore, students' motivation to learn English depends on whether they perceive English as rewarding or important to them. About half of the respondents (47.4%) strongly disagreed with the notion that English was not an essential study skill in a university (see Table 6.18). In other words, they agreed that English was an essential study skill. Following Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964), these students were more likely to have a high motivation toward improving their writing skills in English. Some 30.3% agreed in part with this statement as they might have felt that Malay, not English, was the main medium of instruction used in the university. When the statement was phrased slightly differently but having the same meaning (see Statement b), only 3.3% strongly disagreed. In retrospect, the double negatives in Statements a, c and e might have confused some respondents. However, if all the statements were phrased positively, some respondents might answer without much thinking. This is an area that warrants further research.

Almost three quarters (72.7%) strongly felt that the ability to write effectively in English would contribute toward their future professional success. The majority of them (44.9% agreed, and 44.4% strongly agreed) felt that writing in English was a skill that could be learned. The response to Statements a to d indicated that these

undergraduate students were motivated to learn writing in English as they could see its relative importance for their academic and professional success (Vroom, 1964). The response to Statements e and f showed that the students generally felt that the university could improve its human and physical resources in providing more support to help students master the skills of writing in English.

Table 6.18 Student Opinions about Writing in English
(n=399)

Opinions	%	Strongly disagree	Agree in part	Agree	Strongly agree
a. The ability to write in English is <u>not</u> an essential study skill in a university.	47.4	30.3	16.8	3.5	
b. The ability to write effectively in English contributes towards my academic success.	3.3	15.3	46.6	34.3	
c. The ability to write effectively in English will <u>not</u> contribute towards my future professional success.	72.7	14.8	6.5	3.8	
d. Writing in English is a skill that can be learned.	4.5	5.8	44.9	44.4	
e. The university does <u>not</u> provide sufficient support to help students improve their writing in English.	23.3	45.9	20.8	8.8	
f. Students should be given more support to learn the skill of writing in English.	3	4.8	38.1	53.1	

Student Needs and Difficulties in Writing in English

A majority of the respondents (Table 6.19) said that they experienced difficulty when writing in English (43.1% often, and 48.9% sometimes). These results clearly indicated that most students needed better assistance than what the university is providing currently.

Table 6.19 Student Writing Ability (n=395)

Writing ability	Percentage of Students
Cannot write	3.3
Often difficult	43.1
Sometimes difficult	48.9
Never difficult	3.8

It was generally assumed that students of a higher proficiency level should have better writing ability and less writing difficulty than that of a lower level. Figure 6.7 shows that for the *Never Difficult* category, Level 3 students had the highest percentage (66.7%), Level 2 the second highest (20%), and Level 1 the lowest (13.33%). For the *Sometimes Difficult* category, Level 3 again had the highest (46.67%), but Level 1 had a higher percentage than Level 2 to find writing was sometimes a problem. For the writing was *Often Difficult* category, Level 1 had slightly lower percentage (about 1%) than Level 2, and Level 3 had the lowest (25.58%). For the *Cannot Write* category, the result surprisingly did not follow a logical pattern because Level 1, supposed to have the lowest proficiency based on the MUET band, had the lowest percentage. In other words, more students of Levels 2 and 3 perceived that they could not write compared to students of Level 1. Due to the haphazard and irregular pattern of the responses, there was no basis to establish any kind of relationship between the supposedly proficiency levels as measured by the MUET and writing abilities as perceived by the respondents. The reason might be that the MUET measurement was objective, whereas students' perception of their writing ability was subjective and was also subjected to various extraneous variables such as the kind of writing tasks experienced and teacher factors. Consequently, relating perceived writing abilities to different faculties and different semesters might also produce irregular patterns, making generalizations impossible, because each proficiency level comprised respondents from various faculties and semesters. Therefore, the correlation check was not conducted for faculties and semesters.

The usual writing tasks in English the students performed included writing short notes (59.4%), e-mails (50.1%), writing for Internet chats (42.6%), essays (36.6%), letters to friends (25.1%), and resumes (23.3%). The responses showed that

the students performed more informal than formal writing tasks in English. Their writing of e-mails and Internet chats showed that about half of the sampling population was familiar with online writing. As the lecturer respondents did not include e-mails or online discussion in their common writing assignments, the student respondents could be writing online for non-academic or social purposes.

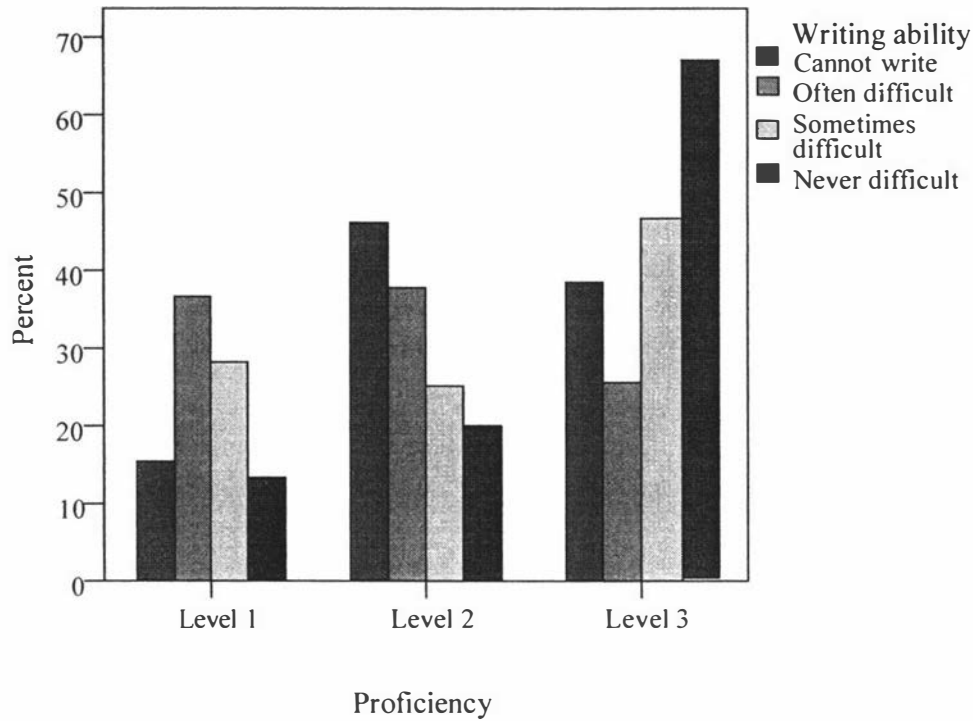


Figure 6.7 Comparison of Perceived Writing Abilities among Three Proficiency Levels (n=399)

The writing tasks for which these respondents most often wished to learn in English included writing official letters, resumes, essays, theses, research papers, and reports (Table 6.20). Note that some of these writing tasks were those that certain respondents usually performed; it is therefore understandable that there was no wish to learn tasks they already mastered.

Table 6.20 Writing Tasks Students Wished to Perform (n=399)

Writing Tasks	%	Do not wish	Somewhat wish	Much wish	Intensely wish
a. Writing diary	22.6	32.6	16.3	8.5	
b. Writing for Internet chats	16.3	28.1	24.6	9.3	
c. Writing e-mails	12.5	27.3	32.1	8.3	
d. Writing short notes	11.8	23.8	32.8	12	
e. Writing letters to friends	13.5	23.8	32.8	11.3	
f. Writing instructions	8.5	25.3	27.6	17.5	
g. Writing official letters	11	13.5	27.8	34.6	
h. Writing resumés	9.5	15.8	24.6	34.3	
i. Writing essays	7.5	17.3	26.3	34.8	
j. Writing reports	11.8	15.5	18	21.6	
k. Writing research papers	11.3	16.3	26.3	29.6	
l. Writing a thesis	13.8	14.8	18.5	32.3	

The difficulties often encountered by this group of respondents included writing a thesis statement, using correct English grammar, making sentences flow smoothly, making writing more interesting, and identifying errors in writing (see Table 6.21). The student respondents and the lecturer respondents both viewed grammar as a significant concern in writing in English. These students seemed to have relatively less difficulty in writing an introduction or a conclusion. Under the *Other/s* option, a respondent cited limited vocabulary in English as a difficulty. The rest added speaking and reading to their difficulty in writing (Table 6.21).

Table 6.21 Common Difficulties of Writing in English (n=399)

Common Difficulties	%	Not at all difficult	A little difficult	Difficult	Very difficult
a. Getting started on my writing task	17	50.4	21.6	2.3	
b. Writing an introduction	19.3	52.1	19	2.8	
c. Writing a thesis statement	4	20.6	43.6	20.8	
d. Expressing my ideas	12	41.9	31.3	8.3	
e. Organizing ideas	10.5	41.1	34.3	7.3	
f. Writing a conclusion	16.5	45.4	25.1	4.8	
g. Introducing a quotation	8.3	38.6	33.1	7.8	
h. Paraphrasing	11.5	41.6	27.6	6.5	
i. Integrating source material into my papers	10.3	37.1	30.8	8.8	
j. Writing a summary	11.8	41.4	34.1	7	
k. Using correct English grammar	6.8	30.6	36.3	21.8	
l. Using accurate punctuation	9.5	37.3	31.3	11	
m. Formatting a specific writing task such as an official letter, a report, or a thesis	10	29.8	37.1	13.8	
n. Making sentences flow smoothly	4.3	34.8	42.9	12	
o. Making my writing more interesting	4.8	26.6	44.4	20.8	
p. Identifying errors in my writing	6	29.8	40.6	17.8	
q. Revising my writing	6.8	38.3	8	14.5	

Preference for Learning Writing Skills

The respondents were asked if it was convenient for them to travel to the university. It was assumed that if students found traveling to UPM inconvenient, they might be more receptive for online or distance learning. Only about 20% of these respondents said that traveling to UPM was not convenient, while the rest did not find going to the campus a problem at all (see Figure 6.8). Hence, traveling to study at UPM was not a cause of concern to the remaining 80% of students.

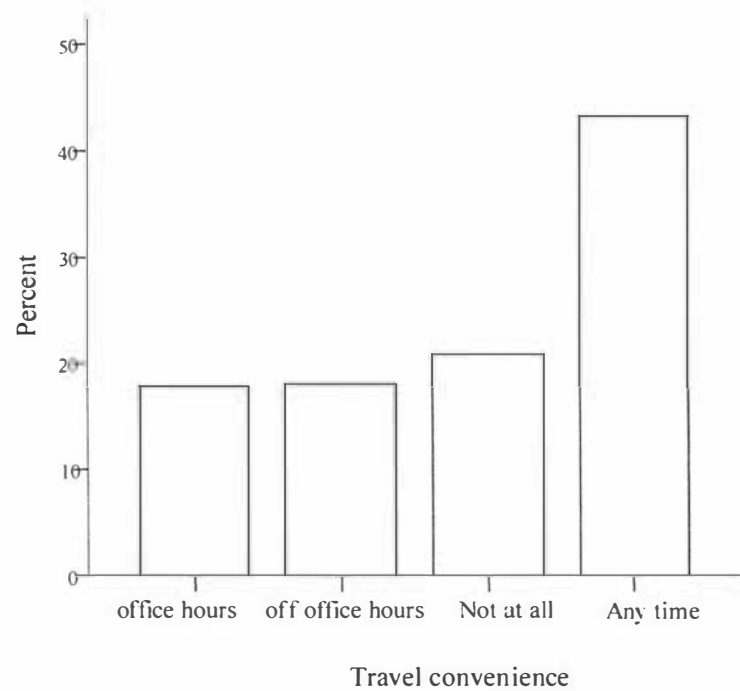


Figure 6.8 Travel Convenience to Campus (n=399)

The most highly preferred strategy for sourcing information was asking someone (38.8%), followed by referring to books (27.8%), and searching the Internet (23.3%). The result implied that more students preferred the ‘human touch’ - interacting with a human being - to using static resources or telecommunication technology (Table 6.22).

Table 6.22 Strategies of Sourcing Information
(n=398)

Strategy	Percentage of Students
Ask someone	38.8
Internet	23.3
Reference books	27.8
Newspapers	.8
E-forum	.8
Others	8.3

Students were asked how long per week they spent online. Out of a total of 399 respondents, only a small percentage did not use the Internet at all (Table 6.23). The largest group of the Internet users were in the 0.5 to 2-hour per week range, followed by the 2.5 to 4-hour range. As one of the objectives of this survey was to probe the plausibility of online writing lab application to an ESL context, students who were already Internet users might be more inclined to use online support.

Table 6.23 Internet Time per Week (n=399)

Hour / Week	Percentage of Respondents
0	6.8
0.5 – 2	42.1
2.5 – 4	29.1
4.5 – 6	14.5
6.5 – 8	6.9
8.5 – 10	3.3
10.5 – 12	1.3
12.5 – 14	1.3
15	0.3
20	0.5
35	0.3

The most common venue where these respondents accessed the Internet was the Internet café. This fact might explain why most respondents could at best spend just one to four hours per week on the Internet as it was more costly to use that Internet facility than to seek information through other means (Table 6.24).

Table 6.24 Internet Venues (n=369)

Venue	Percentage of Students
Rented place	1.3
University library	3.0
Residential college	9.0
Others	14.0
Faculty computer lab	15.8
Home	18.5
Internet cafe	30.8

About half of these respondents (49.4%) paid a fee to use the Internet all the time, 17.8% needed to pay sometimes, while 24.1% did not need to pay at all. The fee paying group included those users at Internet cafés as well as those who paid to an Internet service provider such as JARING or MAXIS Net. The group that did not need to pay probably accessed the Internet on campus. As mentioned above, on-campus Internet surfing was free of charge but the facility was quite limited in view of the bulging student population.

The respondents were then asked to describe how they usually felt when they were asked to use a computer. Because apprehension correlated negatively to online technology acceptance, the more apprehensive a user is, the less likely is s/he to accept technological tools. The result in responses to this question showed that about half of the respondents were looking forward to using computers. Only a negligible percentage was worried when asked to use a computer, and tried to avoid computers as much as possible. Another 18.5%, although worried about using computers, tried their best to cope with the use. The rest were neither worried nor excited about the use of computers (Figure 6.9).

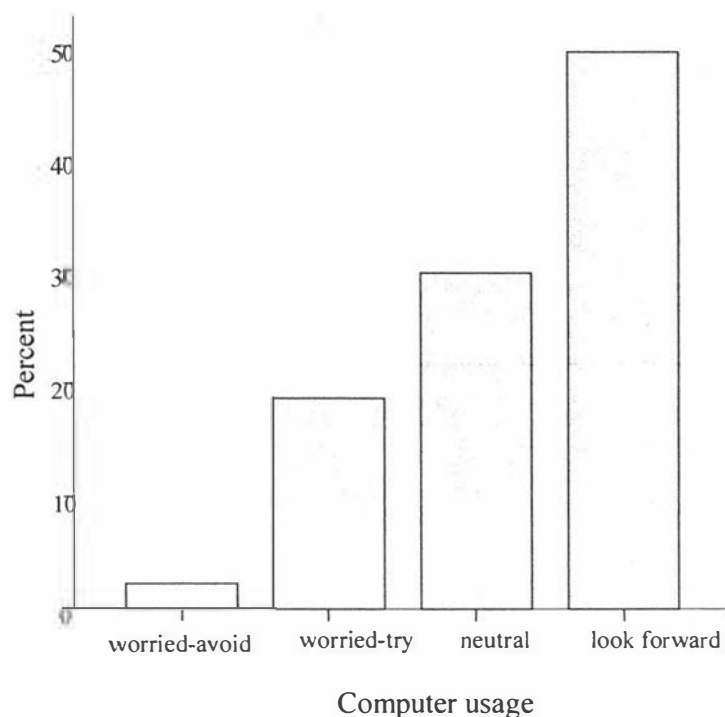


Figure 6.9 Feeling toward Computer Use (n=399)

When asked if they intended to improve their writing skills in English, almost all the respondents affirmed their desire to do so. Only two respondents did not wish to improve their writing skills in English as it was too difficult to achieve and thus a waste of time. The positive attitude of the majority of students, however, showed that they were keen to learn.

The respondents were then asked how they would improve their writing skills in English. Students showed their preferences for static materials like guidebooks and the Internet. Note that paid online writing courses were not attractive to this group of students as some 41% did not consider the option. Instead, they showed strong preferences for reference books, face-to-face consultation, and the Internet (Table 6.25).

Table 6.25 Strategies for Writing Improvement
(n=399)

Strategies	%	Not worth Considering	Possible choices	Strong preference	Very strong preference
a. By taking a paid writing course from a teacher on a one-on-one basis	23.1	44.1	24.3	5.0	
b. By taking a paid writing course from a teacher in a small group	13.5	48.6	28.6	6.8	
c. By consulting someone	12.3	37.8	39.1	7.0	
d. By referring to examples in reference books	4.5	29.6	47.9	16	
e. By referring to examples on the Internet	8.5	36.8	38.6	13.3	
f. By taking a free online writing course through the Internet	15.8	41.1	29.6	10.3	
g. By taking a paid online writing course through the Internet	40.9	37.6	15	3	

When asked about the most effective instructional method in helping students improve writing in English, both lecturers and students found individual face-to-face tutorials effective, rating them as *essential* or *very helpful*. A second preferred option was *tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by small group*, followed by *specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by small group workshop* (Table 6.26).

Table 6.26 Effective Instructional Methods (n=399)

Instructional Methods	%	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very Helpful	Essen- tial
a. Individual face-to-face tutorial for any writing task in English.	4	20.1	46.1	28.1	
b. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by small group.	4	39.1	45.9	9.5	
c. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by small group workshop.	7	43.4	42.1	6	
d. Specific non-credit modules for various problems.	9	46.4	36.3	6	
e. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by lecture method.	9.3	56.1	29.3	3.8	

When comparing both online and on-site support, respondents showed their preference for a face-to-face tutor rather than an online tutor (see Table 6.27). Within the subcategory of static materials, however, the respondents found the online materials preferable, possibly because of the 'anytime anywhere' convenience of the Internet. Note also that for publication of students' writing, the print journal was preferred over the

online journal. The telephone grammar hotline and the web forum also did not attract much attention.

Table 6.27 Helpful On-site and Online Support (n=399)

Support	%	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. A tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments face-to-face individually during certain hours.	2.3	22.6	55.4	19.3	
b. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet any time.	10.5	50.4	30.3	7.5	
c. A resource center that provides guidebooks to effective writing.	6	35.1	45.6	12	
d. A self-access lab that provides worksheets with self-checking answers for students to work on a specific problem area.	4	37.6	46.4	10.5	
e. A telephone hotline for students to ask questions about their writing assignments.	29.6	42.4	22.3	4.5	
f. A website that provides electronic materials such as handouts, guidebooks, and other references.	5.3	27.6	50.9	15.3	
g. A print journal that publishes students' writing in English.	6.3	34.3	47.4	10.8	
h. An electronic journal that publishes students' writing in English.	6	41.4	40.9	10.5	
i. Connection to a web forum on writing.	11.3	43.1	37.3	6.5	

All online support facilities were favorably perceived as helpful to the respondents as only less than 8% viewed them as *not helpful* (see Table 6.28). Some of these options were more strongly preferred. These included: examples of writing tasks and online writing resources (both also had higher votes for *Essential*), and online modules for specific writing tasks, interactive quizzes on English grammar, and downloadable electronic handouts on various aspects of writing. This reaction indicated that the student population might use these online support facilities.

Table 6.28 Students' Perception of Online Writing Support
(n=399)

Online Writing Support	%	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet anytime.	3.5	30.8	45.6	16.8	
b. Downloadable electronic handouts on various aspects of writing.	1.8	30.3	50.9	13.3	
c. Interactive online quizzes on English grammar.	4	24.3	52.6	15.8	
d. An online discussion forum on writing.	7.8	37.8	42.6	8	
e. Links to writing resources such as online dictionaries, thesauruses, and style guides.	2.5	13.6	48.1	23.1	
f. Online search engines.	4.5	31.6	42.1	18.3	
g. An online publishing environment for student writers.	3.3	33.3	47.1	12.3	
h. Online modules on specific writing skills.	2.8	22.1	54.6	17.8	
i. Examples of various writing tasks.	1.5	19	53.1	23.3	
j. An online editing service.	3.3	31.8	45.4	16	

Summary of Results from Student Questionnaire

A total of 399 students from 12 faculties of UPM mostly from Semesters five, three and one, and below 25 years of age, were involved in the survey. They were randomly selected from three levels of English proficiency based on MUET results. The ethnic composition of the student sample, indicated by their first languages, reflected similar ratio in the overall student population in UPM and also in Malaysia that is predominantly Malay. Hence the predominant language (spoken and written) used in studies and daily interaction was also Malay. Next to Malay, English was used mainly for academic purposes.

About 70% of the respondents scored a MUET band of 3 and below. They found writing in English a challenge (49% sometimes difficult and 43% often difficult). Their common writing tasks in English were writing short notes, e-mails, online chats, and letters to friends that were mostly informal writing, and also implied that the students were familiar with online writing possibly in the local variety of English. They listed writing official letters, resumès, essays, thesis, research papers

and reports as writing tasks they wished most to learn. They found using correct grammar, writing a thesis statement and making their English writing flow smoothly and interesting very difficult. Nevertheless, the respondents perceived writing in English an essential study skill in a university, and would also contribute to their academic and professional success. They felt that writing in English was a skill that could be mastered, and wished that the university could provide them with more assistance and support facilities.

Most of the respondents had Internet access, and about half of them spent an average up to 2 hours per week, while the rest more than 2 hours. They generally had a positive attitude toward computer use with half of them actually looking forward to computer use. They quoted referring to examples on the Internet and reference books as their most preferred strategies in improving writing in English, followed by consulting someone. Among the instructional methods they found most helpful was face-to-face tutorials followed by small group tailored credit-bearing writing courses. When given the options to choose either face-to-face or online tutors, stronger preference was for the former. On the whole, the respondents found online resources moderately helpful for improving writing.

6.6 Discussion

Based on the data analysis on both the lecturer and the undergraduate questionnaires, the survey findings are summarized and discussed as follows.

6.6.1 Findings relating to English Language in Malaysia

The poor English language proficiency of general student population in Malaysian tertiary education was substantiated by 68.7% of the lecturers who perceived that none or few of their students could write effectively in English (see Table 6.6). The results from the students showed that about half of them admitted that writing in English was always or often difficult, and for the remaining half it was sometimes difficult (see Table 6.19). The poor English proficiency of the general student population in Malaysia can also be attested by students' MUET results, that

almost 70% of the students who reported taking the test were either extremely limited, limited or modest users of English (see Table 6.16).

Yet the results from the lecturers who taught their content courses in English showed that only one-third of them required their students write only in English, and about half allowed their students write in either English or Malay (see Table 6.3). It is puzzling why the lecturers taught in English yet accepted students' written work in either language. A possible reason might be that the lecturers concerned were sympathetic with students who could not express ideas adequately in English, or they simply did not want to read 'horrible' English. This either-or language option might have encouraged students taking a *laissez-faire* attitude and therefore taking less effort in improving their EAP writing, which would go some way to explaining the current standard of the English language in Malaysia.

On the other hand, both the lecturer and student respondents recognized the facts that writing competence in English contributed to current academic and future professional successes of students (see Tables 6.5 and 6.18). The faculty and students would have observed that English proficient students get employed sooner (see Alumni and Career Services Center, May 2005), and leaders in the public as well as the private sectors are mostly effective users of English on top of their first language. A lecturer respondent opined that English was recognized as the language of trade, business and commerce and not just science and ICT. This finding has brought hope that the perceived advantage of writing well in English by both the faculty and students should motivate faculty to include in their teaching more writing in English, and also motivate students to take more responsibility in learning writing in English (see Vroom's Expectancy Theory, 1964).

A lecturer respondent suggested that an effective way to improve the English proficiency of students was to make writing in English compulsory. In Malaysia where the only official language is the national language that is Malay, making writing in English compulsory in tertiary institutions may backfire, as it actually goes against the national language policy (Gill, 2002). The political leaders, while recognizing the importance and the deteriorating state of English proficiency in Malaysia, have to always strike a delicate balance between national pride and the

pragmatics (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991). Moreover, coercion and compulsion, from a democratic and educational point of view, are less effective than awareness raising and the provision of an assistive, facilitative and supportive environment for learning the English language as well as writing in English. In this light, the WC and OWL discussed in Chapter II can be employed to provide a facilitative and interactive environment to develop the English and writing competence of this group of ESL students (Harris, 2000).

6.6.2 Findings relating to Innovations in Tertiary Education

The finding on common writing tasks lecturers required their students to perform included tests, reports, research papers and essays that indirectly reflected that this group of lecturers might not have used online technology such as weblog, wiki, e-mail or e-forum in their teaching. On the other hand, the finding from the students showed that the majority of them (93.2%) used the Internet, and their usual writing tasks in English (in descending order) included short notes that could be texts to cell-phones, e-mails, and Internet chats (see Section 6.5.2, Students' Needs and Difficulties in Writing in English). A disparity existed: lecturers did not seem to use much online technology in their teaching, but students used online technology in their learning although mainly for communication purposes. However, the finding on online support options from both the lecturer and student respondents showed that they perceived all forms of online support such as online examples of various writing tasks, links to writing resources, and online modules on specific writing skills as very helpful or essential (Tables 6.12, 6.27 and 6.28). Therefore, seen in this light, although the lecturers might be slow in adopting online innovations compared to their students, they recognized and appreciated the potentials of online resources. This attitude would facilitate the introduction of any online or ICT innovations.

The issue of teacher and student cultures discussed in Section 4.5 is relevant to the initiation and adoption of any curricular innovation (Hocking, 2005; Jaffee, 1998). The findings from the lecturers' and students' perceived usefulness of online support options might imply that they would most possibly not resist these online initiatives as they could appreciate the relative advantage of these options. In addition, as students

were already using some of these online tools, they would not find the online support options incompatible to their needs or too complex for them to use (Rogers, 1995).

A positive finding from the lecturers and students was that they had recognized the disadvantage of the lecture method in teaching writing in English (see Tables 6.10 and 6.26). This might imply that they were more receptive to any curricular intervention that promised better delivery than the lecture method.

6.6.3 Findings relating to ESL Learners and Learner Support

The findings from the students showed that a big majority of them (93.2%, see Table 6.3) used the Internet, and a good majority of them used e-mail and online chats. This suggested that they were users of ICT and they might display some of the characteristics of the millennials and net-geners (see Section 3.1.3; Dede, 2005; Oblingers and Oblingers, 2005) who were always 'connected' on the Internet or through cell-phones, PDAs or MPEG players. This phenomenon is in line with the current trend of moving away from formal learning to increasing informal and self-directed learning (Candy, 2004) afforded by ICT-assisted personal learning networks (Siemens, 2005).

On the other hand, although the students preferred the any-time any-where convenience of the online technology, they still preferred the human touch of learning; for example, they preferred to ask someone for help than to search the Internet for information (see Table 6.22), and they preferred face-to-face over online tutors (see Table 6.27). The lecturers also showed preference for on-site over online tutors (see Table 6.11). Therefore, a 100% virtual learning environment or learner support system would probably not work with this group of learners.

The two groups of respondents recognized the acute need for writing support, and they identified on-site tutors, a website that provides handouts, guides, and other references, a resource center and a self-access center as helpful, very helpful or essential (see Table 6.27). Most students viewed all the online writing support facilities as quite helpful, very helpful or essential, with examples of writing tasks and online writing resources more strongly preferred than others (see Table 6.28).

The recognition of the acute need for writing support points to the lack of a learner support system in Malaysian higher education. Studies have indicated that organized and systemic learner support contributes toward learner retention and improved employability of graduates (Simpson, 2000; Wager, 2005). Therefore, it is now an urgent imperative for the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education to initiate an organized learner support system in every institution of higher learning. One way of supporting tertiary ESL learners is through the proposed WC approach, and this will be elaborated further in Chapter VII.

6.6.4 Findings relating to WCs and OWLs

Both the lecturer and the student respondents viewed grammar as a significant concern in writing in English (Tables 6.8 and 6.21). The lecturers perceived that wrong grammar was always a problem in students' writing, and the students felt that using correct English grammar was difficult or very difficult. This might suggest that any WC initiative in Malaysia must address the need of the lecturers and students for grammar help, and this might pose a challenge to the WC principle for teaching grammar in the context of writing and not explicit teaching of grammar (see Section 2.7.5; Hobson, 1994; Weaver, 1996). In answering the need for grammar instruction in ESL contexts, a WC that facilitates self-access interactive grammar learning can be a solution.

The lecturers rated examples of various writing tasks as very useful or essential (Table 6.12). Reference to ready writing tasks could be tricky as it may lead to plagiarism, and therefore must be done under guidance. A WC can provide such support. The lecturers also rated an online editing service as very helpful or essential. The online editing, in practice, is similar to proofreading, and it actually goes against the founding principle of WCs of "improving the writer, not the writing" (North, 1984). This is a challenge that a WC and OWL initiative in Malaysia must address, and this issue will be taken up again in formulating the ESL WC approach framework in Chapter VII (see Section 7.5.5).

The finding also showed that a centralized tutorial center was less preferred than one attached to a faculty. This might pose a big challenge to initiating a campus-wide WC, and perhaps satellite WCs established at various faculties might be a plausible option.

The strong preference of both the lecturers and students for individualized on-site over online tutors might suggest a positive uptake of an on-site WC initiative. The finding also suggested that there was no hurry for an OWL initiative in Malaysia to initiate online tutoring at the beginning of the innovation cycle, as the need for online resources was more urgent than online tutoring.

In sum, the survey revealed that the needs and expectations of Malaysian lecturers and students were uniquely different from the users of WC and OWL in North American contexts. For any support service to work, this uniqueness must be taken into consideration. Many ESL writing educators recognize the fact that ESL writers need more of everything (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; Silva, 1990). It is anticipated that a WC and OWL initiative proposed for Malaysia must be able to do more than just providing writing tutorials.

6.7 Limitations of the Survey

While every effort has been taken in ensuring the perfection of the survey study, a few limitations are still identifiable. Firstly, the student and the lecturer questionnaires might have been limited by the use of double negatives in three perception statements. The double negatives arose when the Likert-type rating scale used had the negative, for example, *strongly disagree* on one end of the continuum, and *strongly agree* on the other. When the statement is phrased in the negative, for example, *the ability to write effectively in English will not contribute towards my future professional success*, some respondents might not realize that double negatives have actually meant positive. However, a balance mix of positive and negative statements is a standard practice of questionnaire design (for example, Frary, 1996). The purpose is to encourage respondents to consider carefully each statement and option, and to avoid respondents' habituation of ticking the same end of the scale without thinking. The experience from conducting this questionnaire investigation

seems to suggest that a mix of positive and negative statement ~~may~~ might not be an effective practice as it had seemed to confuse the respondents. This is an area that requires further research.

Another concern is that the language of some options to certain questions could also be improved further. For example in the Lecturer Questionnaire Question 6 (see Appendix 6.2) and Student Questionnaire Question 13 (see Appendix 6.3), the options provided were Strongly Disagree, Agree In Part, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The original intention of this Likert-like scale was to elicit more information regarding the degree or intensity of the agreement or disagreement instead of a dichotomous yes or no. However, it has recently been pointed out that the options should have been more balanced in terms of affirmative and negative wordings. In this case, there was only one negative but three affirmative options. In practice, the Agree In Part option could also have meant Disagree In Part, which might have complicated data analysis and rendered the interpretation meaningless. In retrospection, the options should have been phrased “Strongly Disagree, *Mildly Disagree*, Agree, and Strongly Agree” to achieve the balance. Along the same line, another set of options used in the questionnaires: Not Helpful, Quite Helpful, Very Helpful, Essential, is also not balanced in terms of affirmative and negative options. The difficulty in finding a balanced option set and appropriate option wordings might have been solved by using a semantic differential (see Figure 6.2; Cohen et al., 2000). Further research is definitely required in the area of designing options to items in a questionnaire.

Another possible limitation is that the lecturer respondents were asked to identify online or on-site support options that might help their students improve writing in English although a good majority of them were not trained to teach writing. Table 6.1 shows that 11% of the lecturer respondents were from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. Out of this 11%, a few lecturers might have been trained to teach writing. The purpose of the questionnaire was to investigate options based on perception and attitude and not expertise in writing. The survey assumed that these lecturers were able to perceive options or strategies that might work for their students because they did assign and evaluate written work of their students. In retrospect, one could question the validity of the lecturers’ choices as they

were not writing experts. Hence, the findings would have been more convincing if at least half of the respondents were writing experts. Nevertheless, the lecturers' choices of the on-site and online support options more or less matched those of the students' (see Tables 6.11 and 6.27). In this matter, the survey revealed a positive predisposition from both lecturers and students to the chosen support options.

The student questionnaire might also be limited by the sampling population. The purpose of the student questionnaire is to collect data to establish the applicability of WCs and OWLs. It was assumed that students who scored MUET Band 5 or 6 are proficient in English, and might not need writing support. Hence, the high English proficient students (in terms of MUET banding) were excluded in the sampling frame. In retrospection, had these students been included, more confident comparative data would have been generated. As it is, the survey findings represent the view of average and below average English proficient students and not the whole student population. It is suggested that a follow-up study be conducted to find out the writing needs in English of these high English proficient students. After all, the practice of WCs and OWLs is serving ALL students irrespective of their proficiency levels.

In further reconsideration, the present study recognized that a survey questionnaire was effective in collecting general demographic characteristics and trends, and useful for assessing general attitudes and behaviors especially when self-report was acceptable. However, a survey questionnaire was not effective in discovering underlying assumptions and feelings and in getting deeper and more complex data relating to specific issues. For example, the data collected from both the Student and Lecturer Questionnaires indicated the general preference for a specific support system, but did not tell why the support option was preferred. In other words, the questionnaire method is good in asking "who", "what", "where" and "how many", but it is less useful in asking "how" and "why" (Ruch-Ross and O'Rourke, 2006). In hindsight, the questionnaires used in this study should have included some open-ended questions to enquire why certain options were preferred or chosen. Such open-ended questions might have helped in generating more interesting and deeper data.

Another way for making up for the limitation of the questionnaire method described in the preceding paragraph was to supplement it with a face-to-face

interview (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). For the Student Questionnaire with 100% response rate, the respondents could be interviewed at random to discover underlying thoughts. For the Lecturer Questionnaire, a face-to-face interview would have made up for the poor return rate. Studies have shown that the response rate of interviews is higher than mailed questionnaires as the personal encounter would have made refusal difficult (McKenna, 1995). A face-to-face interview would have induced the respondents who did not answer the questionnaire in answering the questions set out in the questionnaire plus additional in depth questions, and it would have improved the poor response rate and the data quality of the Lecturer Questionnaire.

In further retrospect, both the questionnaires used in the survey study should have ended with an inviting question such as “Do you have any comment that is not covered by the questionnaire? Your comment is important in improving the quality of this research. Please write down your comment here”. Such an open invite would have helped in improving the quality of the data collected. It is suggested that if similar research is to be carried out in future, these after thoughts should be taken into consideration in generating more informative and useful data and in drawing more convincing conclusion.

Moreover, due to time constraints and the issue of accessibility, only one Malaysian public university was surveyed. It would be useful to ascertain if other universities in Malaysia gave the same results. This would be a valuable area for further study.

Further more, it is also not clear whether the findings from the questionnaires are generalisable to an Asian context beyond Malaysia. Again, this would be another fruitful area for further research.

6.8 Epilogue

The discussion on the status of English in Malaysia in the previous chapter has been delineated against the historical and political backdrop and national development. Never in Malaysian history have the government and the political leaders felt more urgently the need to raise the standard of English of the people.

English is now imperative for Malaysia to compete globally and to be a player in ICT. Relating to this macro concern and need, the survey study on writing needs and writing support in UPM drew concrete evidence for English language educators to seriously consider the needs of the students, and the pedagogical change and support that must be initiated for English to regain its lost glory in Malaysia. In this respect, the next chapter proposes a conceptual framework and an action plan for innovating WCs and OWLs in Malaysia.

CHAPTER VII

WRITING CENTER APPROACH: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN

Writing center theory specifies that we do not “teach” students anything, we help them learn by themselves, and bridging cross-cultural differences, then, is one more thing we help students learn by themselves.

~Muriel Harris (1994, p. 107)

7.0 Prologue

This research project has been motivated by a crisis related to writing in English among tertiary ESL students in Malaysia. The conceptual framework proposed in this chapter is intended to explore the applicability of WCs and OWLs, henceforth called the WC approach, in an Asian ESL environment in general, and in Malaysia in particular.

Two frameworks are presented in this chapter. The first is a conceptual framework of the proposed WC approach for ESL undergraduates, proposed generally as a curricular innovation for Asian countries that have yet to adopt a WC approach to teaching and supporting writing in English, and whose undergraduates learn English as a second language. The second is an action plan showing how this conceptual framework can be implemented in a specific ESL tertiary setting.

7.1 Rationale for a Conceptual Framework

In Chapter II, the difficulty for WC practitioners to come up with a generic definition of a WC or an OWL has been discussed (see Section 2.2). Indeed, many versions or models of WCs and OWLs have been presented; for example, WCs as storehouses, garrets, and Burkean parlors (Lunsford, 1991); extracurricular, curricular, co-curricular and R&D WCs (Hilgers and Marsella, 1992); writing centers, labs or clinics (Carino, 1995), and information, interactive or live OWLs (Koster, 2002), just to name a few. For educators outside North America who are newly acquainted with WCs and OWLs, the myriad models might baffle them. It would be difficult for them to decide whether or not to initiate a WC or an OWL and, then, which specific model to

follow.

In this light, a conceptual framework of a WC and OWL or simply, the WC approach, will be useful as a reference. A conceptual framework, as a mental map or a description of the relationship among concepts, helps to explain what works and what does not work, and it is “very useful in making sense of the array and seemingly inconsistency of (online) writing centers” (Breuch, 2005, p.22). In short, a conceptual framework fosters an understanding of WCs and OWLs and helps the parties concerned in intelligently and critically planning, adopting and using WCs and OWLs according to individual institution needs.

As the intended audience of this research is ESL practitioners, education providers and administrators of Asian universities, the proposed conceptual framework and the action plan are geared towards the possible uptake of this target group.

7.2 A Conceptual Framework for the Writing Center Approach

WCs can exist in three modes: as a 100% physical, a virtual center, or a combination of both. Most WCs today have a website, and WC websites are usually called OWLs (Brown, 2000; Harris, 1998). Such OWLs offer online services that emulate in varying degrees services conducted by a physical WC. It is unusual today to find a WC without a website or an OWL. It is also not common to find an OWL without a physical WC. It is believed that more OWLs will exist without the physical WCs, as e-learning becomes more popular and ubiquitous, and as Internet access and technology improve.

This research project proposes a WC with an OWL conceptual framework. The present continuous tense is used for the verb *propose* because the framework will be subjected to continuous fine-tuning in adjusting to the changing macro and micro environments (see Holiday’s Means Analysis in Section 4.6.3).

The WC with OWL framework, *the WC approach*, is very much informed by the theory of blended learning (Bershin, 2004). Blended learning is defined as a mix of several instructional methods such as face to face tutorials, e-mail discussion, or self-

paced learning through a variety of technologies and activities, to achieve an instructional objective. The aim of blending is to produce an optimal learning package for a specific group of learners who may come from various backgrounds (Bershin, 2004). The rationale of adopting the blended approach is to serve a diverse student demography including on-campus, off-campus, international and working students. Moreover, with the proliferation of distance education, it is good for a WC to have an OWL in serving distant students. Also, as online learning is getting more popular, it is imperative for a physical WC to incorporate a virtual counterpart to meet more diverse demand of the tertiary student population. Interestingly, research has shown that the main clientele of OWLs are on-campus students as more and more students have Internet access (Spore, 2001). Moreover, most institutions of higher education in Asia are currently transforming their curricula to include increasing online learning. For example, UPM has developed an online learning delivery system call e-SPRINT (see <http://www.spc.upm.edu.my/>). Therefore, a 100% physical or a 100% virtual WC will be less useful than a WC that also operates an OWL.

For Malaysia in particular, the WC approach has not been practiced in any educational institution (see Section 4.0). Therefore, the WC approach is proposed here as a curricular innovation, intended to serve three major functions: as a language learning environment in developing all-rounded ESL students, as a pedagogical approach to writing instruction, and as a learner support system for the intended student population, that is, generally ESL tertiary students in Asia, and specifically ESL students in Malaysia (see Figure 7.1).

7.3 ESL Learners as Impetus for the Curricular Innovation

In the center of the proposed framework are the ESL students (Figure 7.1). The investigation of the students' writing crisis has led to this study of a North American curricular innovation i.e. the proposed WC approach. Therefore, the whole conceptual framework of the proposed WC approach is designed around the needs of this specific group of students, who are ESL tertiary students in Malaysia. These students need to improve their writing competence so that they can function in the immediate academic environment and later in their job or professional environment.

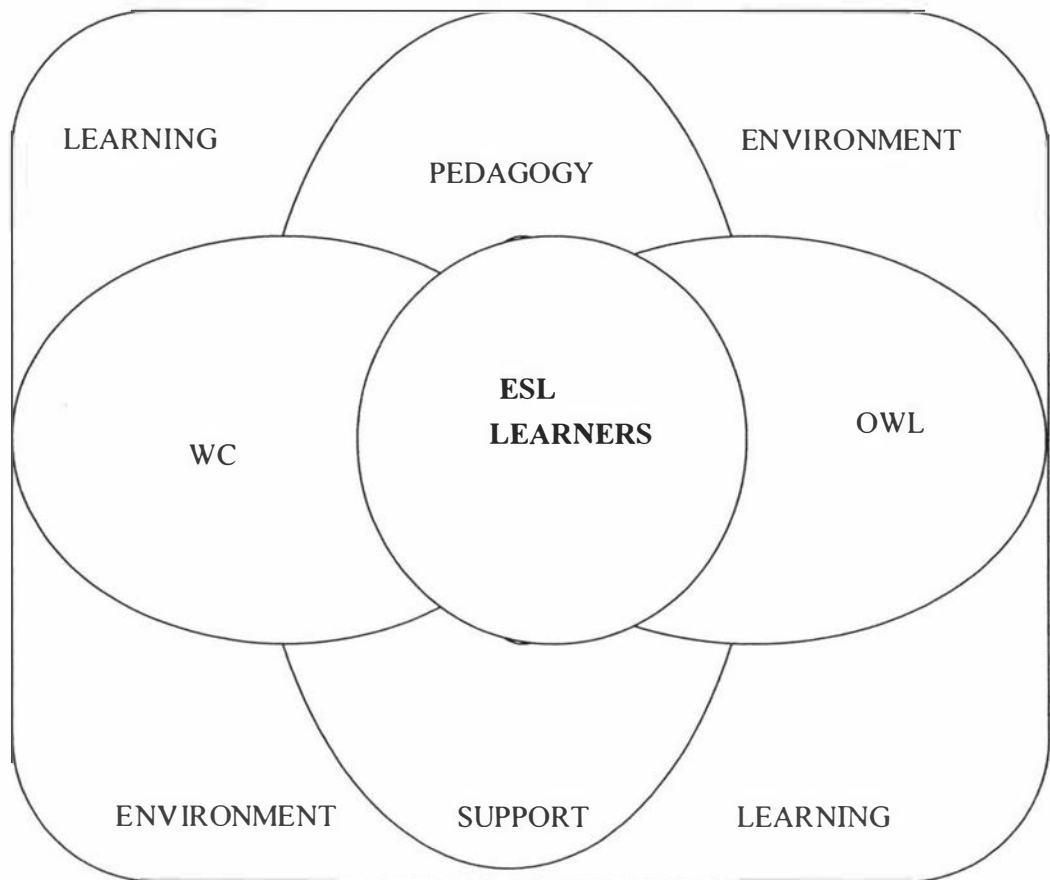


Figure 7.1 A WC with OWL Conceptual Framework

The investigations in Chapters II, III and IV show that WCs and OWLs can play at least three major roles in helping this group of students, i.e. in teaching academic writing, in supporting ESL students in their writing processes, and in developing these students as all-rounded ESL users. While the three major roles will be discussed separately in the following sections, this section expands the discussion on the uniqueness of the ESL learners, and hence their needs, on top of those discussed in Chapter III, to establish the relevance of the blended WC approach to them.

The current ESL students who have moved directly to university immediately after high schools are mostly born after 1982. According to recent discourse in North America on current tertiary student characteristics (see, for example, AASCU, 2005; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005), the generation who are born after 1982 are called the

Net-geners or Millennials. Compared to the earlier generations, the Net-geners are more ICT savvy as they are growing up with the PC and the Internet. They tend to regard the technology as “oxygen” (AASCU, 2005, p.6) because they live, learn, play and communicate with technology. They cannot live without a mobile phone or a phone PDA. For example, a recent poll conducted by New Sunday Time (a major newspaper in Malaysia) on the use of mobile phones found that a majority of readers between the ages of 15-45 said they could not live without their mobile phones (Irdiani Mohd Salleh et al., 2005). The Net-geners prefer hands-on or experiential learning, and they learn better in an active and social environment. They are good at multitasking, for example: listening to radio news broadcast, watching cartoon movies on TV, and at the same time working at Mathematics problems. On the other hand, they tend to have shorter attention span and patience. They expect automated campus service, and also reaching their professors or facilitators around the clock (AASCU, 2005; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005).

While the preceding description may be true for a good number of the Net-geners in the USA, it may befit only a small group of Malaysian tertiary students who have had the luxury of a PC and Internet access from a young age, and who usually come from upper socio-economic background in the urban area. They usually have highly educated parents who earn a high income. The rest of the student population may be more computer literate than their parents due to the computer literacy program conducted in schools, but may be far from savvy with ICT and thus may not display many of the Net-gener characteristics. Most of them have the characteristics discussed in Chapter III (see Section 3.1.1) that include being reserved, people-oriented and highly motivated than those characteristics of the Net-geners. The ICT statistics in the Global IT Report (World Economic Forum and INSEAD, 2005) shows that in terms of Internet subscribers per 100 inhabitants in 2002 among the 104 countries surveyed, Malaysia ranked 25th, New Zealand 11th, and the USA 4th. For Internet access in schools in 2004, Malaysia ranked 28th, New Zealand 15th, and the USA 14th. For the overall Networked Readiness Index in 2004, Malaysia ranked 27th, New Zealand 21st, and the USA 5th. The statistics show that Malaysia still lags behind the two developed countries in the area of ICT usage and readiness. Therefore, it may be inferred that the majority of its present tertiary students have not acquired the Net generation characteristics as yet.

However, with ICT becoming cheaper and more common place, the number of typical Net-geners among the Malaysian student population will increase. Therefore, it is imperative for the proposed WC approach to include an online facility in OWL to cater to the current and emerging needs and preferences of students. However, it has also been observed that the Net-geners and the Millennials generally use ICT to meet their social needs. Whether or not they would apply the same enthusiasm with ICT for academic purposes remains to be investigated.

A current problem facing ESL tertiary graduates in Malaysia is the difficulty of getting a job relevant to their qualifications. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Raslan Sharif, 2005) and a survey conducted among four thousand human resource managers and directors in Malaysia (Shantini Suntharajah, 2005), poor command of the English language and the lack of ICT literacy have been cited as the two main reasons for graduate unemployment. Thus, in the light of the two major factors affecting the marketability of tertiary students who are supposedly ESL learners, this WC approach that includes the OWL will provide learners with *dual immersion* (Warchauer, 2002; discussed in Section 3.4.3) in learning English through ICT and vice versa.

To succeed as tertiary learners and also in lifelong learning later in life, the notion of learner autonomy discussed in Chapter III must be practiced for learners to be able to seize language learning opportunities outside the classroom. Students must be guided in self-directed learning (Gardner and Miller, 1999) and language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). And, for students to initiate learning on their own and be their own teacher effectively, they must understand their own personality, learning preferences and styles, and gauge their strengths and weaknesses in the target language and the specific language skills (Wenden, 2002). Research has shown that when students are aware of their learning styles and use the information to guide their studies, they perform better in their studies (Burke and Dunn, 2003). For this purpose, both the physical and virtual WCs should have a list of self analysis and self evaluation instruments in helping learners to identify their aptitude and preferences and to understand themselves better. The self analysis tools should include a personality or character type indicator such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (see Section 3.3.1 or Brown, 1994, pp.148-149), a learning style indicator such as the Willing's Model of Two-Dimensional Learning Styles (see Section 3.1.3 or Skehan, 1998, p.247)

or a learning style questionnaire developed by Felder and Solomon (see <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html> or Appendix 7.1), or a learning strategy inventory such as the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) created by Oxford (1990) (see Appendix 3.2).

In finding out the overall English proficiency, progress or the level of language attainment, or specific areas that require improvement, students can turn to proficiency placement or diagnostic tests. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) designed and administered by English Testing System based at the USA, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) designed by the Local Examinations Syndicate of University of Cambridge and administered by The British Council or Education Australia, are two trialed and seasoned diagnostic tests for the purpose of measurement. In Malaysia, students can also turn to Malaysia University English Test (MUET) to gauge their English competence. MUET is administered twice a year by the Examination Board of the Ministry of Higher Education. As all of these tests incur a fee, a WC may design an in-house test to help students diagnose their English proficiency.

All of the above mentioned tests have a writing component to diagnose the level of writing performance. Some online automated text analysis software can also serve the purpose with near human accuracy as claimed by the developer (see, for example, MyAccess developed by Vantage Learning, USA, <http://www.vantagelearning.com/>). A trained tutor will also be able to gauge and inform the level of written competence against some established benchmarks.

7.4 The WC Approach as Writing Pedagogy

The survey described in Chapter IV found that both UPM lecturers and students perceived the lecture method of instruction as the least effective and the least preferred, and this finding was also affirmed by the Learning Pyramid research (see Figure 7.2) that the lecture method has the least retention rate of only 5%. The UPM lecturers and students instead preferred one-to-one tutoring if given a choice. However, the lecture method is still being practised by a good number of writing lecturers. This observation

might account for the poor English literacy especially in academic writing among the students. The lecture method may be applicable for content courses, but for a skill course like writing, the one-size-fits-all factory pedagogy that disregards individual differences, has failed miserably. Unless the instructional method improves, the English literacy level of students might not have a chance to improve.

Based on the secondary research on WC and OWL literature, the proposed WC approach is a more effective methodology in teaching and learning writing for ESL students because it encompasses the following pedagogies and techniques of writing.

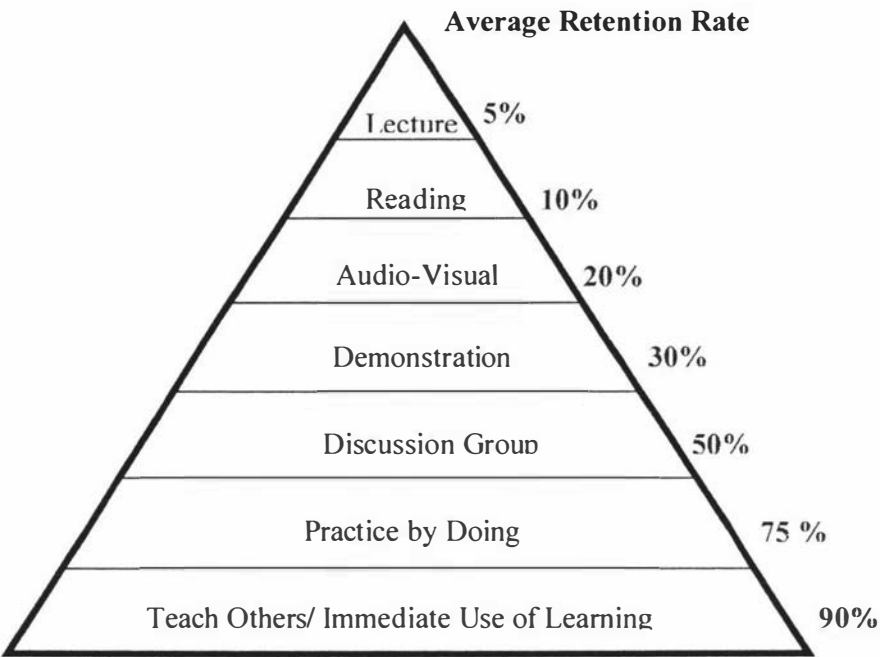


Figure 7.2 Learning Pyramid
(Source: National Training Laboratories, Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences,
300N. Lee Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314, 1-800-777-5227)

7.4.1 One-to-one Tutoring

In a typical ESL writing class, the teacher and a few extrovert students may dominate the talk, and the interaction can be limited. A good number of ESL learners are quiet and may appear passive. This could be because they probably do not have the

meta-language to ask questions or to talk about their writing, or the classroom atmosphere is too threatening and inhibiting for them to venture with their assumingly 'stupid' questions especially when the teacher is there to grade them. Some of them would probably talk if encouraged to, but the teacher may not have the time to assure everyone is given a chance to talk especially in a big class.

The scenario with one-to-one tutoring in a WC is different. Because the tutor attends to only one student at a time, the session can be focused on the individual learner's writing difficulty. The trained tutor can actually personalize the tutoring technique and style according to the student's personality and needs. For example, if the student needs to generate ideas or identify a focus, the tutor may use the non-directive approach. But if the student needs advice from a more experienced and more knowledgeable peer, then perhaps the direct approach would be more appropriate (see Section 2.7.2 for a more detailed discussion).

In North America, the clientele of many WCs is mainly first year composition and ESL students (see, for example, Bruce and Rafoth, 2004). This shows that WCs are especially useful for students who are less familiar with academic writing in English. In this light, the proposed WC approach will be even more useful in a purely ESL or EFL setting, where students can be given one-to-one attention for maximum personalized guidance.

7.4.2 Peer Tutoring

The purpose of peer tutoring in North American WCs is mainly to support students in their writing processes. Peer tutoring is different from classroom writing instruction; it is not intended to replace classroom instruction but to complement it (Harris, 1986). With the recognized position and contribution of WCs in North American universities, some WC practitioners are keen to promote the WC approach as a better pedagogy in writing instruction as compared to that conducted by a teacher in the classroom for its unique features such as individualization and dialogic interaction (see, for example, Kinkead and Harris, 2000).

Especially helpful for ESL students who are new to the university culture is the

non-threatening atmosphere of the WC. In the WC, the student is talking to a friendly tutor who is usually a non-evaluative peer and not an evaluative teacher who sets the assignment. There is less worry of losing face compared to that experienced in the class. Thus, students are more willing to take risks in asking questions and in testing out hypotheses about writing in English in a WC than in a classroom (Wang, 1994). The peer tutor is also more understanding and more sympathetic than a teacher because the peer tutor has gone through the same struggle as the tutee in the writing process before (Capossela, 1998). The important role of peers in learning has also been confirmed by Grey (2005) who said that “more is learned on the playing field and in discourse with peers than from the sage on the stage”, and it is “the secondhand explanation from a colleague that situates the new concept, validates its importance and sanctions its legitimacy.” (para.1). Most importantly, peer tutors have been trained to respond to ESL students’ needs in their writing processes.

7.4.3 Student-Centered Pedagogy

The teaching profession is often confronted with the question of whether teachers should endeavor to meet students’ needs, or students should meet teachers’ requirements. The answer lies with the philosophy or the approach to teaching one believes in. A teacher who is sensitive to students’ needs and teaches according to such needs is said to be practicing student-centered pedagogy. On the other hand, if the teacher sets the instructional objectives according to what s/he feels students must achieve, the approach is teacher-centered pedagogy (Johnson, 2002).

Student-centered pedagogy is traceable to Carl Rogers’ client-centered counseling that later evolved to become an approach in education when he observed “students become passive, apathetic and bored” in the traditional classroom (Rogers, 1983, p. 25). The main tenets of the student-centered approach include active learning, deep learning, learner taking responsibility, learner autonomy, interdependence between teachers and learners, mutual respect between teachers and learners, and reflexive learning (Lea et al., 2003). It has also been argued that the abundance of knowledge has outgrown the capacity to learn. Therefore, it is imperative to teach students according to their needs, and “...that the construction of the university, must be based upon the student, and not upon the professor or upon knowledge” (Ortega y Gasset, 1992, p.43).

Today the use of student-centered pedagogy is reflective of the democratic society that respects individual freedom and choice (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005).

Research studies have found positive findings from student-centered learning (see, for example, Hall and Saunders, 1997). It was reported that students from a UK university liked the approach as it was more interesting, and more respect was accorded to the students that boosted their confidence (Hall and Saunders, 1997). On the other hand, the skeptic pointed out that if every student is unique and his or her choice respected, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to come up with a pedagogy that suits the whole class. Also, if each individual becomes the focus, the social aspect of collaborative learning might be overlooked (Simon, 1999). Therefore, there should be a balance between individualistic student-centered approach and collaborative learning. And, the gist of this balance has been summed up by Oblinger (2005) who states that “competence is developed in active, exploratory, and social settings. When participants are asked to think conceptually and critically, involving both peers and experts, learning is enriched.”(in Vision section). The quote underlines two principles of student-centered pedagogy--social learning and active learning--that are being practiced in WCs and OWLs.

Tutoring in the WC is student-centered as tutors are trained to focus on improving the student writer and not the writing, and the student is an active participant in deciding and initiating positive changes in his or her writing (North, 1984). This adage of North (1984) laid the foundation of WC theory and practice, and WC tutoring is now synonymous with helping the novice writer in the writing process. A student-centered pedagogy is especially useful for ESL learners because it is intrinsically motivating as individual learning needs and styles are taken into account, and learners have a voice in deciding the kind of curriculum or activities they prefer (Johnson, 2002). It also informs the service providers such as teachers, tutors and administrators to accept learners as they (learners) are and not as what they (learners) should be in servicing English instruction to this group of learners.

7.4.4 Guided Learning and Writing

Personalized tutoring, the key practice in WCs, is similar to a trade master

training an apprentice to acquire a skill, and this kind of personalized coaching has been traditionally recognized as being effective (Shamoon and Burns, 1995). A study has shown that novice writers learned not just writing skills but also cognitive and communicative strategies from WC tutoring (Palinscar, 1986). Student writers were also able to achieve much more with apprenticeship kind of guidance, similar to children with parental guidance who were able to learn more than through independent learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, novice ESL writers naturally require and benefit from guidance by peer tutors who are more advanced than them in learning to write academic discourse in English.

7.4.5 Dialogic Pedagogy

A number of authors have discussed the power of conversation in learning. Cross (2005), for example, proposes that conversation is important for tapping into collective wisdom and it allows for “co-evolving the future” (para. 13). Twenty over years ago, Bruffee (1984) too, in propagating peer tutoring and collaborative writing, highlighted the power of talk. Through talk, better understanding is fostered among teachers, tutors and students. Talking to someone who will listen and know how to listen (North, 1984) also helps alleviate writing apprehension of ESL students as they learn to write in the new language and helps build confidence in them in their writing processes.

Talking also helps to generate and shape ideas. With reference to children who solve problems by verbally speaking aloud about their strategies (Vygotsky, 1978), WC tutors can help ESL students rehearse ideas for a written assignment by getting them to talk about their ideas through asking questions. When tutors ask the right questions, students feel comfortable that the tutors are interested in their work, and the tutors can also help students see and fill up gaps in their idea presentation (Purcell, 1998).

Lunsford’s (1991) WC-as-Burkean-Parlor model (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1) best illustrates the notion that dialogues facilitate the social construction of meaning and that meaning is negotiated and seldom remains static. It is also through engaging in dialogues with WC tutors that student writers learn the discourse of the academia. In a WC too, whether physical or virtual, students have the chance to interact with members

of the same discipline, and thus learn the disciplinary discourse to become a member of the discipline. The power of dialogues especially with peers has also been strongly expressed by Grey (March 28, 2005) at his Knowledge at Work weblog. According to him, "The key to learning is not the medium or the message; it is the quality of the dialog with your peers that really matters." (para. 2).

7.4.6 Small Group Pedagogy

The proposed WC approach also includes small group workshops on specific writing skills specially designed to meet ESL students' needs. This kind of workshop can be conducted in the WC where students of similar proficiency level from a similar discipline and having a common need or a similar difficulty with writing are grouped together. Usually a specific concern workshop is conducted when the WC director or tutors observe a common need among a group of users (Garner and Young, 2001). Instead of repeating the same instruction or procedure a few times, the workshop method is more cost and time effective. Sometimes writing skills workshops are conducted in a classroom if a teacher requests for it. These workshops are useful in helping teachers who are new and having little experience in teaching writing. The small group pedagogy also includes peer response groups in a writing classroom.

7.4.7 Collaborative Pedagogy

In a WC, the tutor asks the tutee questions to find out more about the writer and the writing, and the tutee asks the tutor questions to find out how best to approach or improve a writing task. Together the tutor and the tutee embark on a joint enquiry known as collaborative learning about writing (Harris, 1992a). In the collaboration both parties learn and gain confidence in the tutoring and writing processes.

This kind of reviewing and responding to writing can be expanded to a writing class. Some WCs are helping novice composition teachers to implement peer review or response pairs or groups in the classroom by providing examples of response sheets to the teachers, and to help train ESL students in appropriately responding to their peers' writing (Breuch, 2004; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2004).

When a peer group is actively contributing in creating a piece of writing, the resultant work is said to have multiple authorship, and this is the essence of collaborative writing which is common for writing or research projects (Harris, 1992a). Collaborative writing fosters not just enhanced individual writing competence but also an appreciation for comradeship and team work, and thus it is good preparation for citizenry and students' professional career upon their graduation.

For tertiary ESL students who are beginning to learn academic writing in English, collaborative pedagogy is especially useful. Because knowledge is justified belief (Rorty, 1979), discussing and working together give them a chance to test their ideas and English rhetoric with their collaborators, and thus they learn better and retain better. Collaboration gives students the chance to teach and learn from one another, and to discover ideas that they individually may not be able to. On top of the above, collaboration allows learning to become a continuous process. While generating new content out of the resulting interactions, collaboration also acts as a quality feedback loop (Howard, 2001).

7.4.8 Pedagogy of Belonging and Inclusiveness

In North America, the established WCs pride themselves as practicing the pedagogy of belonging and inclusiveness in that all learners, regardless of ethnic origins, social-economic background, and language proficiency levels, are welcome at the WC (Bokser, 2005). Although the tertiary student demography in Malaysia may not be as diverse as that of North America because it basically comprises only three main races, there exists some power politics in the university with the *Bumiputra* or Malays making up about 65% of the total tertiary population. The tertiary demography will become more diverse with the recent announcement that public universities will uncap the 5% limit and will admit more international students from 2006 (The Star, February 20, 2005). Hence the pedagogy of belonging and inclusiveness is applicable in promoting goodwill and understanding among the different ethnic groups in the proposed WC approach.

7.4.9 Whole Language Pedagogy

Unlike native North American first year tertiary students who may be lacking in only academic writing skill, ESL undergraduates in Malaysia are generally weak in all English skills that include reading, speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary. For tertiary education, writing, especially academic writing in English, is deemed more important than the other language skills because it is usually by means of writing that a student's academic progress is being evaluated.

However, reading skills in English are important too as most reference books in the UPM library collection and a lot of the Internet reference content are in English. If students cannot read efficiently in English, they may not gain the knowledge in such sources for them to write a satisfactory paper. A few WC practitioners have suggested incorporating literacy alongside writing tutoring (see, for example, Grigsby, 2001). They argue that a growing number of students cannot read and think critically, and this must be addressed first before they can write effectively. Section 3.3.1 has also highlighted the causal relationship between reading and writing skills, that both skills complement each other.

In the university, Malaysian undergraduates are not required to speak in English unless they study an English language course that requires them to only speak in English. A good number of the students can speak a sub-standard local variety of English (fondly known as *Manglish*, a hybrid word for Malaysia or Mandarin + English), that is made up of a mixture of English and local languages spoken in a local accent such as Malay, Mandarin or Tamil. Standard spoken English (and correspondingly, listening skills in English), is more useful when students join the workforce especially when they become a professional such as a lecturer, a doctor, an accountant or an entrepreneur, who may need to communicate internationally or with local professional clients who speak mainly in English.

Therefore, for a WC to be more useful for ESL students, it must do more than just helping with only English writing skills. After all, the whole language theory suggests that language literacy is best acquired through the integrated approach where all language skills are taught and learned at the same time, thereby reinforcing each

other (Fitzgerald, 1994; Day, 2002).

In this light, a WC for ESL tertiary students would be more useful if it also incorporates self-access language learning and language advising. In other words, a WC for ESL students should also function as a language learning environment where students are immersed in the authentic use of English in all the language skills. This line of discussion will be taken up further in Section 7.5.

7.4.10 Online Pedagogy for Tutoring and Writing

The proposed WC approach encompasses online pedagogy and facilitation. This section discusses online pedagogy and writing, and the next section will cover online facilitation or support. In WCs and OWLs, online pedagogy has been practiced in tutoring and writing. In Section 2.3.2, the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous tutoring have been discussed, and in Section 3.3.1, the need for ESL writing pedagogy to incorporate emergent technologies such as ICT has been highlighted.

In 2000, Krause posed four limitations and four benefits of using the WWW as a pedagogical tool for writing classes. These limitations and benefits are relevant to the practice of WCs and OWLs. The four limitations include that creating a web page or a website is time consuming, learning the Hyper Text Mark-up Language (HTML) for web design or creation can be difficult, advanced Web features require expensive hardware to operate, and not everyone has access to the Internet. Today, various authoring tools have simplified webpage production without necessarily learning HTML, computer equipment is getting cheaper, and more people can now afford Internet access as the fee has dropped. On the other hand, we continue to enjoy the four benefits that include faster and easier distribution of instructional materials across time and space, the Web extends the opportunity for students to conduct research, the online platform provides an authentic publishing opportunity, and it eases and promotes collaboration between teachers and students and among students (Krause, 2000). Benefits not mentioned by Krause include increased opportunity in learning outside the normally teacher-fronted classroom. For ESL students studying English in their native countries, the web has made possible increased opportunities to interact with native

speakers in authentic situations.

On top of the aforesaid benefits, there is a more compelling reason for using online pedagogy. The online pedagogy is most useful to ESL students who have limited proficiency. In a traditional classroom that privileges teacher-centered hegemony, ESL students might be too inhibited to talk or ask questions. Protected by a pseudonym or online anonymity, the online platform gives the timid ones, who thought their English might be laughed at, a voice, rather than continuously being “excluded, marginalized, or silenced in the traditional classroom” (Wahlstrom, 1994, p.173). In short, online pedagogy encourages equal participation in language learning.

There is also a strong reason for using online pedagogy to teach online writing. A recent report by the WIDE (Writing in Digital Environments) Research Center (2005) cited that “44% Internet users have contributed their thoughts and their files to the online world” in the form of websites, newsgroups, blogs, chats and other emerging digital applications. The growing extent of online writing should convince that writing instruction should also include teaching the techniques of online writing for an online audience and using various online software and strategies, and the best way to teach online writing software is to illustrate the actual use by teaching online.

Recently, there seems to be a shift in online pedagogy from teaching to supporting learning. In the past decade, attention was focused more on effective presentation of online materials in engaging learners. Education providers have come to realize that transporting materials online and using sophisticated web designs do not necessarily ensure optimal use and effective learning, and thus more attention is now given to observing and supporting learning activities online (CEVU, 2001). The proposed WC approach fits in well with this growing trend as its main focus is on supporting the full development of ESL learners from the academic, cognitive, affective and social perspectives.

7.5 The WC Approach as Learner Support

Traditionally, WCs have been unique for supporting students including ESL students in their writing processes through a well researched and developed peer

tutoring system. Compared to native students, ESL students should need more guidance and should benefit more from an organized support system as they are learning a new language and also a new culture in English. Because of the tutoring system available in a WC and an OWL, a more comprehensive learner support system can be incorporated cost-effectively to further expand the usefulness of a WC. Also, there are valid reasons for a WC to adopt the whole language pedagogy (see Section 7.3.7) and in providing a more comprehensive system of support to its clientele because writing competence cannot be attained independently of other related literacies such as critical reading and thinking skills (Connor and Cushman, 2004). Therefore, in the proposed WC approach, the WC also functions as a learner support center in meeting the cognitive, affective and academic needs of students. The proposed WC approach is meant to provide the following support facilities.

7.5.1 Peer Writing Tutoring

On top of the discussion on the various techniques and advantages of peer writing tutoring in Chapter II and earlier sections of this Chapter, one-to-one peer tutoring in the WC is both a pedagogical method and a form of support, and this service has been recognized as the most unique feature of the WC (Harris, 2004). Naturally, in the proposed WC approach, the main function and responsibility of a WC is of course providing one-to-one tutoring service, which should include both face-to-face and online tutoring to meet the diverse learning styles of ESL undergraduate students. Having a chance to talk to a peer tutor individually helps to off-set writing anxiety or apprehension of ESL students. Encouragement from a peer tutor also helps ESL students build confidence in writing academic discourse and thereby the affective needs are being taken care of. At the same time, ESL students not only gain by improving their writing, they also improve their meta-cognition by asking questions about writing, and thereby building social competence.

In implementing peer tutoring, highly English proficient final year or graduate students should be trained before they serve as peer tutors in the WC and online through the OWL. In North American WCs, native tutors often have difficulty attending to ESL students due to cultural and first language differences. In their home countries, ESL students have the chance of talking to a WC tutor who shares the same cultural and first

language background. In UPM, students are mainly from three major ethnic groups or first languages (see Section 6.5.2). Hence, an ideal situation would be to match the cultural and linguistic background of a tutor to that of a student client so as to minimize cultural and linguistic barriers. Another consideration is that about 60% of the students are Muslims who may feel discomfort in sitting close or talking one-to-one to a peer tutor of the opposite gender. Therefore, there is also a need to match the gender of the tutor to that of the tutee. The gender matching, of course, is not necessary for online tutoring. A third consideration will be matching the discipline of the tutor with that of the tutee, based on the belief that a tutor who is well-versed in writing in English as well as having the disciplinary knowledge has the added advantage in dealing with writing related to disciplinary discourse (see Section 2.7.3).

Other than matching a tutor with a tutee in achieving optimal condition for writing tutorials, a tutor may also needs to tailor tutoring strategies to a tutee's learning style (Macauley, 2004). For example, a kinesthetic or tactile learner may prefer cutting up a piece of writing to reorganize main and subordinate ideas, a visual learner may prefer color-coding of main and subordinate ideas, an aural learner may prefer tutor reading aloud the paper, and a verbal learner may prefer talking about the writing. It is purported that tutors should understand their own and their tutees' learning styles so that they can be more sensitive in applying tutoring strategies when tutoring writing (Macauley, 2004).

7.5.2 Self-Access Language Learning

The basic resources of a physical WC include a collection of guidebooks on various writing skills, grammar reference books, style manuals such as APA and MLA, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, and worksheets on various writing tasks and skills. The electronic version of these resources is available on an OWL for round the clock download and referencing. The basic resources of a physical WC should also include at least a few sets of networked computers for student clients to access online resources or to revise their writing. Because of these already available resources, a WC can quite cost-effectively play the additional role of a self-access language center with an appointment of a language advisor and some additional self-learning English packages either in print or on CD-ROMs or even online through

the OWL.

In Chapter III the concept of learner autonomy has been deliberated alongside self-access language learning (SALL). In order to initiate SALL, students must learn and be trained to be autonomous learners. The advent of online technology has facilitated self-directed learning including SALL in a number of ways including flexible interaction across time and space barriers with the learning content and a support person. It has been proposed that self-directed learning is one key method that all students must learn to keep up with change, since the pace of change has accelerated at an unprecedented pace brought about by technological advancement and intense competition at the global level (Candy, 2004). In this light, the proposed WC approach should include SALL as a major function.

Furthermore, given that ESL students usually lack other language skills besides writing, the whole language theory can be applied through self-access to reinforce and enrich the writing experience. Therefore, the added SALL facility will enhance further the peer tutoring-in-writing function of an ESL WC.

7.5.3 Language Advising

As articulated in Section 3.4.1, self-access language learning (and hence the WC too) will not work and may run into the risk of poor uptake if the student clientele do not know how to make use of the self-access resources, let alone better or optimal use. This is where a language adviser can come in useful to guide students in getting started with services and facilities provided in the WC that include self-access language learning. The WC director and his/her assistants, who are usually experienced faculty members, can play the role of a language advisor in helping students identify their weak language areas and skills, and subsequently recommend suitable modules or worksheets for students to initiate self-directed learning. The responsibility of a language advisor may also include advising on reading and speaking strategies, dictionary skills, and using language software.

The language advising system should also include a grammar telephone line or a grammar online bulletin board afforded by the OWL. The language advisor may

oversee and maintain the grammar hotline for students to dial in for an answer to a grammar question. ESL students are often bothered by the correct use of English grammar; probably grammatical mistakes are the first to get spotted by a reader or an evaluator. ESL students and their lecturers tend to assign a lot of weight to grammar, and this has been confirmed by the survey study described in Chapter VI. When ESL students encounter confusion with grammar, it would be good if they can quickly get over the confusion and continue with the writing which is possible if there is an expert to talk to. This just-in-time grammatical support helps students to off load a problem and frees their mind to concentrate on the writing task. For less urgent questions, ESL students are encouraged to post their questions on the grammar bulletin board of the OWL. The language advisor needs to give clear instruction as to how questions can be posted and also to inform the turn-around time so that learners can re-log in to check the answer. The advantage of maintaining an online grammar bulletin board is for on-going reference by the whole student population, so that similar questions and answers do not need to be repeated.

7.5.4 Learning Advising

Learning is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder in your veins, you may miss your only love and lose your monies to a monster, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it, then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the poor mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. ~ White, 1938, p. 254.

The preceding quote enlightens the reward and joy of continuing learning and that it is an art that never disappoints. Yet learning, be it a second language or any other subject matter or skill, is not something that happens naturally although learning the first language can happen quite effortlessly (Steinberg, et al., 2001). For learners in tertiary education, advanced study skill, that is, learning how to learn, is essential for academic excellence in the university.

Connor and Cushman (2004) suggest that basic academic skills such as critical reading, note-taking, critical thinking and time management can impact on the writing

performance of students. For example, if a student's writing is muddled, the cause might be the student's lack of critical thinking resulting in the poor organization of main and supporting ideas. If a student often procrastinates on a written assignment and delays writing to the last minute, the cause might be traceable to poor time management. The skills Connor and Cushman (2004) raise are of two types actually, comprising both language skills and learning or study skills, although the authors group them all under academic support. Since reading skills have been discussed under language advising (see Section 7.4.3), the current section focuses only on study skills. Because of the observed interdependency of study skills and writing, Connor and Cushman (2004) propose that a WC to integrate study skill advising as a component of its support service. Study skill support should also include helping learners identify their effective learning style and learning strategy training.

The issue of WCs to integrate academic support has also been taken up in an earlier report by Faber and Avadikian (2002). They reason that WCs should integrate academic advising because the two systems share similar issues, and the integration would improve "opportunities for students to learn about disciplinary cultures, academic life, and the university's larger institutional culture within an academic rather than an administrative context." (para.5). Academic advising, as defined by Faber and Avadikian (2002), covers a much broader scope that includes advice on majors and minors, course information and career options. This important academic service helps students understand their major discipline and the larger university culture, thereby enable students to have a better vision of their academic and career goals (Faber and Avadikian, 2002). An effective academic advising system benefits both students and the institution. With available and expert advice, students tend to develop more befitting academic plans and career paths based on their interest, aptitude, and aspiration. "Quality Advising fosters student development" and thus "enriches the academic community, the adviser, and the society" (Raushi, 1993, p.5; cited in Faber and Avadikian, 2002, para. 8). It has also been confirmed that academic advising improves student retention (see, for example, Anderson, 1997).

Different universities usually have different academic advising infrastructures for different advising purposes. Generally, four types of advising are provided that include: *mentoring* that is usually a voluntary and informal 'one-time' non-judgmental

relationship where the mentor encourages the mentee; *tutoring* on a specific subject matter related to a learning program usually in the form of individual help given by a manager, trainer or student to one or a few learners; *coaching* that involves regular and formalized contact hours throughout a program meant to keep the learner focused in reaching set goals; and *counseling* that is usually related to issues that concern (e.g. career options) or disturb a learner (e.g. exam anxiety) (British Learning Association, 2005). At UPM for example, lecturers also play the role of an academic advisor. They are assigned by the faculty a few students who are supposed to consult their respective academic advisors should they experience any academic or personal problems during their studies.

While a WC may also support learning or study skill advising as learning problems may result in poor writing, it cannot cover a wide-scope academic advising. For an ESL WC especially, developing the whole English competence of undergraduates for them to function in the immediate academia and later their professions in an increasingly online landscape is already a daunting task. Therefore, academic advising is best handled by a different entity. Nevertheless, if the academic advice involves a writing skill, for example, writing a curriculum vitae or a resume for a post-graduate scholarship application, then the academic center, unit, or the lecturer on duty can send the student to seek help at the WC or OWL.

Both language and learning advising can operate as a helpdesk system at the WC. The advisor is best appointed from among the more experienced lecturers than from the peer tutors. Students should also be given the flexibility to seek help or ask questions by telephone or e-mail.

7.5.5 Guidance for Editing and Proofreading

Most WCs (North American, European and Asian alike; see Section 4.8.3) emphasize the non-editing policy professed by a strict adherence to the WC founding philosophy of improving the writer not the writing (North, 1984). However in reality, editing and proofreading are the service most sought after by students especially ESL students who generally lack the language on top of inadequate writing skills (Myers, 2003; Powers, 1993 & 2001). This particular need of general ESL tertiary students has

been affirmed by the findings reported in Sections 4.8.8 and 6.6.4. Therefore, failure to recognize or appreciate such a need would be counter productive to WC efforts in supporting students in their writing processes, and a WC designed for ESL learners must be able to address the need for editing and proofreading to be helpful. Due to the context-specific differences, a whole-sale adoption of a western WC principle of strictly no editing or proofreading may not work (see Section 4.8.4; Turner, 2006; Yasuda, 2006).

In practice, writing tutorials usually address higher-order concerns such as organization and rhetoric. Due to limited resources in serving a big clientele, writing tutors may not be able to attend to lower-order or grammatical concerns that require time to develop. In balancing the ESL learners' need for editing and proof reading and the WC principle of non-editing, a guided editing approach could be a plausible solution. The guided editing approach is achievable in the WC that practices SALL and language advising (see Sections 7.5.2 and 7.5.3). Usually students who ask for editing help lack the language competence to help them see their own errors such as those related to subject-verb agreement, articles, tenses, and countable/uncountable nouns. In such situations, the writing tutors can direct these students to the language advisor, who can help students identify their weak language areas. The language advisor can also recommend to the students suitable language practice worksheets or software for self-directed practice, and also teach the students the use of suitable editing tools such as grammar checkers and editing checklists in checking their writing. This kind of guided self help tends to improve students' awareness in analyzing their language, reduce their writing apprehension and enhance their confidence as writers (Powers, 1993 & 2001). At the same time, the guided editing approach frees up writing tutors' time for more urgent writing problems such as higher-order concerns.

7.5.6 ICT Support

Ten years ago, a WC director pointed out that a major goal of WCs should be in helping students acquire information literacy (Clark, 1995). She argued that information literacy "will ultimately become a primary determiner of life quality and economic independence" (p. 204) and students who can access and appropriately use information

have an added edge over those who cannot. Her comment cannot be more relevant today with ICT encroaching on every facet of our life. In supporting students in acquiring information literacy so that they have accurate information to base their writing, WCs need to teach students strategies and tools for accessing a wide array of print and electronic resources and for assessing the creditability and relevance of the resources to a particular writing task (Clark, 1995).

Earlier sections of this chapter and also Chapters II and III point to the reality that students are learning and writing in an increasingly technological, hypermedia and hypertext online environment. On top of that, a good part of their self-access language learning is through CALL and online. Also, in ensuring the uptake of the OWL, students need to be conversant with digital writing and online communication tools such as email, forum, bulletin board, chat, blog and wiki.

Therefore, in addition to supporting the acquisition of information literacy, the WC approach should include supporting students and also peer tutors in learning the use of such writing tools and writing media. Appointing an ICT support person in a WC will reduce operational problems caused by unfamiliarity with ICT. The ICT support staff can also help to ensure the smooth operation of the OWL.

7.5.7 Fostering a Writing Community

A brief definition of a learning community is “any social network or infrastructure that brings people together to share and pursue knowledge” (Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2005, p.13). A learning community is formed when a group of people collaborate to achieve a common learning objective. It is “defined by function, purpose, and membership rather than temporal, physical, or geographical boundaries” (Shimabukuro, 2005, para.18).

Learning community as a theory and practice of learning has several obvious advantages compared with learning that is not supported by a peer community. A learning community offers a physical and/or virtual space for students to meet and feel accepted, and thereby offsets isolation, promotes retention and increased satisfaction towards the academia. It also encourages academic discourses. In interacting with peers,

students have the chance to see issues being discussed from multiple angles including conflicting thoughts, and this kind of community discussion develops higher thinking skills and promotes critical thinking (Kirby, 2000). Students are also likely to have deeper understanding of the subject matter if they have a chance to discuss it with their peers. Moreover, a research project that investigated three models of learning community found that even a simple learning community structure with limited resources and without the coordination of a faculty member had positive effects for students in terms of grade-point average (GPA), retention and first year experience (Stassen, 2003).

However, simply grouping a few students together will not automatically form a learning community if the learning objective or the collaborative task is not explicated. For a learning community to achieve its optimal advantage, it has to be intentionally restructured by considering the unique personality, need and preference of each student and also the support infrastructure. In this light, the WC is well positioned for promoting the formation of learning communities because of its physical and virtual spaces, support personnel, and learning resources. The WC's function will attract students who have a common purpose of improving their English and writing skills.

In the context of the proposed WC approach, the collaboration effort centers around supporting and interacting with learners so that they become happy, competent and contributing ESL learners, writers and users in their majoring disciplines, the immediate academia and the society at large. Collaborative activities, either online or face-to-face, are central to learning as such activities encourage reflection, meaning making, co-creation of knowledge, learning transfer, and the development of critical thinking (Palloff and Pratt, 2005). Learning is active and meaningful when learners construct knowledge through social interaction (Piaget, 1969).

The idea of an established WC in the USA is a welcoming and non-threatening contact zone for students to meet and learn in a supportive environment (Bokser, 2005). WCs have been portrayed as physical spaces with supportive personnel, facilities and resources for English language learning and writing, and comfortable sofas and brewing coffee for students to socialize or have a breather. This idea of the WC as a contact zone is applicable to the proposed writing center approach for Malaysian ESL tertiary

students. For newly enrolled students, the university could be a strange place quite different from their secondary schools especially when they have been uprooted from their rural or sub-urban abodes and are placed in an urban university. The WC as a contact zone can provide the kind of scaffolding for new students to adapt to the university culture. Although the experience of locally enrolled students is less daunting than those enrolled in foreign universities, supporting students affectively could help them get on with their new academic life sooner and more efficiently.

In recent years, Malaysian public universities have been increasing foreign student intake. These foreign students are usually from neighboring countries such as Thailand or Indonesia, Middle-Eastern countries such as Iran, Asian countries such as China and India, and African countries such as Sudan and Nigeria. The English standard of these international students are generally lower than local Malaysian students. For these international students, the WC is a good contact zone for them to improve their English and to meet with local students, thereby foster cultural understanding. Thus, for local and international students, the WC is a mediator in easing them into university culture and academic discourse. The WC is also cultural exchange zone, providing a fertile bed to grow ideas for writing.

For those who are less proficient with spoken and written English, the WC and OWL provide the people and spaces for them to learn and practice English skills with guidance from peer tutors, language and learning advisors. Online spaces and collaborative tools afforded by the OWL make possible interaction and collaboration across time and space barriers. These WC spaces extend the opportunities for learners to interact either one to one as in a tutoring session, or one to many when participating in discussion or in-class writing workshops or any collaborative effort, thereby fostering a community or several communities of writers.

7.6 The WC Approach as Language Learning Environment

Educators today are not just disseminators of information or even facilitators. Learning has to extend beyond the physical boundary of the classroom and educators need to become designers of the learning environment. ~Tan Oon Seng (2003, p.7)

An environment can be defined as the circumstances, especially the combination of external physical conditions, that affect and influence the growth, development, and survival of a person or a group of people (Dictionary.com, 2005). A learning environment is sometimes referred to as learning climate or atmosphere (Hiemstra and Sisco, 1990). Applying this definition to education, an expert in adult education described a learning environment as “the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in an educational enterprise” (Hiemstra, 1991, p. 8). This much broader sense of a *learning* environment includes not just physical conditions, but also social, cultural, and psychological elements.

The above definition of a learning environment is outdated with the proliferation of e-learning today. To be of relevance, a twenty first century learning environment needs to include the fifth aspect, that is, the virtual dimension. A virtual learning environment (VLE) is defined as:

... a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process. The principal components of a VLE package include curriculum mapping (breaking curriculum into sections that can be assigned and assessed), student tracking, online support for both teacher and student, electronic communication (e-mail, threaded discussions, chat, Web publishing), and Internet links to outside curriculum resources. (Whatis Online Encyclopedia, 2005).

The proposed WC framework comprises a combination of both physical and virtual learning environment, capitalizing on the strengths from both the environments and using the strengths from each to offset the inherent weaknesses of each environment. The rationale of including a virtual dimension, on top of those given in Section 7.1, is in keeping up with the current demand from the job market for advanced electronic and digital literacy, and also to provide an additional learning option to students who have diverse needs and learning preferences.

The learning environment theory suggests that learning does not take place in a vacuum. Instead, learning occurs in dynamic interaction among the learners, teachers, administrators, instructional materials, supporting systems and facilities. A positive or

negative learning environment can influence the learners' attitude in learning, and the extent of effort they are willing to put on a learning task (Hiemstra, 1991).

Lately, there has been an enthusiastic discussion on the theory of *immersive learning environment* in blogosphere. Downes (July 1, 2005) started with the proposition that "learning (and teaching such as it is) is not a process of communication, but rather, a process of immersion" (para. 1). Downes' notion of learning not being a process of communication may not convince because only through communication there is interaction which is vital for learning. However, a conducive environment does encourage optimal learning. Therefore, the task of an education provider or a teacher is to ensure the creation of an optimal learning environment to immerse learners so that they learn from the environment. An example of an immersive environment can be a community of practice or a simulated virtual reality (Russell, July 2, 2005).

For ESL tertiary learners, the proposed WC approach that includes both physical and virtual environments afforded by the various forms of on-site and online resources and learning spaces, is well-positioned to function as an immersive language learning environment for the following reasons/features.

7.6.1 Accessibility

The WC environment is informal and relaxed, different from the formal teacher-fronted classrooms where rigid time and place are followed. Students have the freedom to visit the physical WC any time during open hours, or to visit the OWL any time in the day or week for just-in-time information or help. Most online labs specify a turn-around time of 24 or 48 hours depending on the availability of online support personnel.

7.6.2 Exposure to English

In any Asian countries for example Malaysia, English is either a second or a foreign language, and therefore English use in daily life or even in the public academia is quite limited. Many second language researchers have confirmed the importance of exposure to the target language as a form of linguistic input in learning the language (see, for example, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, 1982). In the WC environment, students

are exposed to nothing but English. According to the interactionist learning theory, the communication between the second language learners and other speakers in social interactions (such as those happened in the WC) promotes the acquisition of the second language (see, for example, Ellis, 1994). In ensuring English is the only language used just like any English language classroom, the rule must be made explicit or written at the door as soon as the WC service is operational. This rule will ensure that the students form the habit of speaking only in English and not their first language when they are in the WC, thereby giving everyone a good exposure of spoken English while learning to write. The tendency to switch into their first language is less likely online especially when students interact through the OWL which is set up in English.

7.6.3 Authenticity

Students often have difficulty to apply the kind of English learned in the classroom to real life use as classroom or instructional English is somewhat contrived. In the WC, English is used to achieve a communicative purpose. In the on-site or online center, students have an authentic task to perform in English, that is, talking about their writing, and asking for help to improve their writing. Therefore, the use of English is 'real' compared to the contrived or simulated reality of the classroom. While ESL students may not have the chance to interact with native English speakers in the physical WC, they are exposed to standard or near native English spoken by their hand-picked tutors. The WC director or support personnel can arrange opportunities or design tasks or activities for ESL students to interact with native speakers, probably a native WC community in the USA, UK, Australia or New Zealand, through the OWL discussion board or any e-mail system, or a link to any such communities. Such border-crossing intercultural interaction will enrich the students' repertoire of English and create a better understanding of the native English culture. Through the OWL too, students can follow links to authentic materials where they see how English is used in real life.

7.6.4 Updated Reference Resources

The WC has the ecology for English language learning and writing as it has a rich and updated resource of reference materials. In addition to the reference resources

in the on-site center, there is an always open library in OWL, where advice on specific genres, formats, styles, mechanics, usage, etc. can be downloaded anytime. On the OWL too, reference materials can remain updated as changes can be conveniently made compared to the print resources in the WC.

7.6.5 Risk Free

While the classroom is a place where students compete to get the best grade, the non-evaluative WC is a friendlier place that promotes camaraderie and genuine collaboration, in the absence of any form of grading. In the WC's non-grading environment, students are more willing to seek help with their writing, and are less inhibited to share their writing with a support person most probably a peer tutor or a language advisor at the WC or the OWL. As the students use the on-site or online WC with a single purpose, that is, to improve their English and writing, they are less inhibited to experiment with spoken and written English among themselves. With this arching purpose of improving the writers and thereby the ESL users, a community of writers or ESL learners is formed (see discussion in Section 7.4.6). The big WC community may in turn be divided into satellite communities possibly according to majors, interest, or the purpose of writing.

7.6.6 E-Learning and Online Writing

With the OWL facilities, students have the opportunity to be initiated into e-learning and online writing. The dialogic on-site and online spaces give ESL students especially the less proficient a voice, as the risk-free environment let them feel free to speak in speech or in writing, and they know their voices will be heard or valued and not being taken for granted. The OWL that has both synchronous and asynchronous facilities actually enhances the interaction between the students, WC tutors, and their English or Writing teachers. When ESL students write on online spaces, their writing is of a better quality as they have time to reflect on their writing. Also, as students "talk" about their writing through writing, they not only have increased practice on writing but also learn from their peers' feedback to improve their writing and critical reading skills (Hewett, 2002). This "immersion in writing" (Palmquist, 1993, p.26) afforded by the OWL is especially useful for ESL learners who will benefit most from maximum

exposure to the target language as well as active and situated learning.

7.6.7 Learner Development

In addition, the proposed WC approach for ESL undergraduates also includes learner development and training, as students may have to be trained to identify their learning styles and learn to apply language learning strategies to make the process of learning English and academic writing more efficient. The WC tutors can also serve as role models for novice ESL learners to learn “good language learner strategies” (Rubin and Thompson, 1994).

7.7 Summary of the WC Approach

Figure 7.3 sums up the philosophy of the WC approach. The dual-mode WC approach delineates a dynamic, positive and collaborative language learning environment by providing informal learning spaces on-site and online to complement formal learning in the classroom. Coincidentally, the WC and OWL theory and praxis are in line with the *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* promulgated by Chickering and Gamson since 1987. The WC as a physical locale and the OWL as a virtual space together form an integrated and powerful immersive language learning environment that

1. encourages contact between students and faculty,
2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. encourages active learning,
4. gives prompt feedback,
5. emphasizes time on tasks,
6. communicates high expectations, and
7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning. (para. 4)

In terms of supporting the affective needs of ESL students, the WC approach suggests a learning environment that fosters a community of learners and writers. The community encourages interpersonal bond, negates isolation, reduces writing apprehension, and builds confidence in beginner writers. With its emphasis on individualization and personalization, the enriched linguistic environment promotes “the

application of different theories within one facility for students of all levels of ability” (Farrell-Chiders, 1994, p.111). The multiple pedagogies and the inclusive support infrastructure give more options for learning English and writing. With more choices comes more freedom. Students decide or identify their own needs with the help of the language or learning advisor, and use the WC services according to their needs.

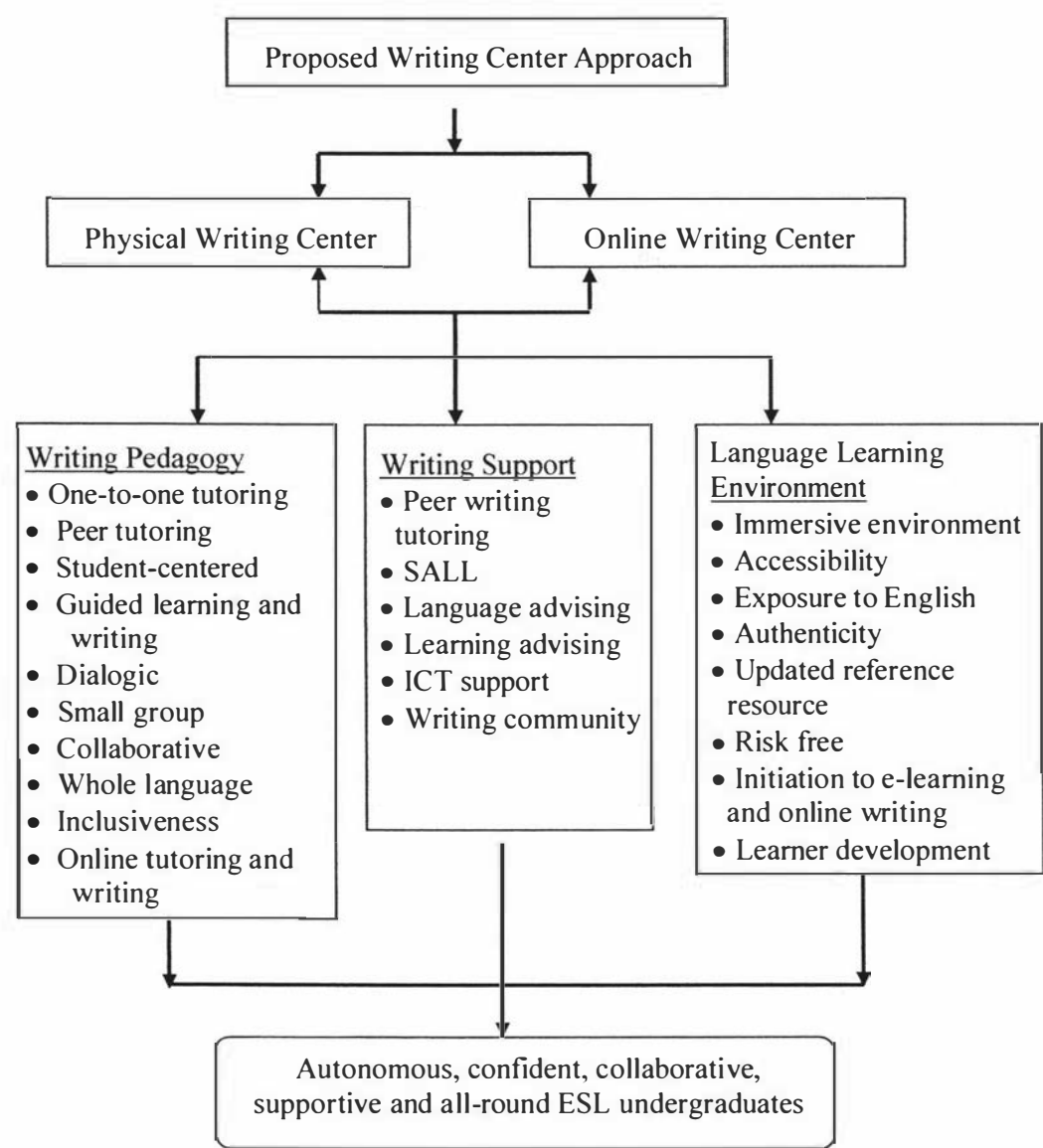


Figure 7.3 The Writing Center Approach

Figure 7.4 illustrates the relationship among collaboration, community and environment. It is through collaboration that a WC community is formed within the on-

site and online infrastructure afforded by the WC approach.

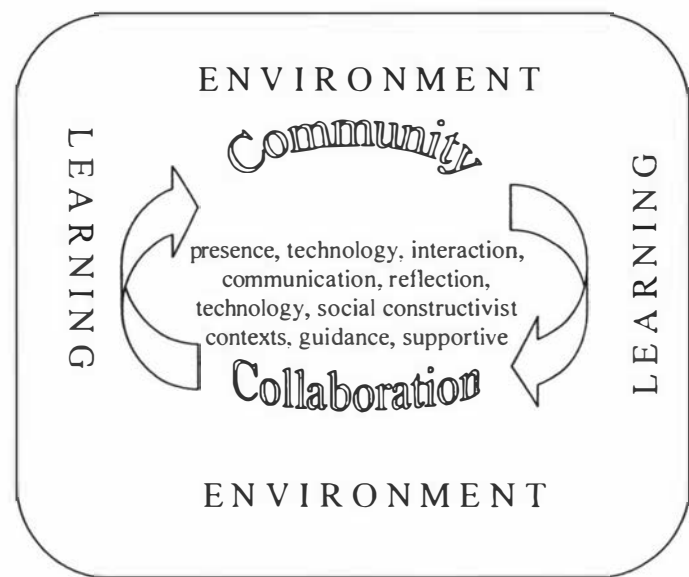


Figure 7.4 Relationship of Collaboration, Community and Learning Environment
(Adapted from Palloff and Pratt, 2005, p. 5)

Last but not least, the WC can also serve as a testing field for curricular innovation especially in the area of ESL writing pedagogy and support that will indirectly benefit ESL students in the long run. However, as this is outside the scope of the research, this WC function will not be elaborated.

7.8 An Action plan for Innovating the WC Approach

Among the various imperatives for innovation discussed in Chapter IV (see Section 4.2), the obvious reason for the proposed WC framework is “to improve student learning and to better prepare them for the future” (see Chapter IV). Also, the framework is meant to propose an intervention mechanism to help students who are having problems with writing in *academic* English. These students are capable of expressing in sub-standard or a local form of colloquial English called Manglish, for example, in sending short messages to mobile phones or in online chats. However, most of them need help in writing formal English (see Section 6.5.2).

The proposed WC framework will be a *self-motivated* and *selective* curricular innovation (see Section 4.3) because an insider felt the need to initiate a North

American curricular innovation in a Malaysian context. As such, the innovation will be *proactive* (with the insider leading the innovation) and *incremental* as the innovation will add on to the existing teaching and learning environment. Based on the nature of the proposed innovation, there may be zero or little resistance from within the institution as the innovation will be an add-on support system complementing classroom efforts, and may not complicate the existing teaching practice or increase the present workload of the teaching staff.

In initiating and implementing the proposed WC approach, a five-phase action plan based on the innovation literature examined in Chapter IV (see Section 4.6.1), will be followed (see Figure 7.5). The action plan is adapted after the model of Holiday and Cooke (1982, p.135; see Section 4.6.3) and described in terms of the innovation-decision model of Rogers (1995, p. 163). The next section discusses the action plan from an applied perspective.

7.8.1 Knowledge and Awareness

In the knowledge and awareness stage, a potential innovation initiator, who can be an individual or a decision-making team, is exposed to an innovation and thereby gains some knowledge about the innovation (Rogers, 1995). The debate on whether a need motivates an innovation or its awareness leads to a need often recurs in innovation diffusion literature. Rogers (1995) calls this a chicken-or-egg situation. The selective exposure hypothesis says that people tend to expose themselves to things that matter or appeal to them (Hassinger, 1959). If there is no real need for an innovation, people tend not to see it despite being exposed to it frequently. Only when there is a need would a person actively seek an innovation. This is the scenario where a needy user seeks an innovation. For example, a person who has broken his leg may begin to look for a walking aid. On the other hand, in the scenario of an innovation looking for a user, advertisements of the special walking aid may motivate wheel-chair bound people, who previously did not think of 'adopting' a walking aid, into buying one.

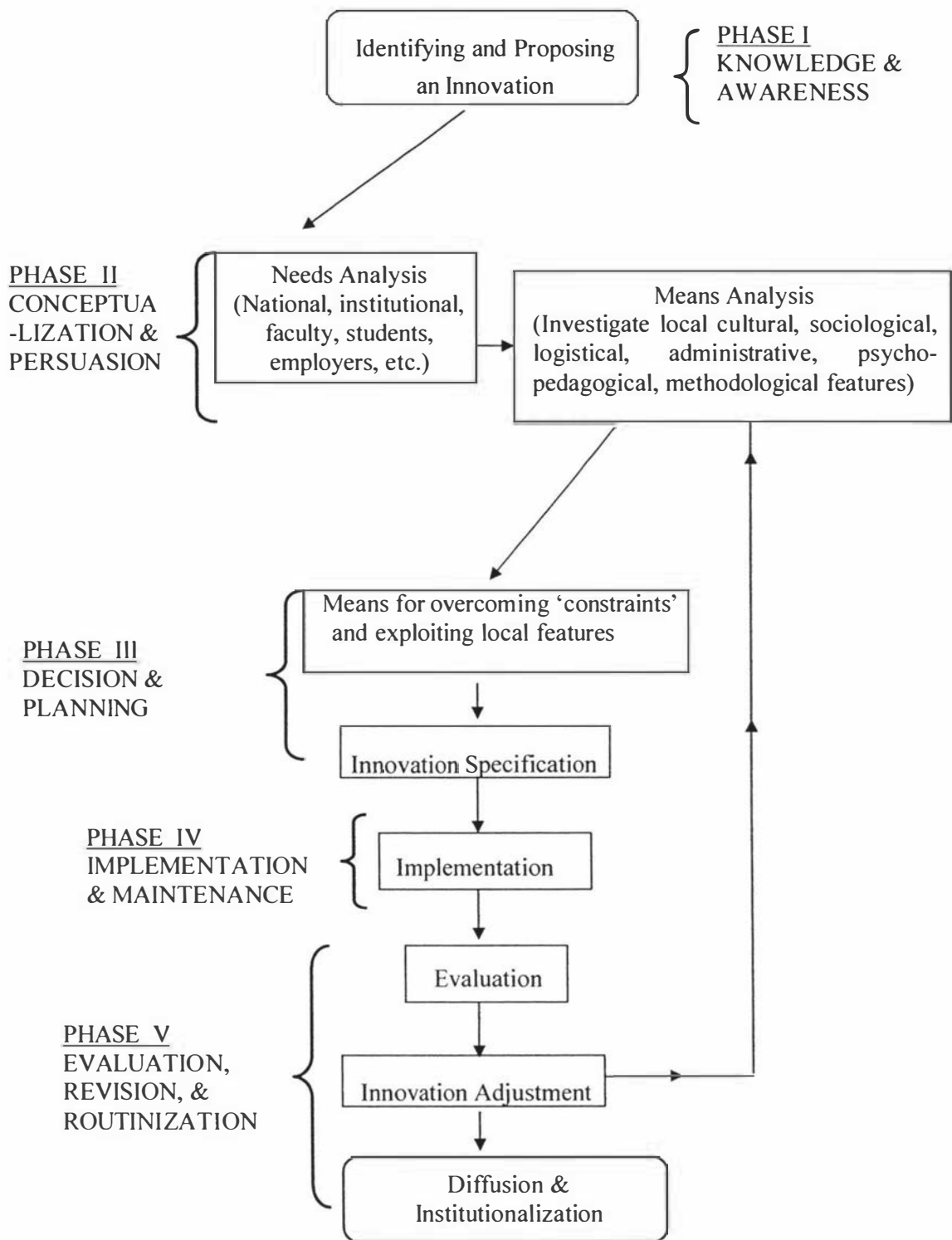


Figure 7.5 An Action Plan for Innovating the WC Approach
(Adapted from Holliday and Cooke 1982, p.135;
and Rogers, 1995, p. 163)

On top of the awareness knowledge, a person needs to have the “how-to knowledge” to correctly use an innovation, and the “principles knowledge” to understand how the innovation works (Rogers, 1995, p. 166-167). An innovation may stop short at Phase I, knowledge and awareness stage, if the potential user lacks any of these types of knowledge.

In creating awareness for WCs and OWLs in Malaysia, educating potential adopters is essential. An effective yet cost-effective way is to publicize WC and OWL applications through talks in popular local conferences or mass-media such as radio, TV and newspapers.

In the case of the present research of innovating WCs and OWLs at a specific Malaysian context, the researcher’s encounter with the innovation was by chance. A routine Internet surf led the researcher to the Purdue OWL. The links provided by the Purdue OWL led to the discovery of more OWLs and hence WCs, and the realization that this North American curricular innovation might help to mitigate a similar “literacy crisis” in Malaysia. In this light, the need for an innovative solution to the crisis existed before the encounter with the Purdue OWL, and the subsequent awareness of the WC innovation tentatively filled in the need.

Further reading on the history, theory and practice of WCs and OWLs informed how they have been applied in various contexts in different institutions of higher learning in North America. Despite the diverse applications of WCs and OWLs, there exist some fundamental principles that include: individualized and personalized tutoring, mentored writing, peer response to writing, learner support, non-judgmental and non-grading writing pedagogy, and student-centered approach. These principles seemed to provide a convincing alternative to the prevailing lecture approach to writing in Malaysian universities. A second plausibility factor for the possible adoption of the WC innovation is that most of the North American WCs serve ESL learners, and ESL learners have been reported to have gained from their use of the WC (Powers and Nelson, 1995). The third factor is that WCs have been in existence since the establishment of the first WC in 1934 (Carino, 1995), and new ones are still being established in North America and elsewhere in the world. This means that the approach

has been trialed and seasoned and has proven to be useful. Therefore, the chance of failure might be reduced. Finally, the long and established WC and OWL development has produced abundant literature and scholarship on various aspects of the WC theory and praxis. The literature and expertise in the area is helpful for any novice who plans to set up a WC and/or OWL.

This initial knowledge and awareness has created a favorable attitude in the researcher toward the WC/OWL innovation, and has encouraged further investigation of the innovation. In learning about WCs and OWLs, two publications, the *Writing Center Journal* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and the International Writing Centers Association website (see www.writingcenters.org) have provided excellent guidance. Another superb source of information is from the WC community listserv, the *WCenter*, where members pose questions or announcements, contribute ideas and encouragement in supporting one another.

7.8.2 Conceptualization and Persuasion

In the conceptualization and persuasion phase, a decision maker seeks “innovation-evaluation information” (p. 168) to affirm attitudinal opinions formed earlier. If the attitude is favorable, the initiator goes on to investigate if the innovation meets institutional needs through a needs assessment. The needs assessment will inform whether to adopt the whole innovation or only certain parts of the innovation. The decision maker will also find out if the innovation is congruent to micro and macro culture and practice and whether the institution has the resources and means to implement the innovation. This can be done through a means analysis (Holliday, 1994) (see Section 4.6.3 for a detailed discussion on needs and means analysis). The decision maker will be persuaded to adopt the innovation if findings from the needs and means analyses are favorable.

In innovating WCs and OWLs in Malaysia, the specific WC approach formulated in Section 7.7 should be rationalized against local needs, so that only the practical aspects are adopted. Before convincing colleagues and administrators in setting up a WC at the institution, the initiator must be completely convinced of the

logic and practicality of the conceptual framework of the WC approach. When the initiator is persuaded of the innovation benefits, his/her enthusiasm and commitment will help to persuade his/her team to diligently work with him/her towards the next phase of the innovation.

In innovating the WC approach at UPM, its five theoretical aspects have been conceptualized. These are: the blended approach of a WC and an OWL (Section 7.2), the specific needs of ESL learners (Section 7.3), the specific writing pedagogies that are applicable to ESL tertiary students (Section 7.4), the specific support structures that are helpful to ESL undergraduates (Section 7.5), and the language learning environment afforded by the WC approach (Section 7.6).

In establishing the extent of congruence between the innovation and the micro and macro climate (see Figure 7.5 Means analysis), the findings from the survey on writing needs and writing support at UPM (the micro environment) confirm the viewpoint of both faculty and students that writing in English is an important academic and professional skill, and support in the form of individualized tutorials and reference resources should be provided for students (see Sections 7.5.1 and 7.5.2). At the macro environment level, the general sentiment of the Malaysian government, business, industry, educators and parents is the recognized imperative of pushing up the standard of English for global competitiveness and ICT advancement. The favorable climate in the micro and macro environments should support innovating a WC approach aimed at improving the English standard especially academic writing skills of ESL undergraduates.

According to Harris (2001), a WC and an OWL are guided and shaped by the mission and functions of the institution that created them, and subsequently related to the need of the institution's clientele. The mission statement of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) reads as follows:

The University's mission is to be a leading center of learning and research, contributing not only towards human advancement and discovery of knowledge but also to the creation of wealth and nation building. (UPM Homepage, 2005)

In order to realize this vision and mission, UPM has formulated eight goals or functions, of which the following are most relevant to the creation of a WC, and where the WC

approach can contribute in realizing the goals:

1. *To produce quality graduates who are competitive and resilient through lifelong learning.* Graduate unemployment has been a standing headache for the Malaysian government and society, and the cause has been linked to the lack of English competence and ICT skills (see Section 5.5). The dual mode WC facilitates the blended approach and dual immersion in teaching English through ICT and vice versa. In this light, the WC approach will contribute towards helping the university in producing both employable graduates as well as graduates who have the most important competence to compete globally. Through the one-to-one coaching in the proposed WC, undergraduates learn to collaborate and support their peers and learning how to learn and these are the prerequisites in promoting life-long learning.
2. *To transform UPM into a renowned research university.* In imparting research findings to the world, researchers must again have the two important tools: English and ICT. At the beginning, the WC will serve mainly students but its clientele will be extended to include faculty members who needs help with publishing in English at a later stage. A function of the WC is to teach research writing and basic web search skill. This function helps students acquire research skills. As students often help faculty in research activities, and they may later become a research student or a lecturer in contributing towards the realization of this goal.
3. *To upgrade UPM as a renowned center of learning, agricultural and bio-resources services internationally.* In becoming a renowned center of learning, a supportive learning culture is a prerequisite. The WC approach, with its main goal in providing a supportive and collaborative learning environment, is well positioned in helping the university in attaining this goal.
4. *To develop and create excellent human resources and professional environment.* This goal relates to Goal #1. Through the nurturing in the WC environment, students are expected to be groomed into supportive, caring, competent ESL and ICT-savvy learners to become excellent human resources to the university and the

nation. For tertiary students who have yet to master literacy and study skills, the WC can provide the retraining that is not possible in large classes (Cox, 1984).

5. *To promote an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) culture through e-University.* The OWL of the WC, other than providing a platform for students to learn the Internet culture and various ICT tools, can also function as a testing ground for faculty to experiment with e-learning tools. This in turn will help UPM in realising the e-university goal.
6. *To effectively generate and manage University Financial Resources.* In this highly competitive era where education has become a commodity and has gone global, having a WC in providing student support and an OWL in creating the web presence will help entice and retain both domestic and international students. Having more students will generate more revenue and hence make the university financially stable.

Out of the eight goals, the proposed WC approach is in the position to contribute toward the realization of six goals. Therefore, the UPM mission and climate is seen to be favorable to the proposed WC approach.

For a start, the proposed dual-mode WC will follow the *Co-Curricular WC Model* discussed in Chapter II (see Section 2.2.2). It has been reported that WCs and OWLs might risk slow uptake caused by poor location on campus and poor publicity (Harris, 2004). By linking the services of the WC to existing writing intensive courses, the problem of poor uptake could be avoided. At a later stage, the co-curricular function of the WC can expand to include a curricular function, that is, in conducting writing courses and workshops, before moving on to offer extra-curricular help with writing that is not related to a course. Also, starting the WC with the co-curricular function will meet the need of the generally large class size of taught courses in UPM as lecturers are not able to provide personal attention to every student in class. The one-to-one tutoring at the WC will fill in this need. As for the OWL, it will start as an Information OWL at the initial stage to be upgraded to an Interactive OWL by adding an e-mail tutoring facility, and a bulletin board or a blog space for students to publish their papers and to receive feedback/comments from the community at a later stage. At the third stage, the

OWL may be expanded to include online chat room tutoring (see Section 2.3.2).

In conceptualizing the kind of WC that is suitable for Malaysian tertiary education, an important consideration is the WC administrative structure. In North America, a WC is either integrated into the English Department services, or is an ancillary component of a larger learning support center, or exists as an independent center (Harris, 2004). For a start, it is more viable for the WC to be set up and administered by the English Department as this is the department that offers Service English or English proficiency courses to the whole campus. Thus, it has the manpower and the expertise in overseeing the successful implementation of a WC program or approach. Also, the English Department is open to all students across the curriculum. Most first year students have to sign up for at least one English proficiency course upon their admission to the university. This is the place where students attend their English courses and seek any English language advice, and thus there is a natural and logical link by placing the WC under the jurisdiction of the English Department. The preference for the English Department to offer individualized writing support has also been confirmed by UPM lecturers in the survey study (see Section 6.5.1). In UPM, due to the absence of a formal learner support center, the proposed WC will include the function of providing learning guidance as poor learning strategies can affect the successful mastery of the English language including academic writing skills (see Section 7.5.4).

7.8.3 Decision and Planning

At the decision and planning phase, a decision maker, upon satisfying him/herself of the investigation involved in Phases I and II, may either adopt fully or partially or reject an innovation. A decision maker can also try out the innovation on a probationary basis to ascertain its applicability (Rogers, 1995).

In planning for the take-off, the decision maker or the innovation initiator should anticipate any possible constraints from pedagogical, cultural, financial, managerial, administrative and political perspectives (Holliday, 1994). The initiator should also exploit local features that encourage the implementation of the innovation.

As mentioned earlier, the proposed WC approach is an add-on support facility and it does not propose a drastic change to existing curricular practice, hence there should be little or no resistance from faculty members. However, the absence of resistance does not automatically spell out to acceptance or support. Therefore, the faculty must be convinced and persuaded of the benefits of the WC approach and advantages of having a WC through dialogues at meetings, seminars and publications, so that the whole faculty could be mobilized in working towards the realization of a WC in UPM.

When the faculty has been won over, the next equally important challenge is in getting the fund to set up an experimental WC to implement the WC approach. In sourcing the initial fund, the research team at UPM submitted a proposal to innovate the WC approach to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovations (MOSTI), which provides the grant for research in Intensified Research Priority Areas (IRPA). The proposal was screened by the Department, Faculty, Sectional (Humanities and Social Sciences), and Professorial research committees before being finally assessed by the research grant committee at the Ministry. The battle was half won when the MOSTI approved a grant for setting up an experimental WC at UPM. With the start-up fund secured, full effort can then be channeled to the details of implementation.

Before the implementation, the innovation specification has to be considered and outlined. For the proposed WC, the specification will include the location, space design that includes the floor area and lay out, furniture and equipment, staffing and resources. For the OWL, the software, screen lay out and design, various topics of static resources and downloadable handouts should be deliberated. Table 7.1 shows a detailed basic specification of an initial WC and OWL for planning and implementation.

Table 7.1 Basic Specifications of the WC and OWL

	Writing center	Online writing lab
Location	In the Faculty building with a floor area of two-classroom size or 100 square meters for the start.	Reside in existing Faculty server.
Space design	• Director's office. • Clerical assistant cum receptionist's area. • Tutoring corners • Computer area • Meeting area • Waiting or socializing area	• Front page showing the WC name, mission and functions, location, services, opening hours, staff members and contact details. • Left panel menu bearing links to director's message, making an appointment, description of a tutoring session, benefits of consultations, various writing genres and tasks with model answers, style manuals, online pronouncing dictionary, thesaurus and encyclopedia, search engine, interactive grammar, exam help, etc.
Furniture	• Tables and chairs for the director and the receptionist. • Six small round tables and chairs for tutoring. • A dual purpose meeting table with chairs for meetings and individual writing. • A row of cabinets for record keeping and handouts. • Computer tables • A sofa set.	
Equipment	• Four networked PCs for on-demand revision and research by students and staff. • Photocopying machine • Printer • White board • Audio-visual equipment such as TV and VCD and DVD player • Coffee making machine • Fax machines • Telephones	• Web design software
Instructional resources	• Tutoring handbooks • Style manuals • English and bilingual dictionaries with CD-ROM • Thesaurus • Encyclopedia • Guidebooks on writing skills • Multimedia English language learning packages • Handouts and worksheets on grammar and writing tasks	• The same to be digitized and saved in the OWL for 24/7 access and reference.
Staffing	• Director • Language advisor • Study skill advisor • Tutors • Clerical assistant	• Web designer cum webmaster.

7.8.4 Implementation and Maintenance

The implementation stage usually follows directly the decision and planning phase. Problems of application such as the various functions of the innovation often arise during the actual operation (Rogers, 1995).

In implementing the items in the specification table, the primary concern next to securing a fund is staffing. It would seem that the success or failure of a WC depends very much on the professional and administrative competence and leadership capability of the WC director. As the director plans long and short term goals, oversees daily administration, supervises and trains tutors, develops WC materials, reports to a higher level, evaluates utility, maintains budget, promotes the WC and liaises with external agencies, s/he must be someone experienced in teaching ESL and composition. The IWCA website has a detailed evaluation guideline for the appointment of a WC director. The knowledge and experience of a WC director should include, besides the aforementioned, knowledge of learning theories, research and evaluation methods, material development, accounting, business administration, personnel management, ICT, and curriculum design (Simpson, 1985). For the appointment of the language and study skill advisors, similar appointment criteria and job specifications must be worked out.

An important responsibility of the director is to work with a web designer in creating the OWL. The OWL will enhance the visibility of the WC, and will support students who need WC services during the after hours. The development of the OWL can follow several stages as described in Section 6.8.

The next concern is tutor training that can be done through a credit-bearing course in the MA program, or through training selected volunteers. A course in tutoring should be popular among the MA students as many of them become teachers after graduation, and the tutoring course will give them some theory and practice in “teaching” and will also enhance their credentials. The syllabus of the peer tutoring course will need to be designed and approved by the University Senate and the Ministry of Higher Education before it can be included in MA English program. Once the

syllabus is in place, it will ensure a constant supply of tutors. The second method is to train selected volunteers based on their writing and communication competence. Many tutor manuals available also include ESL tutor training (see, for example, Bruce and Rafoth, 2004). This will save a lot of effort on the director part in preparing a training manual from scratch. A tutor handbook needs to be prepared to guide tutors throughout the year. Criteria for tutor selection must be made transparent. Tutors should be paid based on an hourly rate. When they are not tutoring, they can assist in developing handouts or worksheets.

In maintaining the daily functioning of the WC and OWL, continuous publicity and promotion of the WC services are important in ensuring student and faculty uptake. The director must also budget and always plan ahead in ensuring ongoing incoming fund. Before the initial IRPA research fund is fully utilized on the experimental WC, the WC director must apply for a development grant from the University to expand the services of the WC. A continuous fund allocation should also be applied from the Faculty for continuous maintenance of the WC.

7.8.5 Evaluation, Revision, Routinization and Diffusion

In applying for grants and allocation to continuously maintain the WC and OWL, concrete evidence based on formative and summative evaluation is needed in supporting the application. Besides, on-going evaluation ensures systemic data collection and analysis that fit in well with the research culture of tertiary institutions. On-going data collection and analysis also encourage reflective practice that improves the work competence of the WC director, tutors, administrative assistants and all who work at the WC. Most importantly, a well-planned evaluation validates the WC effectiveness and thereby convinces the administrators or sponsors to continuously fund the WC services. It is also a good way to increase power and prestige and to propel further growth of the WC in the university (Thompson, 2006). Other than the accountability and ethical reasons, a well-considered evaluation plan helps to prevent marginalization in times of financial squeeze and reduced budgets. In justifying the continuous maintenance of WC facilities and services, the WC must prove that it improves student attitudes, supports students' writing processes, and contributes

towards student retention through both qualitative and quantitative data collection and research (see Section 2.6; also Carino and Enders, 2001).

Therefore, the director must ensure systemic evaluation on the staff and services, and such records should be analyzed and filed properly. Statistics such as the frequency of student visits, which groups make the most or least use, student and faculty attitudes towards the WC and OWL, and comparison of grades as well as retention rate, should be collected and analyzed.

If any area of poor or non-use is detected, and if there is client dissatisfaction, the cause must be immediately investigated and corrective measures be initiated. This means that there must be a constant reference to means analysis to continuously recast the WC and OWL so that the WC approach fits well into the anticipation of the micro and macro environments. When the WC has evolved and stabilized to become a routine practice, it will be time to diffuse the innovation to other institutions in Malaysia and nearby countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

7.9 Epilogue

The preceding discussion has centered around three important topics comprising the innovation (the WC approach) as a response to the needs of the students, the conceptual framework of the proposed WC approach, and the action plan to realize the WC approach. In comparison, the WC conceptual framework is not of stark difference to the established WC framework in North America as North American WCs also serve ESL students. The difference will lie in the actual implementation as there are obvious differences in terms of cultures and local contexts such as the political and education systems. For example, it may be alright for a tutor to sit near a tutee in order to read from the same paper in a North American WC. However, sitting in close proximity with a different gender is a taboo in Malaysia. The WC conceptual framework and the action plan discussed in this chapter are significant in that they serve as models and references being the first to be implemented in Malaysia for those who are thinking of initiating the WC approach to ESL and learner support in similar contexts. The frameworks will lead to further and more in-depth research in related areas of the WC approach.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

We must focus, as never before, on improving the conditions of the individual men and women who give the state or nation its richness and character. ~ Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General, on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, 2001.

8.1 SUMMARY

The purpose of this summary is to present a condensed overview on the discussion of the three thematic areas, the case study on the status of English in Malaysia, and the empirical study at a Malaysian university. The summary may help in giving a quick flash-back to the discussion thus far, or as an extended abstract for those who are interested in the study but do not have time to read all the details.

8.1.1 Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs

The study began with the identification and analysis of three identified themes. The first, Writing Centers (WCs) and Online Writing Labs (OWLs), is the central focus of the study. The evolution of WCs was described in three phases of development: early WCs (Pre 1970), middle stage WCs (1970-1990), and current WCs (Post 1990). In each phase, the main developmental events were highlighted. The most notable event in the first phase was the establishment of the first WC in the University of Iowa in 1934, and a survey study on early WCs by Shouse (1952). In the middle phase, the main developments included the proliferation of WCs with the realization of the writing literacy crisis from the 1970s, the publication of the Writing Lab Newsletter in 1977 and the Writing Center Journal in 1980, the formation of the Writing Centers Association in 1980 and National Writing Centers Association in 1983. The current phase from post 1990s saw the expansion of WCs into the cyber space with the creation of OWLs and WCenter listserv in 1991, and the website of NWCA in 1996. The WCs went international with the formation of the International Writing Centers Association in 1998.

Despite the multiplicity and diversity of WCs, the most prominent generic feature of WCs is the individualized and personalized non-directive, non-grading and non-threatening peer tutoring. Tutoring strategies are generally minimalist, generalist and non-directive. WCs have been variously called as centers, labs and clinic and each has very different connotations. The four basic models of WCs are: extracurricular, curricular, co-curricular, and R & D. For OWLs, three models have been identified. The information OWL is a simple websites with essential operational information regarding the walk-in WC and downloadable static resources. The interactive OWL usually has a designated e-mail for students to submit their writings to a WC tutor, and/or a bulletin board for publication of written work. Asynchronous tutorials may be conducted through e-mail. Finally the live OWL has the features of the aforesaid models plus an online facility for synchronous tutoring either via a MOO or Chat software.

The diverse nature of WC praxis warrants the application of at least three main epistemologies: current-traditional, expressionist and social constructionist rhetoric. The current-traditional model views writing as a product and WC as a site for remediating, diagnosing and eliminating language weaknesses. The expressionist model views knowledge as individually held and WC tutors' role is to elicit this knowledge and help less experienced writers to find their own voice in writing. The social constructionist model views writing as a process of collaboration, and the role of a WC is to promote dialogues and negotiation of knowledge that are vital for collaborative writing.

For OWLs, two sets of theories have been used to guide the praxis. The first is related to technology adoption such as instrumental, substantive and critical theories and social construction of technology. The second is the WC epistemology of current-traditional, expressionist and social constructionist rhetoric. As OWL is about online learning and writing, an emerging theory, connectivism, is also applicable. Connectivism proposes that learning involves forming networks with people who have the required knowledge and with knowledge bases such as specific Internet nodes, CD-ROMS or specialist newspapers. An ideal learning network should be self-feeding and self-learning which is possible if supported by advanced ICT. A main contention in

OWL praxis is whether it should replicate the same functions and services of physical WCs.

In North America, WCs and OWLs have been used to support writing programs such as First Year Composition (FYC) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). It has been generally felt that WCs are the best place for one-to-one tutorial assistance in supporting such writing programs because of the space and expertise provided, and the neutral position for not being attached to any specific discipline.

As the main business of WCs and OWLs is tutoring, considerable attention was paid to tutoring strategies in this thematic discussion. The main issues included the notion of help and how much help should be extended to help students write their assignments, the teaching of grammar, peer tutoring versus peer review, and strategies for tutoring ESL students such as directive versus non-directive tutoring, and generalist versus specialist tutoring.

8.1.2 ESL Undergraduates and Academic Writing

The second theme, related to the main concerns of the first, focuses on ESL students and academic writing. Characteristics of ESL students compared to native English students are discussed, as hypotheses and not prescriptions. Emerging characteristics of millennial students, closely related to the current ICT culture, are also highlighted. Learner characteristics can be categorized into character types that seem to influence learning preferences or styles and also learning strategies. This discussion is useful as it informs the kind of services and tutoring strategies that a WC or OWL should adopt.

In order to initiate language learning outside a teacher-fronted classroom, ESL learners must be trained to be autonomous. Aspects of autonomy such as the ability to make informed decisions, the use of appropriate learning strategies, and taking responsibility for learning can be categorized into five dimensions of analyzing autonomy. The dimensions are technical, political, psychological, individual and social autonomy.

The main challenge of ESL students at the tertiary level is academic writing, and WCs have been set up mainly to help students in this respect. Pedagogy of academic writing includes controlled or guided writing, current-traditional rhetoric, process approach, content-based, genre-based, and reason eclecticism. Related to ESL academic writing pedagogy, three selected issues: the reading-writing relationship, writer-based writing versus reader-based writing, and computers and ESL writing are explored.

As WCs are often seen as a support system for ESL students, the notion of support has been elaborated. Five other support systems that are helpful for ESL students include self-access language learning, language advising, responding to student affective needs, computer-assisted language learning, and online language learning.

8.1.3 Innovations in Tertiary Education

The third theme is innovations in tertiary education. As WCs and OWLs were new to most Asian countries including Malaysia when this research started in 2000, concepts and issues pertaining to innovations are studied. Innovation is defined as being different from change and invention. An innovation can be immanent or self-motivated, selective or directed contact change, and internally or externally developed. Attributes of successful innovations include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability, tangible form, explicitness, originality, adaptability and feasibility.

Organization structure and culture can also encourage or inhibit the initialization of an innovation. Universities, used to be inertia to change, can no longer remain so. The rationale for universities to actively innovate includes international competition caused by globalization, changes in student demography, demand for practical education, the need for shorter education programs, increase in tertiary enrolment, and competition from non-traditional education service providers who are usually mega corporations. However, the biggest resistance to any pedagogical innovation in any university can be faculty culture or student culture.

An innovation process usually comprises several phases including initialization, planning, implementation, evaluation, revision, routinization and diffusion. In planning for any curricular innovation, needs and means analysis should be conducted. The innovation diffusion theory discussed extensively by Rogers (1994) should also inform any innovation planning. Lessons can be learned from successful transfers of western curricular innovation to Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. Congruence to local culture is also an important factor to the smooth transfer of an innovation.

From the end of the twentieth century, countries outside North America started to innovate WCs and OWLs. New WCs and OWLs have been or are still being developed in several European and Asian universities where English is used as a second or foreign language. A comparison of North American and non-North American OWLs did not produce any stark differences.

8.1.4 English Language in Malaysia

Most of the current WCs and OWLs have been developed in the context where English is used as the first language and the only medium of instruction, i.e. the USA. In answering the question as to whether WCs and OWLs may also be applicable to ESL contexts, a specific country (Malaysia) and a specific tertiary institution (UPM) where English is used as a second language has been investigated. A brief history of Malaysia from the early 1900s is presented as it is closely linked to the British colonial rule and the status of English. The English language status in Malaysia was at its peak during the British administration. When Malaysia achieved its independence, due to nationalistic sentiments, the national language (Malay) took over as the official and instructional language.

Due to reduced significance and consequently reduced use, the standard of English in Malaysia deteriorated. The poor command of English especially among the graduates has affected their employability and productivity, and may affect Malaysia's global competitiveness in the k-economy and the attainment of a developed nation by 2020. This realization has motivated the government into implementing several drastic measures such as the Malaysian University English Language (MUET) test and the

teaching of science and technology subjects in English, for the purpose of raising the English language standard. The government has also called for a critical examination of how English is taught, especially in the tertiary sector.

8.1.5 Writing Needs Survey

In responding to the national concern, an empirical study was conducted at UPM to investigate the perception on writing in English and the writing needs in English of the ESL undergraduates. The survey found that both lecturers and students perceived writing in English an important academic and professional skill. Grammar has been a major concern among the lecturer and student respondents. They agreed that students required more help and support in learning to write in English. Given an option, they preferred face-to-face tutors over online. Nevertheless, all types of online support were perceived as useful. The findings from the student and the lecturer questionnaires were used to inform the applicability of the WC approach in Malaysian tertiary education and the formulation of an ESL WC conceptual framework.

8.1.6 The Writing Center Approach: Conceptual Framework and Action Plan

The conceptual framework for the proposed ESL WC approach was formulated based on the findings from the three themes, the case study on the English language status in Malaysia and the survey study on writing needs in English at UPM. As the framework for the curricular innovation is proposed for current and future ESL undergraduates, the characteristics of millennial students or net-geners are discussed.

The WC approach is proposed to serve three main purposes. The first is serving as writing pedagogy that encompasses one-to-one and peer tutoring, guided learning and writing, student-centered, dialogic, small group, collaborative and whole language pedagogy, the pedagogy of belonging and inclusiveness, and online pedagogy for tutoring and writing. The second purpose of the proposed WC approach is for learner support. The support system afforded by the WC approach can take the form of peer tutoring, self-access language learning, language advising, learning or study skills

advising, guidance for editing and proofreading, supporting the acquisition of ICT skills that are related to online learning and writing, and fostering a writing community. The third purpose of the WC approach is functioning as a language learning environment. The immersive language learning environment that include both physical and virtual spaces afforded by the WC and OWL promotes accessibility to all students, exposure to English, authenticity of learning, updated reference resources, risk-free communication, e-learning and online writing, and learner development.

An action plan is then proposed to illustrate how the WC conceptual framework can be implemented in a specific ESL tertiary context. This action plan is designed after Holiday and Cooke (1982) and Rogers (1995). The plan comprises five phases: knowledge and awareness, conceptualization and persuasion, decision and planning, implementation and maintenance, and evaluation, revision, routinization and diffusion.

In summing up, this research, thus, is built upon three thematic studies, a case study, and an empirical study. Findings from the studies have culminated in the formulation of the ESL WC framework and an action plan to implement the conceptual framework in UPM.

8.2 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the writing needs survey have been discussed in Chapter VI. This section gives the limitation of the study as a whole.

The research study might have been limited by the researcher's lack of first hand experience in WC practice. Although the researcher has been teaching various writing skills to ESL students of different academic levels for many years, she has not been involved in any WC work, nor did she have the chance to visit any exemplary North American WC to see the actual operation and to observe a tutoring session in action before and while working on this research study. In addition, even though there is abundant literature and secondary data on how a WC works, tacit knowledge can only be gained by experience. The first hand experience might have helped, for example,

better appreciation of salient features or differences between tutoring English as first language and English as second language students.

On the other hand, some first hand experience was gained through visiting the Student Learning Center at Massey University that provided writing consultation as a major service, and through subscribing to the WC community forum, the WCenter Listserv. Even by being a 'listener' most of the time, feelings of the practitioners toward WC issues can be inferred and appreciated. The WCenter participation has, to a certain extent, helped the conceptualization of the WC approach.

Another possible source of limitation is related to the external validity of this exploratory research. Firstly, although the return rate of the Student Questionnaire was 100 %, that of the Lecturer Questionnaire was only slightly above 40%. This low return from the lecturers affected the confidence in generalizing the survey results to other institutions in Malaysia, and might impact on the confidence in introducing the WC approach framework to other Malaysian institutions of higher learning. Secondly, although efforts were taken to establish contacts with existing Asian WCs and to get their feedback with the purpose of gleaning practical insights from their experience, only three Asian WCs were able to be identified and contacted. The reason is that there are indeed only a few WCs operating in Asia, and the small number has mostly only been established after the year 2000. Therefore, on top of the limited feedback from Asian WCs, there is also limited literature about Asian WCs. The limited response from existing Asian WCs has, to a certain extent, affected the confidence of the proposed WC conceptual framework. Thirdly, even in its country of origin i.e. the USA, the WC is manifested in various models of operations according to institution-specific requirement. Therefore, the ESL WC conceptual framework proposed in this study is expected to be used as a general guide and not as a prescription for wholesale adoption by any ESL or EFL institution.

On the whole, as this research is a pioneer in innovating the WC and OWL in Malaysia, it inherits all the difficulties of being a pioneer, for example, the lack of specific reference literature, and gaps in the existing mainstream literature. When the WC efficacy issue was raised, it was extremely difficult to trace studies that were able to provide such concrete and empirical evidence. This lack of formal WC assessment

could also be confirmed from the directors' feedback of the three Asian WCs, who admitted not conducting any formal measurement of their WC effects.

Finally, at this stage the proposed WC framework is only conceptual. The pioneering WC in Malaysia, when fully operational in UPM, should test the extent of applicability of this framework. On-going research on the conceptual framework, both in UPM and elsewhere, is required to fine-tune the application of the WC approach framework.

8.3 Future Directions and Recommendations

The main concern of any innovation endeavor is the extent of uptake by people for whom the innovation is intended. Indeed, poor uptake can be the biggest pitfall in implementing a curricular innovation as the whole enterprise will end up a sheer waste of resources. Therefore, innovators should be wary of "when you build it, they will come" attitude. In ensuring satisfactory uptake, several measures are recommended as reference for practitioners, educators and decision makers at both the institutional and national levels.

At the institutional level, promoting WC services continuously and publicizing users' satisfaction responses should be a routine practice (Harris, 2004). The uptake of the WC approach at UPM is of paramount importance, as UPM is the first institution in Malaysia to innovate the WC approach. The success at UPM in innovating the WC approach will serve as a catalyst and a reference model in motivating WC and OWL development in other Malaysian tertiary institutions and those of neighboring countries such as Thailand and Indonesia.

In encouraging uptake, evidence from concrete data on the WC and OWL utility will help persuade the skeptics (see, for example, Lerner, 2003b). An effective type of convincing data is the visible improvement on student writing performance and attitude. Therefore, designing or adopting diagnostic tools to gauge both writing performance and attitude will add much weight to WC and OWL services. The collection of concrete data will also help, for example, in gauging the optimal time and the duration for

writing conferences, the usefulness of each type of reference or learning resources, and the optimal tutor to student ratio that contributes toward more efficient administration of the WC and OWL (Pemberton, 1996).

WC discourse has often highlighted the situatedness of WC and OWL praxis in the institution it serves, and the difficulty in proposing a single WC and OWL model. Likewise, the proposed conceptual framework of the ESL WC approach is subject to institutional adaptation. It is recommended that adopters apply the framework critically according to local conditions and needs, and only pick those features that are congruent to the institutional goals and practice.

At the national level, duplication of effort in developing a WC or an OWL for institutional use can be reduced if a coordination body can be set up to oversee or centralize individual effort. Such a coordination body may be best initiated and administered by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia that oversees all tertiary institutions. Concerted effort can then be channeled into developing, for example, a guide for starting a WC, a design template for OWL, guidelines for WC directors, and a manual for training WC tutors. The coordination body can also help to maintain a central repository of writing references, handouts, tasks, topics, and prompts. This national repository of writing resources will mitigate the difficulty in developing local content. It is true that all the mentioned resources are available, for example, numerous tutoring training manuals have been published, a guide for starting a WC can be downloaded from the IWCA website, and there is also an OWL construction and maintenance guide on CD-ROM (Inman and Gardner, 2002). However, these have been developed for North American contexts, and may not be entirely suitable for local application.

In encouraging local WC development, application and scholarship, it is recommended that a regional WC association be set up in the Asian region. Currently, WCs and OWLs are in existent in several Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Singapore. With the formation of the regional WC association to foster a sense of community and common goals, the novice can perhaps have the chance to learn from the initiated and the experienced. Later, a sub-regional WC association for ASEAN countries can be formed when more WCs are set up in these countries. These

regional WC associations can affiliate with the IWCA for cross regional cooperation and collaboration in WC work.

8.4 Conclusion

In concluding the study, the main research question, “In what ways are the theory and praxis of the WC and OWL applicable to ESL tertiary contexts of Malaysia” is reflected again.

The earlier chapters of this dissertation explained that academic writing in English is a difficult skill to learn for both native English and ESL students (Connor, 1996; Silva, 2001). For ESL students, learning to write academic English is often aggravated by the lack of writing instruction in their first language (Turner, 2006; Yasuda, 2006). Even for students who are good at writing, the act of writing remains difficult. The reason is that academic writing in English, especially for the ESL learners, is based on a culmination of multiple abilities that include linguistic, cognitive, rhetorical, and social skills and knowledge, on top of the right feeling and attitude toward the act of writing.

Therefore, in developing ESL students’ writing competence and nurturing positive attitude towards writing in English, students require instruction and support in addition to those afforded by a traditional teacher-fronted classroom. The writing center approach, based on a blended model of a physical WC and OWL conceptualized in Chapter VII, should be able to meet these needs of ESL tertiary students in three significant ways, comprising the application of the WC approach as writing pedagogy, learner support and immersive language learning environment. The extent of the applicability pivots on the wisdom and flexibility of each institutional innovator in adapting the approach to meet local needs.

In *Why Can't Johnny or Jane Write English Anymore* (1999), William Harris says that “the deterioration in students’ writing abilities, especially if it is (a) result of complex social etiologies, is incurable, and may be one of those things like warfare, which we will have to get used to living with” (para. 30). His words may have sounded

despair and perhaps, the futility of intervening students' writing. In contrast, hope has been expressed by Gary Griswold (2003), who says that WCs, "with their blend of innovative theory, student-centered pedagogy, and teaching-learning focus, occupy a unique position to help students on board and on course." (p. 280).

This expressed optimism and confidence in the WC by Griswold (2003) as well as many other WC leaders and practitioners such as Carino (2003), Harris (2004), Inman and Sewell (2000), and Pemberton and Kinhead (2003) is not coincidental. The research work done on the WC approach in this study further affirms that there is hope in the WC for assisting ESL students in succeeding as writers.

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APPENDIX 3.1

MYERS-BRIGGS CHARACTER TYPES

<u>Extroversion</u> Sociability Interaction External Breadth Extensive Multiplicity of relationship Expenditure of energies Interest in external events	<u>Introversion</u> Territoriality Concentration Internal Depth Intensive Limited relationship Conservation of energy Interest in internal reaction
<u>Sensing</u> Experience Past Realistic Perspiration Actual Down-to-earth Utility Fact Practicality Sensible	<u>Intuition</u> Hunches Future Speculative Inspiration Possible Head-in-clouds Fantasy Fiction Ingenuity Imaginative
<u>Thinking</u> Objective Principles Policy Laws Criterion Firmness Impersonal Justice Categories Standards Critique Analysis Allocation	<u>Feeling</u> Subjective Values Social values Extenuating circumstances Intimacy Persuasion Persona Humane Harmony Good or bad Appreciative Sympathy Devotion
<u>Judging</u> Settled Decided Fixed Plan ahead Run one's life Closure Decision-making Planned Completed Decisive Wrap it up Urgency Deadline! Ger show on the road	<u>Perceiving</u> Pending Gather more data Flexible Adapt as you go Let life happen Open options Treasure hunting open ended Emergent Tentative Something will turn up There's plenty of time What deadline? Let's wait and see

(Source: Brown, 1994, pp.148-149)

APPENDIX 3.2

OXFORD'S STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (Version for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English)

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement. On the separate Worksheet, write the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.

- 1. Never or almost never true of me**
- 2. Usually not true of me**
- 3. Somewhat true of me**
- 4. Usually true of me**
- 5. Always or almost always true of me**

NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE OF ME means that the statement is very rarely true of you.

USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true less than half the time.

SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you about half the time.

USUALLY TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true more than half the time.

ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you almost always.

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Put your answers on the separate Worksheet. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.

EXAMPLE

- 1. Never or almost never true of me**
- 2. Usually not true of me**
- 3. Somewhat true of me**
- 4. Usually true of me**
- 5. Always or almost always true of me**

Read the item, and choose a response (1 through 5 as above), and write it in the space after the item.

I actively seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers of English _____

You have just completed the example item. Answer the rest of the items on the Worksheet.

- 1. Never or almost never true of me**
- 2. Usually not true of me**
- 3. Somewhat true of me**
- 4. Usually true of me**
- 5. Always or almost always true of me**

(Write answers on Worksheet)

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.
7. I physically act out new English words
8. I review English lessons often.
9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.

Part B

10. I say or write new English words several times.
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
12. I practice the sounds of English.
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.
14. I start conversations in English.
15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
16. I read for pleasure in English.
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
20. I try to find patterns in English
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
22. I try not to translate word-for-word.
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
27. I read English without looking up every new word.
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.

32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.

- 1. Never or almost never true of me**
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me
(Write answers on Worksheet)

34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
38. I think about my progress in learning English.

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
47. I practice English with other students.
48. I ask for help from English speakers.
49. I ask questions in English.
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Your Name _____ Date _____

Worksheet for Answering and Scoring

- 1. The blanks () are numbered for each item on the SILL.
- 2. Write your response to each item (that is, write 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) in each of the blanks.
- 3. Add up each column. Put the result on the line marked SUM.
- 4. Divide by the number under SUM to get the average for each column. Round this average off to the nearest tenth, as in 3.4.
- 5. Figure out your overall average. To do this, add up all the SUMs for the different parts of the SILL. Then divide by 50.
- 6. When you have finished, your teacher will give you the Profile of Results. Copy your averages (for each part and for the whole SILL) from the Worksheet to the Profile.

Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F	Whole SILL
1. _____	10. _____	24. _____	30. _____	39. _____	45. _____	SUM Part A _____
2. _____	11. _____	25. _____	31. _____	40. _____	46. _____	SUM Part B _____
3. _____	12. _____	26. _____	32. _____	41. _____	47. _____	SUM Part C _____
4. _____	13. _____	27. _____	33. _____	42. _____	48. _____	SUM Part D _____
5. _____	14. _____	28. _____	34. _____	43. _____	49. _____	SUM Part E _____
6. _____	15. _____	29. _____	35. _____	44. _____	50. _____	SUM Part F _____
7. _____	16. _____		36. _____			
8. _____	17. _____		37. _____			
9. _____	18. _____		38. _____			
	19. _____					
	20. _____					
	21. _____					
	22. _____					
	23. _____					
SUM _____	SUM _____	SUM _____	SUM _____	SUM _____	SUM _____	SUM _____
÷ 9 = _____	÷ 14 = _____	÷ 6 = _____	÷ 9 = _____	÷ 6 = _____	÷ 6 = _____	÷ 50 = _____
						(OVERALL AVERAGE)

STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Your Name _____ Date _____

Profile of Results on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

You will receive this Profile after you have completed the Worksheet. This Profile will show your SILL results. These results will tell you the kinds of strategies you use in learning English. There are no right or wrong answers.

To complete this profile, transfer your averages for each part of the SILL, and your overall average for the whole SILL. These averages are found on the Worksheet.

<u>Part</u>	<u>What Strategies Are Covered</u>	<u>Your Average on This Part</u>
A.	Remembering more effectively	_____
B.	Using all your mental processes	_____
C.	Compensating for missing knowledge	_____
D.	Organizing and evaluating your learning	_____
E.	Managing your emotions	_____
F.	Learning with others	_____
YOUR OVERALL AVERAGE		_____

STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Your Name _____ Date _____

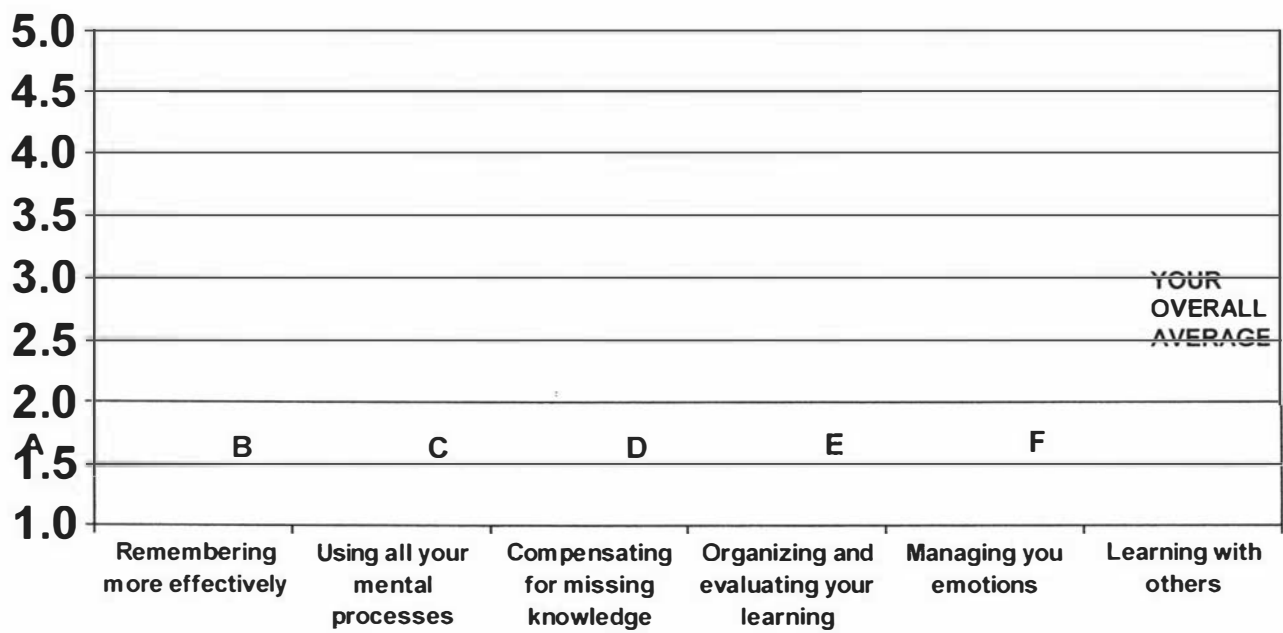
Key to Understanding Your Average

High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

Graph Your Averages Here

If you want, you can make a graph of your SILL averages. What does this graph tell you? Are you very high or very low on any part?

Graph your averages here



What These Averages Mean to You

The overall average tells how often you use strategies for learning English. Each part of the SILL represents a group of learning strategies. The averages for each part of the SILL show which groups of strategies you use the most for learning English.

The best use of strategies depends on your age, personality, and purpose for learning.

If you have a very low average on one or more parts of the SILL, there may be some new strategies in these groups that you might want to use. Ask your teacher about these.

SOURCE: Oxford, R.L. (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL). In R.L. Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (pp. 293-300). New York: Newbury House Publishers.

APPENDIX 4.1

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY WEBSITES

Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) <http://www.iiu.edu.my/>

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) <http://www.ukm.my/>

Universiti Malaya (UM) <http://www.um.edu.my/>

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) <http://www.ums.edu.my/>

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) <http://www.unimas.my/>

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) <http://www.upm.edu.my/>

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) <http://www.usm.my/>

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) <http://www.utm.my/>

Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) <http://www.utp.edu.my/>

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) <http://www.uum.edu.my/>

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) <http://www.itm.edu.my/>

Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) <http://www.uniten.edu.my/>

Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) <http://www.unitar.edu.my/>

APPENDIX 4.2

WRITING CENTERS AND ONLINE WRITING LABS IN ASIA

Hong Kong

Hong Kong University

The Writing Machine

<http://ec.hku.hk/writingmachine/default.htm>

The Writing Turbo-Charger

http://ec.hku.hk/writing_turbocharger/turbotools/browser_basics.htm

Virtual English Centre, Writing on the Internet

<http://ec.hku.hk/vec/writing/wriuint.htm>

Chinese University of Hong Kong

English Writing Centre

<http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/english/Guide090.htm>

City University of Hong Kong

Writing at the Independent Learning Centre

<http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk>

Japan

Osaka Jogakuin College

Writing Center

http://www.wilmina.ac.jp/studylink/Writing_Center/index.htm

Korea

Hanyang University of Korea

<http://ctl.hanyang.ac.kr/writing/>

Singapore

National University of Singapore

Writing Centre

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/writingcentre/feedback.html>

Taiwan

National Chiao Tung University of Taiwan

The Chinese OWL

http://www.cc.nctu.edu.tw/~tedknoy/html/w_eng.htm

National Taiwan University

Writing Center

<http://www.im.ntu.edu.tw/~b89024/english/NTU%20Writing%20Center.htm>

APPENDIX 4.3

WRITING CENTERS AND ONLINE WRITING LABS IN EUROPE

Belgium

University of Antwerp

Calliope: The Belgian OWL

http://extranet.ufsia.ac.be/calliope/En_Calliope.html

England

Coventry University

Centre for Academic Writing

<http://www.coventry.ac.uk>

University of Nottingham

trAce Online Writing Center

<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/>

France

American University of Paris

Writing Center

<http://ac.aup.fr/writelab/>

Greece

American College of Thessaloniki

<http://www.anatolia.edu.gr>

University of La Verne – Athens

www.ulaverne.edu

Hungary

Central European University (CEU)

Center for Academic Writing

<http://www.ceu.hu/writing/mission.htm>

Turkey

Sabanci University, Istanbul

Writing Center

<http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/writingcenter/undergrad.php>

APPENDIX 5.1

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH TEST

The *Malaysia University English Test* is designed to test the English language ability of those who intend to pursue degree courses in local public institutions of higher learning. This test comprises four components: Listening, Speaking, Reading Comprehension, and Writing. The maximum scores are as follows:

Test Component	Maximum Score
Listening	45
Speaking	45
Reading Comprehension	135
Writing	75
Aggregated Score	300

Description of Aggregated Score

Aggregated Score	Band	User	Command of Language	Communicative Ability	Understanding	Task Performance
260-300	6	Very Good User	Very good command of the language	Very fluent, accurate and appropriate: hardly any inaccuracies	High level of understanding of the language	Functions extremely well in the language
220-259	5	Good User	Good command of the language	Fluent, appropriate but with minor inaccuracies	Good level of understanding of the language	Functions extremely well in the language
180-219	4	Competent User	Satisfactory command of the language	Generally fluent, appropriate but with occasional inaccuracies	Satisfactory level of understanding of the language	Functions reasonably well in the language
140-179	3	Modest User	Fair command of the language	Fairly fluent, usually appropriate but with noticeable inaccuracies	Able to understand but with some misinterpretation	Able to function but with some effort
100-139	2	Limited User	Limited command of the language	Lacks fluency and appropriacy; inaccurate use of the language resulting in frequent breakdowns in communication	Limited understanding of the language	Limited ability to function in the language
0-99	1	Extremely Limited User	Poor command of the language	Inappropriate and inaccurate use of the language resulting in very frequent breakdowns in communication	Poor understanding of the language	Hardly able to function in the language

Source: Examination Council of Malaysia, Ministry of Education.

APPENDIX 6.1

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY COURSES AND PLACEMENT LEVELS AT UPM

The list of English languages proficiency courses and the pre-requisites for placement to the courses:

Level	Course	Pre-requisite
Foundation / Level 1	BBI 2409 English for Academic Purposes	*MUET Bands 1 and 2
Level 2	BBI 2410 Skills in Grammar BBI 2411 Reading and Discussion Skills BBI 2412 Writing for Academic Purposes BBI 2413 English for the Workplace	MUET Band 3 or passed BBI 2409
Level 3	BBI 2414 Interactive Speaking BBI 2415 Report Writing BBI 2416 Business Writing BBI 2417 Public Speaking	MUET Band 4 or passed any one of the Level 2 courses
Total Exemption		MUET Band 5 or 6

*MUET stands for Malaysian University English Test. It is designed to test the English Language ability of those who intend to pursue degree courses in local public institutions of higher learning. Upon enrolment to UPM, first year students are placed at a particular level based on their MUET result. The students are required to pass assigned English proficiency courses at each level.

APPENDIX 6.2

LECTURER QUESTIONNAIRE



Information Sheet

A Survey Study on Writing Needs and Support at UPM (Target Respondents: Lecturers)

Researcher and Contact Details

Tan Bee Hoon

Brief profile: Ms. Tan is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UPM. She is currently undertaking a study leave as a doctoral scholar at the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, New Zealand. Her doctoral proposal has won her two scholarship offers, an International Writing Centers Graduate Research Award, and an NZASIA Graduate Research Award.

Correspondence:

School of English and Media Studies
Massey University (Turitea Campus)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, New Zealand
Tel: UPM Direct line: 03 8946 8798
E-mail: tanbh@fbmk.upm.edu.my

Supervisor and Contact Details

Lisa Emerson

Brief profile: Dr. Emerson is a lecturer in the School of English and Media Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. She lectures in academic writing, writing for science and technology, and life writing. She is the author of five books for students on academic writing plus many journal articles. Her present research interests include writing a book on writing autobiography and designing a test of academic literacy. She is also author and designer of the Massey OWLL (On-line writing and learning lab).

Correspondence:

School of English and Media Studies
Massey University (Turitea Campus)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, New Zealand
E-mail: L.Emerson@massey.ac.nz

Purpose

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the following questions:

1. What kind of writing tasks do UPM lecturers require students to write in English?
2. Do UPM lecturers view writing an essential skill in the courses they teach?
3. Do UPM lecturers view the teaching of writing one of their professional responsibilities?
4. Which areas of students' writing do UPM lecturers perceive as problematic?
5. What kind of writing support do UPM lecturers think will help improve the writing ability of undergraduates?

Procedure

You have been invited to participate in this survey because the feedback from your faculty shows that students write in English for your course assignments. As a token of appreciation, your participation will put you in the draw for the prestigious Oxford Fajar Advanced Learner's English-Malay Dictionary valued at about RM100. Please detach this information sheet that bears a number, and bring it to the Department of English office to collect the prize if your number is drawn. The lucky number will be announced in Bulletin Putra and on the notice board outside the Department of English office on 28 August 2002.

This sheet also gives you the contact details of the researcher. If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please feel free to call or e-mail the researcher.

This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. You have the right to decline participation, or to refuse to answer particular questions. You may ask any questions about the study at any time. You are also assured of full anonymity, and the collected data will be used solely for the purpose of this research study. A summary of this survey study will be e-mailed to you if you so wish.

Please fill in the consent form on the next page before you answer the questionnaire.

CONSENT FORM

Please tick ✓ boxes.

- ☐

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- ☐

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer particular questions.
- ☐

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. *(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).*
- ☐

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

Optional:

- ☐

I request that a copy of the study’s findings be sent to me.
Please send the report to the following e-mail / mail address:

Please circle one number only unless otherwise required.

Section A – Teaching Profile

- Q1. Which faculty are you attached to?
- | | |
|---|----|
| Agriculture..... | 1 |
| Computer Science and Information Technology | 2 |
| Design and Architecture | 3 |
| Economics and Management..... | 4 |
| Educational Studies..... | 5 |
| Engineering..... | 6 |
| Food Science and Biotechnology..... | 7 |
| Forestry..... | 8 |
| Human Ecology | 9 |
| Medicine and Health Sciences..... | 10 |
| Modern Languages and Communication..... | 11 |
| Sciences and Environmental Studies..... | 12 |
| Veterinary Medicine..... | 13 |
- Q2. For how many years have you been teaching at UPM? _____ years.
- Q3. How many undergraduate courses, on average, do you teach in each semester?
_____ course/s.
- Q4. Do you require students to write in English in ALL the undergraduate courses you teach so far?
- | | |
|---|---|
| No, only for some courses..... | 1 |
| No, but for about half of the courses | 2 |
| No, but for most courses | 3 |
| My students are allowed to write in either Malay or English | 4 |
| Yes, for all courses | 5 |
- Q5. What kind of writing tasks do you require your undergraduate students write in English?
Please circle as many as applicable.
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| E-mails..... | 1 |
| Memos | 2 |
| Online discussion forums | 3 |
| Letters..... | 4 |
| Answering open-ended questions | 5 |
| Tests | 6 |
| Essays | 7 |
| Reports..... | 8 |
| Research papers | 9 |
| Thesis..... | 10 |
| Other/s (Please write.) | 11 |

Section B – Perception on Writing in English

Q6. What are your opinions about writing in English? Please circle the degree of your agreement for statements a to g.

	Strongly disagree	Agree in part	Agree	Strongly agree
a. The ability to write in English is an essential study skill in a university	1	2	3	4
b. The ability to write effectively in English does <u>not</u> contribute towards academic success of my students	1	2	3	4
c. The ability to write effectively in English will contribute towards professional success of my students.....	1	2	3	4
d. Being a content specialist in my discipline, I should <u>not</u> be expected to teach writing skills in English	1	2	3	4
e. Helping students to write in English is one of my professional responsibilities	1	2	3	4
f. Students should <u>not</u> be given help and support to master the skill of writing in English	1	2	3	4
g. Other/s (Please write.).....	1	2	3	4

Section C – Writing Performance of Students

Q7. What is your opinion on your students’ writing performance in English generally?

- None of them can write effectively in English..... 1
- Few of them (about 25%) can write effectively in English..... 2
- Half of them (about 50%) can write effectively in English..... 3
- Most of them (about 75%) can write effectively in English..... 4
- All of them can write effectively in English..... 5

Q8. Are a to m below common problems of your students' writing in English? How prevalent / common is each problem among your undergraduate students? Please circle as many as applicable according to the degree of prevalence.

	Never occurs	Rarely occurs	Quite common	Always a problem
a. Lack of logical organisation.....	1	2	3	4
b. Lack of central thesis or focus	1	2	3	4
c. Poor development.....	1	2	3	4
d. Inappropriate style.....	1	2	3	4
e. Incorrect format.....	1	2	3	4
f. Wrong grammar	1	2	3	4
g. Inaccurate word choice.....	1	2	3	4
h. Insufficient content.....	1	2	3	4
i. Incorrect paragraphing.....	1	2	3	4
j. Misuse of punctuation marks.....	1	2	3	4
k. Inaccurate spelling	1	2	3	4
l. Monotonous sentence structure.....	1	2	3	4
m. Other/s (Please write.)	1	2	3	4
.....				
.....				

Section D – Support for Writing in English

Q9. The following are 5 possible places to provide support in assisting undergraduate students write in English. Please rank options a to e in terms of your degree of preference by writing 5 for the most preferred, 4 for the next most preferred, followed by 3 and 2 for the less preferred choices, and 1 for the least preferred in the brackets.

- a. Specific writing classes conducted by the Department of English
Language of the Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication.....()
- b. Specific writing classes conducted by the Department of TESL
(Teaching of English as a Second Language)
of the Faculty of Educational Studies.()
- c. A tutorial service unit attached to each faculty.....()
- d. A tutorial service unit attached to each residential college.()
- e. A university writing tutorial center.()

Q10. What would be effective in helping improve undergraduate students' writing in English? Please circle the degree of helpfulness for each option below.

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by lecture method.....	1	2	3	4
b. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by small group (up to 10 students) workshop method.	1	2	3	4
c. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by lecture method.	1	2	3	4
d. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by small group workshop method.	1	2	3	4
e. Individual face-to-face tutorial for any writing task in English that a student requires help.....	1	2	3	4
f. An immersion academic writing programme upon entry to the university.	1	2	3	4
g. An immersion workplace writing programme prior to exit from the university.	1	2	3	4
h. Other/s (please write).	1	2	3	4

Q11. What kind of support would help your undergraduate students improve their writing in English? Please circle the degree of helpfulness for each option below.

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. A tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments face-to-face individually during certain hours.....	1	2	3	4
b. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet any time.	1	2	3	4
c. A resource center that provides guidebooks to effective writing.	1	2	3	4
d. A self-access lab that provides worksheets with self-checking answers for students to work on a specific problem area.	1	2	3	4

e. A telephone hotline for students to ask questions about their writing assignments.	1	2	3	4
f. A website that provides electronic materials such as handouts, guidebooks, and other references.	1	2	3	4
g. A print journal that publishes students' writing in English.	1	2	3	4
h. An electronic journal that publishes students' writing in English.	1	2	3	4
i. Connection to a web forum on writing.	1	2	3	4
j. Other/s (please write).	1	2	3	4

Q12. If UPM provided online/Internet support for students for writing in English, what is your opinion on the degree of usefulness of each of the following online facilities?

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet anytime.	1	2	3	4
b. Downloadable electronic handouts on various aspects of writing.	1	2	3	4
c. Interactive online quizzes on English grammar.	1	2	3	4
d. An online discussion forum on writing.	1	2	3	4
e. Links to writing resources such as online dictionaries, thesauruses, and style guides.	1	2	3	4
f. Online search engines.	1	2	3	4
g. An online publishing environment for student writers.	1	2	3	4
h. Online modules on specific writing skills.	1	2	3	4
i. Examples of various writing tasks.	1	2	3	4
j. An online editing service.	1	2	3	4
k. Other/s (please write).	1	2	3	4

The end. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX 6.3

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

Information Sheet

A Survey Study on Writing Needs and Support at UPM (Target Respondents: Undergraduates)

Researcher and Contact Details

Tan Bee Hoon

Brief profile: Ms. Tan is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UPM. She is currently undertaking a study leave as a doctoral scholar at the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, New Zealand. Her doctoral proposal has won her two scholarship offers, an International Writing Centers Graduate Research Award, and an NZASIA Graduate Research Award.

Correspondence:

School of English and Media Studies
Massey University (Turitea Campus)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, New Zealand
Tel: UPM Direct line: 00 6 03 89468735
E-mail: tanbh@fbm.upm.edu.my

Supervisor and Contact Details

Lisa Emerson

Brief profile: Dr. Emerson is a lecturer in the School of English and Media Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. She lectures in academic writing, writing for science and technology, and life writing. She is the author of five books for students on academic writing plus many journal articles. Her present research interests include writing a book on writing autobiography and designing a test of academic literacy. She is also author and designer of the Massey OWLL (On-line writing and learning lab).

Correspondence:

School of English and Media Studies
Massey University (Turitea Campus)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, New Zealand
E-mail: L.Emerson@massey.ac.nz

Purpose

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the following concerns:

1. Do UPM undergraduates have strong English language background to write well in English?
2. How do UPM undergraduates view the skill of writing in English?
3. What kind of writing tasks in English do UPM undergraduates perform in their studies and daily interactions?
4. Which areas of writing do UPM undergraduates need help?
5. What kind of writing support do UPM undergraduates think will help improve their writing ability?

Procedure

You have been invited to participate in this survey because the feedback from your faculty shows that you do need to write in English for your course assignments. As a token of appreciation, your participation will put you in the draw for the prestigious DBP Bilingual Dictionary valued at RM200. Please detach this information sheet that bears a lucky number to collect your prize. The lucky number will be announced in Bulletin Putra and on the notice board outside the Department of English office on 28 August 2002. This sheet also gives you the contact details of the researcher. If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please feel free to call or e-mail the researcher.

This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete. You have the right to decline participation, or to refuse answering any particular questions. You may ask any questions about the study at any time. You are also assured full anonymity, and the collected data will be used solely for the purpose of this research study. A summary of this survey study will be sent to you if you so wish.

Please fill in the consent form on the next page before you answer the questionnaire.

CONSENT FORM

Please tick ✓ boxes.

☐

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

☐

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

☐

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. *(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).*

☐

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

Optional:

☐

I request that a copy of the study's findings be sent to me.
Please send the report to the following e-mail / mail address:

Please circle one number only unless otherwise required.

Section A - Personal Details

Q1. Which faculty are you from?

Agriculture.....	1
Computer Science and Information Technology.....	2
Design and Architecture.....	3
Economics and Management.....	4
Educational Studies.....	5
Engineering.....	6
Food Science and Biotechnology	7
Forestry.....	8
Human Ecology	9
Medicine and Health Sciences.....	10
Modern Languages and Communication	11
Sciences and Environmental Studies	12
Veterinary Medicine	13

Q2. At what level are you studying now?

Diploma.....	1
Undergraduate.....	2

Q3. Which semester are you at? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Q4. What is your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

Q5. What is your age? _____ years.

Section B - Language Background

Q6. What is your first language?

Malay.....	1
Mandarin	2
Tamil	3
English.....	4
Other (Please write.)	5

Q7. Which language do you use BEST?

Malay	1
Mandarin.	2
Tamil	3
English.....	4
Other (Please write.).....	5

Q8. Which spoken language do you use the most in your studies?

Malay 1
Mandarin..... 2
Tamil..... 3
English. 4
Other (Please write.) 5

Q9. Which spoken language do you use the most in your daily interaction?

Malay 1
Mandarin. 2
Tamil..... 3
English. 4
Other (Please write.) 5

Q10. Which written language do you use the most in your studies?

Malay 1
Mandarin. 2
Tamil..... 3
English. 4
Other (Please write.) 5

Q11. Which written language do you use the most in your daily interaction?

Malay 1
Mandarin. 2
Tamil..... 3
English. 4
Other (Please write.) 5

Q12. What is your HIGHEST English Language qualification?

Please write the grade or score next to the exam name you have circled.

SPM 1
STPM..... 2
1119..... 3
MUET 4
IELTS..... 5
TOEFL 6
Other (Please write.) 7

Section C – Perception on Writing in English

Q13. What is your opinion about writing in English? Please circle the degree of your agreement for statements a to g.

	Strongly disagree	Agree in part	Agree	Strongly agree
a. The ability to write in English is not an essential study skill in a university.....1	2	3	4	
b. The ability to write effectively in English contributes towards my academic success..... 1	2	3	4	
c. The ability to write effectively in English will not contribute towards my future professional success 1	2	3	4	
d. Writing in English is a skill that can be learned ... 1	2	3	4	
e. The university does not provide sufficient support to help students improve their writing in English 1	2	3	4	
f. Students should be given more support to learn the skill of writing in English..... 1	2	3	4	
g. Other/s (Please write.) 1	2	3	4	

Section D - English Language Writing Needs and Difficulties

Q14. How well can you write in English?

I cannot write in English at all.....	1
I often have difficulty with writing in English.....	2
I sometimes have a little difficulty with writing in English.....	3
I never have any difficulty at all with writing in English.	4

Q15. What are the writing tasks you usually perform in English?
Please circle as many as applicable.

Writing diary.....	1
Writing for Internet chats.	2
Writing e-mails.	3
Writing short notes.....	4
Writing letters to friends.	5
Writing instructions.....	6
Writing official letters.	7
Writing resumés.....	8
Writing essays.....	9
Writing reports (Please specify the type of reports).	10
Writing research papers.....	11
Writing a thesis.	12
Other/s (Please write.)	13

Q16. What are the writing tasks in English you wish you could perform, but your English does not allow you to do so? Please circle as many as applicable according to the intensity of your wish.

	Do not wish	Somewhat wish	Much wish	Intensely wish
a. Writing diary.....	1	2	3	4
b. Writing for Internet chats.....	1	2	3	4
c. Writing e-mails.....	1	2	3	4
d. Writing short notes.....	1	2	3	4
e. Writing letters to friends.....	1	2	3	4
f. Writing instructions.....	1	2	3	4
g. Writing official letters.....	1	2	3	4
h. Writing resumés.....	1	2	3	4
i. Writing essays.....	1	2	3	4
j. Writing reports (Please specify the type of reports.....).....	1	2	3	4
k. Writing research papers.....	1	2	3	4
l. Writing a thesis.....	1	2	3	4
m. Other/s (Please write.).....	1	2	3	4

Q17. When you write in English, do you encounter the difficulties listed in a to r? Please circle as many as applicable according to the degree of difficulty.

	Not at all difficult	A little difficult	Difficult	Very difficult
a. Getting started on my writing task.....	1	2	3	4
b. Writing an introduction.....	1	2	3	4
c. Writing a thesis statement.....	1	2	3	4
d. Expressing my ideas.....	1	2	3	4
e. Organizing ideas.....	1	2	3	4
f. Writing a conclusion.....	1	2	3	4
g. Introducing a quotation.....	1	2	3	4
h. Paraphrasing.....	1	2	3	4
i. Integrating source material into my papers.....	1	2	3	4
j. Writing a summary.....	1	2	3	4
k. Using correct English grammar.....	1	2	3	4
l. Using accurate punctuation.....	1	2	3	4
m. Formatting a specific writing task such as an official letter, a report, or a thesis.....	1	2	3	4
n. Making sentences flow smoothly.....	1	2	3	4
o. Making my writing more interesting.....	1	2	3	4
p. Identifying errors in my writing.....	1	2	3	4
q. Revising my writing.....	1	2	3	4
r. Other/s (Please write.).....	1	2	3	4

Section E – Preference for Learning Writing Skills

Q18. Is it convenient for you to travel to UPM?

- No, not at all.....1
- Yes, only in the evenings or weekends 2
- Yes, only during office or day hours..... 3
- Yes, anytime. 4

Q19. When you need information for a specific question related to your studies, where do you look FIRST?

- I ask someone.... 1
- I search the Internet. 2
- I refer to a reference book..... 3
- I pose the question to a newspaper. 4
- I pose the question to a forum on the Internet..... 5
- Other/s (Please write.)..... 6

Q20. On average, how many hours do you spend on the Internet per week?
Please write the number of hours, or 0 if you do not use the Internet at all.
_____ hours. (If your answer is 0, skip Q21 and Q22.)

Q21. Where do you usually use the Internet?

- At home 1
- At my residential college..... 2
- At my rented room / house 3
- At an Internet café..... 4
- At my faculty computer lab..... 5
- At the university library 6
- Other/s (Please write.) 7

Q22. Do you pay for your Internet access?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Sometimes..... 3

Q23. How do you usually feel when you are asked to use computers?

- I feel worried, and try to avoid using them. 1
- I feel worried, but try to use them anyway 2
- I don't feel worried or excited..... 3
- I look forward to using them 4

Q24. Do you intend to improve your writing skills in English?

If yes, please proceed with the rest of the questions. 1

If no, please give your reason/s, and you may skip the rest of the questions. 2

Reason/s:

.....

Q25. How do you intend to improve your writing skills in English?

Please circle your degree of preference for options a to h.

	Not worth Considering	Possible choice	Strong preference	Very strong preference
a. By taking a paid writing course from a teacher on a one-on-one basis. 1	1	2	3	4
b. By taking a paid writing course from a teacher in a small group..... 1	1	2	3	4
c. By consulting someone..... 1	1	2	3	4
d. By referring to examples in reference books..... 1	1	2	3	4
e. By referring to examples on the Internet. 1	1	2	3	4
f. By taking a free online writing course through the Internet. 1	1	2	3	4
g. By taking a paid online writing course through the Internet..... 1	1	2	3	4
h. Other/s (Please write) 1	1	2	3	4
.....				

Q26. What would be effective in helping you improve your writing in English?

Please circle the degree of helpfulness for options a to f.

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by lecture method..... 1	1	2	3	4
b. Tailored credit-bearing writing courses taught over one whole semester by small group (up to 10 students) workshop method. 1	1	2	3	4
c. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by lecture method. 1	1	2	3	4
d. Specific non-credit modules for various problem areas of writing taught by small group workshop method. 1	1	2	3	4
e. Individual face-to-face tutorial for any writing task in English that a student requires help..... 1	1	2	3	4
f. Other/s (please write) 1	1	2	3	4

Q27. What kind of support would help you improve your writing in English?
Please circle the degree of helpfulness for options a to j.

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. A tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments face-to-face individually during certain hours.	1	2	3	4
b. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet any time.	1	2	3	4
c. A resource center that provides guidebooks to effective writing.	1	2	3	4
d. A self-access lab that provides worksheets with self-checking answers for students to work on a specific problem area.	1	2	3	4
e. A telephone hotline for students to ask questions about their writing assignments.	1	2	3	4
f. A website that provides electronic materials such as handouts, guidebooks, and other references.	1	2	3	4
g. A print journal that publishes students' writing in English.	1	2	3	4
h. An electronic journal that publishes students' writing in English.	1	2	3	4
i. Connection to a web forum on writing.	1	2	3	4
j. Other/s (please write).	1	2	3	4

Q28. If UPM provided online/Internet support for students for writing in English, what is your opinion on the degree of helpfulness of each of the following online facilities?

	Not helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Essential
a. An online tutor whom students can consult about their writing assignments through the Internet anytime.1	2	3	4	
b. Downloadable electronic handouts on various aspects of writing.1	2	3	4	
c. Interactive online quizzes on English grammar.....1	2	3	4	
d. An online discussion forum on writing.1	2	3	4	
e. Links to writing resources such as online dictionaries, thesauruses, and style guides.....1	2	3	4	
f. Online search engines.1	2	3	4	
g. An online publishing environment for student writers.1	2	3	4	
h. Online modules on specific writing skills.1	2	3	4	
i. Examples of various writing tasks.....1	2	3	4	
j. An online editing service.....1	2	3	4	
k. Other/s (please write).....1	2	3	4	
.....				

The end. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX 7.1
LEARNING STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire

Barbara A. Soloman
First-Year College
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695

Richard M. Felder
Department of Chemical Engineering
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-7905

Directions

Please provide us with your full name. Your name will be printed on the information that is returned to you.

Full Name

For each of the 44 questions below select either "a" or "b" to indicate your answer. Please choose only one answer for each question. If both "a" and "b" seem to apply to you, choose the one that applies more frequently. When you are finished selecting answers to each question please select the submit button at the end of the form.

1. I understand something better after I
☐ (a) try it out.
☐ (b) think it through.
2. I would rather be considered
☐ (a) realistic.
☐ (b) innovative.
3. When I think about what I did yesterday, I am most likely to get
☐ (a) a picture.
☐ (b) words.
4. I tend to
☐ (a) understand details of a subject but may be fuzzy

about its overall structure.

☐ (b) understand the overall structure but may be fuzzy about details.

5. When I am learning something new, it helps me to

☐ (a) talk about it.

☐ (b) think about it.

6. If I were a teacher, I would rather teach a course

☐ (a) that deals with facts and real life situations.

☐ (b) that deals with ideas and theories.

7. I prefer to get new information in

☐ (a) pictures, diagrams, graphs, or maps.

☐ (b) written directions or verbal information.

8. Once I understand

☐ (a) all the parts, I understand the whole thing.

☐ (b) the whole thing, I see how the parts fit.

9. In a study group working on difficult material, I am more likely to

☐ (a) jump in and contribute ideas.

☐ (b) sit back and listen.

10. I find it easier

☐ (a) to learn facts.

☐ (b) to learn concepts.

11. In a book with lots of pictures and charts, I am likely to

☐ (a) look over the pictures and charts carefully.

☐ (b) focus on the written text.

12. When I solve math problems

☐ (a) I usually work my way to the solutions one step at a time.

☐ (b) I often just see the solutions but then have to struggle to figure out the steps to get to them.

13. In classes I have taken

☐ (a) I have usually gotten to know many of the students.

☐ (b) I have rarely gotten to know many of the students.

14. In reading nonfiction, I prefer

☐ (a) something that teaches me new facts or tells me how to do something.

☐ (b) something that gives me new ideas to think about.

15. I like teachers

☐ (a) who put a lot of diagrams on the board.

- ☐ (b) who spend a lot of time explaining.
16. When I'm analyzing a story or a novel
- ☐ (a) I think of the incidents and try to put them together to figure out the themes.
- ☐ (b) I just know what the themes are when I finish reading and then I have to go back and find the incidents that demonstrate them.
17. When I start a homework problem, I am more likely to
- ☐ (a) start working on the solution immediately.
- ☐ (b) try to fully understand the problem first.
18. I prefer the idea of
- ☐ (a) certainty.
- ☐ (b) theory.
19. I remember best
- ☐ (a) what I see.
- ☐ (b) what I hear.
20. It is more important to me that an instructor
- ☐ (a) lay out the material in clear sequential steps.
- ☐ (b) give me an overall picture and relate the material to other subjects.
21. I prefer to study
- ☐ (a) in a study group.
- ☐ (b) alone.
22. I am more likely to be considered
- ☐ (a) careful about the details of my work.
- ☐ (b) creative about how to do my work.
23. When I get directions to a new place, I prefer
- ☐ (a) a map.
- ☐ (b) written instructions.
24. I learn
- ☐ (a) at a fairly regular pace. If I study hard, I'll "get it."
- ☐ (b) in fits and starts. I'll be totally confused and then suddenly it all "clicks."
25. I would rather first
- ☐ (a) try things out.
- ☐ (b) think about how I'm going to do it.
26. When I am reading for enjoyment, I like writers to
- ☐ (a) clearly say what they mean.
- ☐ (b) say things in creative, interesting ways.

27. When I see a diagram or sketch in class, I am most likely to remember
- ☐ (a) the picture.
 - ☐ (b) what the instructor said about it.
28. When considering a body of information, I am more likely to
- ☐ (a) focus on details and miss the big picture.
 - ☐ (b) try to understand the big picture before getting into the details.
29. I more easily remember
- ☐ (a) something I have done.
 - ☐ (b) something I have thought a lot about.
30. When I have to perform a task, I prefer to
- ☐ (a) master one way of doing it.
 - ☐ (b) come up with new ways of doing it.
31. When someone is showing me data, I prefer
- ☐ (a) charts or graphs.
 - ☐ (b) text summarizing the results.
32. When writing a paper, I am more likely to
- ☐ (a) work on (think about or write) the beginning of the paper and progress forward.
 - ☐ (b) work on (think about or write) different parts of the paper and then order them.
33. When I have to work on a group project, I first want to
- ☐ (a) have "group brainstorming" where everyone contributes ideas.
 - ☐ (b) brainstorm individually and then come together as a group to compare ideas.
34. I consider it higher praise to call someone
- ☐ (a) sensible.
 - ☐ (b) imaginative.
35. When I meet people at a party, I am more likely to remember
- ☐ (a) what they looked like.
 - ☐ (b) what they said about themselves.
36. When I am learning a new subject, I prefer to
- ☐ (a) stay focused on that subject, learning as much about it as I can.
 - ☐ (b) try to make connections between that subject and related subjects.
37. I am more likely to be considered
- ☐ (a) outgoing.

- ☐ (b) reserved.
38. I prefer courses that emphasize
- ☐ (a) concrete material (facts, data).
- ☐ (b) abstract material (concepts, theories).
39. For entertainment, I would rather
- ☐ (a) watch television.
- ☐ (b) read a book.
40. Some teachers start their lectures with an outline of what they will cover. Such outlines are
- ☐ (a) somewhat helpful to me.
- ☐ (b) very helpful to me.
41. The idea of doing homework in groups, with one grade for the entire group,
- ☐ (a) appeals to me.
- ☐ (b) does not appeal to me.
42. When I am doing long calculations,
- ☐ (a) I tend to repeat all my steps and check my work carefully.
- ☐ (b) I find checking my work tiresome and have to force myself to do it.
43. I tend to picture places I have been
- ☐ (a) easily and fairly accurately.
- ☐ (b) with difficulty and without much detail.
44. When solving problems in a group, I would be more likely to
- ☐ (a) think of the steps in the solution process.
- ☐ (b) think of possible consequences or applications of the solution in a wide range of areas.

When you have completed filling out the above form please click on the Submit button below. Your results will be returned to you. If you are not satisfied with your answers above please click on Reset to clear the form.

Dr. Richard Felder, felder@ncsu.edu

Source:

Solomon, B. A., & Feder, R. M. (n.d.). *Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire*. Retrieved August 30, 2005, from <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>