Students' Common Writing Problems & Practices at King Abdulaziz University: An Inquiry to Move a Writing Center From Conception Towards Conceptualization

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Abstract

This study reports the results of a quantitative investigation of the most shared writing problems and practices King Abdulaziz University (KAU) students have in common, the students' attitudes towards the teaching of basic writing and research methods, their readiness and attitude towards the kinds of activities writing centers usually have, and their self-perceptions with regards to writing skills. The study also attempts to shed some light on how the student service centers[1] (SSC) affect students' self-reliance and their academic achievement. The study also examines the feasibility of using the concept of writing center at King Abdulaziz. Findings of the questionnaire to which 543 subjects have responded rendered indications that a history of seeking help from SSCs exists among students, who also pointed out the need for professional academic help to be provided on campus, and the determination to use such services if conceptualized. The study also found that a US model of WCs is feasible and reliable to adopt. A number of recommendations conclude the study.

Key words: King Abdulaziz university; Writing centers; Term-papers, Saudi Arabia; Student service centers; File-sharing; Plagiarism

INTRODUCTION

"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed," (Hemingway, n.d.). Whether or not this remains a valid claim, writing has become an even more challenging task, especially for university students. A considerably noticeable weakness in writing has always been a source of concern to many academics and instructors teaching communication skills, especially writing and composition skills. University instructors often notice through submitted research and term papers, the different forms of writing problems revealed in students' works and the continued slow motion towards the production of better quality research reports capable of gaining editorial satisfaction for academic approval or publication. In order to improve this situation, universities launched remedial programs and introduced different solutions to improve the quality of students' writings. However, some of these solutions stand out as more influential than many others. To identify those effective solutions, this study was carried out at KAU to investigate the prospects of success for the "Writing Center" solution at the university.

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[1] SSC refers to the Student Service Centers, which are commercial services, similar to FedEx and OfficeMax copy centers. They are licensed to operate as copy and print service providers with limited stationary sales. They appeared in Saudi Arabia in 1987 when the First Student Service Center appeared in Riyadh within the outskirts of King Saud University main campus. More centers surfaced in the following years. With the expansion of the service, many of these stores started a "research help" service that provides statistical, typing, graphical design, and printing services. Along with that, some "unethical" services lied beneath where student had their research and term-papers done for them at very tempting prices. From that point, universities noticed patterns of plagiarism, recycling, and, above all, quality that goes beyond the aptitude they know their students had. These centers continue their uninterrupted services.

1. STUDIES RELATED TO WRITING CENTERS

The present study looks at writing centers as an effective solution that requires testing of the waters before committing to it because of the integration complications that the university will have to go through to connect the classroom to the writing center beside the expenses to be incurred to establish a writing center. Robinson (2009) listed a number of "implications for how writing centers can best serve less prepared students, especially in light of the –US- national movement to end remediation, as well as for the ways in which we measure student success," (Robinson, 2009). Writing centers are not only viewed as an important supplementary institution for universities, but also for secondary schools.

The US National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2008) put a number of recommendations that placed writing in the center of focus. It reports that, "American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution places language and communication in their proper place in the classroom," (National Commission on Writing, 2003). In a subsequent report that followed, it declares that "Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly short-changed throughout the school and college years". It also confirms that, "writing always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom," declaring that, "of the three "Rs[2]," writing is clearly the most neglected" (National Commission on Writing, 2005). In subsequent reports, the National Commission on Writing (2005) also continued to, "emphasize the relationship between improved writing skills for university students and jobs that fit the needs for the modern economy," (National Commission on Writing, 2005). Considering that link, Saudi Arabia should find that emphasis likely to apply to its schools and universities because its declared plans to move its economy to become knowledge-based before the year 2040.

With regards to copyright protection and considering the current situation in many academic institutions, not only do many students submit poorly written papers, when they do, but they also steal other people's ideas, share recycled papers, copy materials from the WWW, and get their papers written for them either online or by illegitimate helpers.

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[2] The three Rs (as in the letter R) refers to the foundations of a basic skills-orientated education program within schools: reading, writing and arithmetic (Wikipedia., 2014).

Despite laws in Massachusetts and 16 other states', lawsuits, honor codes, and even sophisticated plagiarism-detection software, college students continue to buy term papers and other academic material from individuals and companies that have built a thriving business out of cheating. (Herman, 2009)

Saudi universities are no stranger to this phenomenon. Allegations of file-sharing and term paper exchange practices were made against a long list of websites as a result of the Internet evolution and its mid-1990s revolution. "Copyright lawsuits increased accordingly bringing information technology companies to courts to disentangle and reconsider the copyrights new realities, which affected universities that witnessed increasing scores of plagiarism and copyright-related issues," (Stanford University, 2010). These laws required constant reproduction, improvements, updating, and broadening to allow them to curb the online uproar and uprising of copyright violations and illegitimate file sharing. The presence and growth of the Internet allowed more objectionable practices to escalate dramatically. Term-paper submissions developed more writing problems including plagiarism and illegitimate use of electronic media available on the web. "Websites with names like Papergeeks.com, 15,000 papers.com, Schoolsucks.com, and echeat.com advertise easy access to recycled and "customized" term papers with catchy slogans like "Download Your Workload" and "It's Not Cheating, It's Collaborating" (Herman, 2009).

When considering the impact of poor writing skills on students present and future, it is evident that students' problems with writing are not going to be limited to their college experience, but will continue to haunt them even if they make out of college. "People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired, and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion." (National Commission on Writing, 2005) Since employment is becoming increasingly competitive in Saudi Arabia, looking at problems related to the quality of outcomes in Saudi universities has become an inevitable decision to make.

The US nation-wide survey of the employers' expectations and requirements in their future employees which the National Commission on Writing in the US has carried out and reported in 2005, it was found that,

more than half of all responding companies report that they "frequently" or "almost always": Produce technical reports (59 percent), formal reports (62 percent), and memos and correspondence (70 percent). Communication through e-mail and PowerPoint presentations is almost universal. "Because of e-mail, more employees have to write more often. Also a lot more has to be documented," said one respondent.

(National Commission on Writing, 2005)

This entails that the market needs are tremendous and require universities to better prepare students for such challenges that require putting the writing skill in the center of focus. Some researchers started questioning

the need for college writing courses including 101 basic writing courses, assuming that universities should examine the quality and true impact of these courses and reconsider ending that era and adopting "the writing center alternative." Robinson (2009) makes a daring statement predicting the end of basic writing. However, she believes that "the bigger challenge is to reach the students who do not see the writing center as having an important enough role in helping them to succeed in college". This indicates, though, that the role of a writing center remains a problem if it is expected to play a role in completing and complementing the role that academic departments play in educating college students.

When it comes to students and their prior perceptions and attitudes, researchers covered this aspect in a number of studies. Elashri (2013) studied the attitudes of Egyptian students towards writing at Alazhar University secondary schools and found that the students' weakness in writing stands behind their negative attitude towards writing as a consequence of their writing skills shortcomings. He recommends that teachers "encourage their students, guide and support their hesitant steps, reassure them it is acceptable to make mistakes on first drafts, and remind –that- the purpose of the initial writing is to communicate ideas." He also recommends that teachers of writing should "provide students with frequent and lengthy opportunities to write." He adds, "Collaboration is highly valued and encouraged at every step of the process, especially during the revising and editing phases." (Elashri, 2013) While these are very effective recommendations, Elashri does not indicate the medium needed to implement these recommendations. The writing center is the place where collaboration, revisions, extensive writing and drafting, guidance, tutoring, and encouragement are practiced on a regular basis.

Students' perceptions of their own writing skills and capabilities, and their attitude towards writing are very important for the study. Found that "an understanding of student perceptions about their writing is important to help them to gain a positive identity in writing as a precursor of acquiring increased skills (Lavelle & Zuercher, 1999). The study that had a sample of 30 students using interviewing and a questionnaire, found that the instructional approach influence the students' outcomes immensely. This, in turn, confirms the need for students to be approached differently through another means such as tutoring, which involves a lot of negotiation, revision, conferencing, and focused thinking.

Considering the aspects covered in these studies, the questions this study asks are based on linkage between the findings and recommendations of these studies and the setting in Saudi universities, where the concept of "writing centers," to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been adopted, let a lot implemented.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Rationale

Writing problems were the focus of a long history of research seeking to improve teaching methods and improve outcomes. Primary and higher education systems put writing skills at the core of its business process and dedicate a major part of the educational process to keep those skills up to standard. However, issues and problems continue to surface putting language educators under constant obligation to come up with even more solutions to resolve the many problems with writing that continue to come out continuously.

However, the high volume of plagiarism made it an imperative to innovate and introduce more effective solutions to such writing problems. Among these solutions is the Writing Center, which was present on the academic scene way before the Internet surfaced, but had less than necessary impact on students. The empowerment and development of writing centers paved the way for such centers to play an important role in combating writing problems in leading universities around the world, especially the US. This paper considers this solution based on investigation of the situation in Saudi universities based on students' perspective and perceptions of writing-related issues. A set of research questions was developed to examine the feasibility of the Writing Center solution.

2.2 The Situation in Saudi Universities

In Saudi Arabia, a growing interest in seeking illegitimate help from other sources including SSCs among university students was noticed. The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, which oversees all academic institutions in the country, decided to combat that phenomenon in 2007 by issuing a memorandum that was distributed to Saudi universities warning them of the negative influence, repercussions and consequences of SSCs scattered around academic institutions. It called for a group of active measures to be taken by universities to reduce the negative SSCs' influence. The phenomenon continues to exist and SSCs now rent and occupy corners, not only around the outskirts of university campuses, but also inside universities which allowed this to happen for "students' convenience". Such SSCs are licensed to operate on-campus to provide photocopying services, but apparently authorized government departments failed to observe and stop the copyright-related desecrations, among other violations. The Saudi local press[3] covered the problem that was escalating in objection to its academic and educational quality repercussions (Okaz Daily, 2010;

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[3] Saudi Arabia has only 8 daily newspapers published in Arabic language with some of them published in parallel in English versions. All these newspapers have very active presence on the WWW and social media.

Alriyadh Newspaper, 2011; Alyaum Newspaper, 2010; Saudi Research & Marketing LTD, 2004).

While universities allow many different and legitimate forms of help that students could use such as proof reading or peer review, the situation in Saudi Arabia has developed into a commercially-driven investment in student services that go beyond academic acceptability. The SSCs continue to pose major threats to the academic process and endanger the quality of its outcomes in Saudi Arabia.

In 2010, KAU decided to consider the introduction of a new academic unit, KAU Writing Centers (KAUWCs), to its academic structure through which it seeks to enhance the quality of its outcomes. This study reports an investigation of the magnitude of the writing problems that KAU students may have and the prospects for a solution like the writing center if considered. The study also investigates a number of aspects that need to be considered when moving the writing center with a solution concept into a conceptualized one.

2.3 Policing vs. Tutoring

The question of "what to do to improve students' writing skills and reduce their objectionable practices, especially with the presence of the Internet?" remains a tricky question to many language educators. Corporate support to educators came to the rescue and provided some solutions including text-matching software solutions. Educators from within the academia came up with an academic solution which is the Writing Center, which is an academic unit established to provide help to student writers using "tutoring". Some universities tend to call these centers other names such as "writing studio", "Student Help Center", and "Research Support Unit". Nevertheless, the focal point putting of these units together is the mission they share to improve students' writing. However, the universities have a different perspective on what to do to fix the problem. While "policing" can be effective but painful, "tutoring" can be effective but costly.

Some universities in the US, Europe, and Asia started considering solutions with more innovative instructional methods that involve conferencing and process research to make sure students submit original papers. Some universities are using computerized paper-checking systems to examine the authenticity of papers submitted by students and penalize proven plagiarizers. Among these systems is "Turnitin[®]" which is one the solutions that many universities around the world have chosen to use such as the University of Melbourne[4]. Turnitin[®] allows students' work to be "instantly checked for potential plagiarism using pattern recognition algorithms"

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[4] The University of Melbourne introduced Turnitin[®] System to their students as "an online web-based text-matching software that works by comparing electronically submitted papers to billions of pages of content located on the Internet and proprietary databases as well as the work of other students whose papers have also been submitted into the system" (The University of Melbourne, 2014)

(iParadigms, LLC, 2014). It is not the only system the corporate business has introduced to universities, but this paper uses it as an example of the "policing solutions" some universities decided to use to hold back the influence of the "copy-paste-mania". An Originality Report is generated from this system when a paper is submitted by the student. If the originality report renders low authenticity marks, the student should undergo legal review and action.

Considering the situation in Saudi universities, the choice of tutoring could be a better solution to consider, not excluding the other solutions that can go together with the presence and influence of writing centers.

2.4 What Is the Writing Center?

Writing centers are supplementary academic units that universities and colleges establish them to provide one-to-one tutoring services to researchers and student-writers. They came to existence in reaction to the "literacy crisis" of the mid-1970s and the subsequent "back-to-basics" movement in the United States (Harris, 2014).

Writing Centers vary in numerous aspects including size, services, staffing, and organization. Writing centers exist within academic institutions typically as a service from an academic department or a learning center in the university (Harris, 2014). They fit within the university structure as a supplementary supporting academic unit that seeks to improve the writing outcomes that students submit to their respective instructors. When students show signs of weakness, disorganization, ambiguity, plagiarism, or failure to execute writing rules and expectations, instructors would usually refer those students to the writing center to receive tutoring services that should lead to better writing outcomes. Students receive tutoring and go back to their instructors with improved drafts that are expected to be better received by those instructors.

A number of features of characteristics identify the writing center. Harris (2014) lists them as follows:

a) Tutoring is provided on a one-to-one mode.

b) Tutors coach students and collaborate with them, but they do not teach them.

c) Tutoring is individualized targeting the student's needs.

d) Student-writers go to the writing center for experimentation and practice of writing.

e) Students study different majors and writing bring them to the center for advice and tutoring.

f) A writing center offers its services to all students regardless of their writing proficiency.

The concept of a writing center has been present in the American academic scene for more than 40 years. It was adopted by increasing numbers of academic institutions in Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand at varying degrees of presence and influence. The Middle East is moving towards that direction with the growth of international branches of American universities. For that

reason, a chapter of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) was conceived under the name of the Middle East and North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA).

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Writing is a central learning skill. All academic programs depend heavily on their students' ability to produce assignments, term-papers, essays, and research which all depend on the writing skill. Academic institutions around the world are increasingly worried about the quality of their outcomes, especially their writing skills. Such skills have a significant effect on their employ ability potential.

In Saudi Arabia, universities continue to support students' writing with many different solutions including supplementary solutions such as training programs. However, such solutions are scarce, limited, and incapable of providing wide-scale help that is open and easily accessible to more students.

The pressing need for adoption of more aggressive and smart solutions can no longer be ignored. SSCs and file-sharing websites seem to have negative influence on the quality of university outcomes. The long-tested concept of the writing centers, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been considered seriously in any university. The situation requires close investigation of the degree of need for such a solution and the situation of research and paper writing among students. This study puts that target for its procedures and seeks to end up with recommendations that can contribute to the proper and timely implementation of the concept of writing centers reading to full realization of the benefits of writing centers to the academia.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Writing problems can be treated in many different ways. In a university context, a solution to a problem is initiated by investigation of the potential for that solution to be effective and suitable for the problem at hand. This study has the purpose of considering the status of teaching writing and research methods in the university, the magnitude of influence that SSCs have on students, the degree of reliability of the writing center solution to enhance sufficiency, integrity, and self-reliance among students, the potential for writing centers to succeed in a Saudi university, the students' readiness and attitude towards the solution concept, conceptualization requirements, and the implementation approach suggested by the investigation implications.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To fulfill the purpose of the study, a group of research questions were developed and turned into statements from which the 29-item questionnaire was assembled. Here are the questions that the study attempts to answer:

A. Satisfaction with the teaching of writing and research methods:

a) What is the Students' attitude towards the teaching of basic writing with their current curricula and methods (101 Writing skills)?

b) What is the students' attitude towards the quality of teaching and curricula of research methods courses?

B. Myth and reality regarding the magnitude of research and writing violations:

What is the students' Attitude toward negative academic practices related to writing research nd term papers?

C. Students' readiness and attitude towards voluntary work:

a) How far would students be interested in carrying out voluntary academic tasks and exert supplementary academic effort that could help improve their writing?

b) How much do students follow the assignment instructions and requirements given to them by instructors?

D. Students' self-perception:

a) How do students perceive their readiness and capability to produce proper and academically-sound research papers?

b) How do students perceive their mastery of writing skills?

6. SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is important for numerous causes. Writing problems are universal to academic contexts. Students continue to exhibit such problems in all kinds of activities they engage in, while instructors put the improvement of writing skills in the core business of their academic activities seeking to enhance students' communication skills. The significance of this study lies in the fact that Saudi universities do not have any writing centers in the concept, form, organization, and role that is known in the industry.

Firstly, Writing centers exist to improve students' writing skills, help them with their research papers, provide them with a legitimate and reliable alternative, and develop the quality of their submissions. The concept of writing centers has not been implemented in any Saudi university before, except, to the best of my knowledge, a writing studio at Princess Nura University in Riyadh which is primarily limited to encourage student extra-curricular creative writing. Secondly, the results of this study will optimistically bring about a number of recommendations which will consequently improve the quality of students' writing and research at KAU. Thirdly, the study seeks to make a significant contribution to the

literature on writing centers in the Arab world, and most certainly the foundation and implementation of writing centers in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the study shall include implications for other MENA, and particularly Saudi, universities to benefit from when they look for solutions for student writing problems and consider establishing their own writing centers.

Establishing a writing center should be based on a number of measures including a study of the status of writing problems among students, the students' readiness for a writing center, and the setting surrounding the operation of a writing center in the university. This study will focus on the first two objectives that should put the puzzle together and identify the status of writing skills among students and kind of problems the university is dealing with.

A number of limitations are taken into account in this study. First, the study does not cover the colleges outside the main campus in Jeddah[5]. Second, only male students are covered by this study because the university operates in accordance with the Saudi higher education system regulations segregating the two sexes in schools and universities. Third, only students in junior and senior years were given the chance to participate in the study because they are less likely to be given writing tasksin earlier years compared to later years. Fourth, not all majors or academic specialties are covered in the study, but only those departments that use English language as a teaching medium. Finally, the study does not carry out its investigations for incrimination purposes, but limits its investigation to the creation of an attempted answer to its research questions which all have an academic purpose serving students to become better writers.

7. METHOD

7.1 The Subjects

The subjects that participated in the study were 543 in total. The sample was selected from 10 different colleges at KAU where English was the teaching medium. These students study in different specialties where they are required to study their courses and write all their assignments, papers, and research in English language. Instructors are native speakers of English, international, and Arab bilinguals. This mix of instructors puts English at the center of communication between students and their instructors. Colleges and departments where Arabic was the teaching medium were excluded from the study.

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[5] King Abdulaziz University (KAU) has a main campus in Jeddah and fully operates a number of other campuses in Northern Jeddah, Khulais Province, Alkamil Province, and Rabigh Province. These other campuses are being prepared to become regional teaching universities. Northern Jeddah has become independent in 2014. The study's jurisdiction is limited to main campus.

Sampling was also limited to junior and senior years in the included specialties because most courses requiring research and term-papers are offered only in those two years. The sample did not include freshmen, sophomore, and some junior years due to focus of their coursework on foundation and preparatory topics. All students live in Jeddah where the university main campus is located. The sample was also limited to male students due to sex-based segregation nature of the Saudi academic system.

The participating subjects were distributed according to major or specialty:

Table 1
Distribution and Percentages of Subjects According to Specailty

Major	Number of subjects	Percentage
Science	138	25.41
Economics & administration	116	21.36
Engineering	106	19.52
Pharmacology	82	15.10
Arts	40	7.36
Natural sciences	20	3.68
Geology	16	2.95
Medicine	10	1.84
Computer & IT	5	0.92
Marine studies	5	0.92
Environmental designs	5	0.92
Total	*543*	100

7.2 Instruments

7.2.1 The Questionnaire

The study developed a questionnaire that was designed, tested, and used to collect the data for the study. It was built on these rules:

a) The researcher's prior experience as a tutor at the Writing Center at IUP, and as an English language instructor at Imam University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. That experience enriched the researcher with significant know-how and awareness of the academic research and writing requirements and expectations.

b) The researcher's utilization of related criteria revealed by the reviewed studies with reference to studies that covered assessment of writing problems and foundation of writing centers in particular.

c) Raters' reports.

7.2.2 Content of the Questionnaire

The 29 item questionnaire was designed to fit on a single page to avoid student boredom and encourage them to cooperate with the questionnaire administration. The

items were grouped in four subsections based on the four issues investigated by the study. All four sections serve the purpose of the study.

All sections were assigned a coding system based on a five-point scale to facilitate the computer processing of the resulting data. The coding system is based on Liker's scale in which 5 represents (strongly agree), 1 represents (strongly disagree), and 3 represents undecidedness status (Likert, 1932). In calculating the frequencies, histograms represented merged results that combined "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" as well as combining "Disagree" with "Strongly Disagree" results. The purpose was to reflect the total attitude regardless of the degree as long as the subject has chosen a side.

7.2.3 Validation and Revision of the Questionnaire

After developing the questionnaire in its first draft, it was translated into Arabic and reviewed by an arbitrator specializing in translation and interpreting to examine the quality of translation. Then, five fellow linguistics researchers were asked to review the questionnaire and evaluate its content, organization, design, and true investigation of what it claims to investigate. A statistician was also asked to review the questionnaire for the same purpose, but from a statistical perspective. Comments and feedback from the translation arbitrator, statistician, and academic raters were incorporated into the final revision and reproduction of the questionnaire in its final form. A pilot study followed in order to test the validity of the tool. Five students at Imam University in Riyadh and two students at Salman University in Alkharj Province were given the questionnaire to respond to it. Ease of items, clarity, and ease of administration were the focus of the exercise. The result was encouraging and no problems or hiccups were recorded. The questionnaire was found ready to administer to the selected sample at KAU.

7.3 Procedures of Data Collection & Analysis

Six hundred questionnaires were printed for distribution and administration. University colleges were assigned a week on the academic calendar for the administration of the questionnaire. A schedule for college visits and questionnaire administration was created and distributed to college deans for observation and support. 550 questionnaires were distributed and administered during implementation week. The investigator administered the questionnaire to each homeroom for students to respond to the questionnaire at the same time. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire and ask any questions they may have about the process within the allocated time for each group, which was two hours per group. A total of 543 students returned completed questionnaires, while seven forms were exempted for inappropriate completion or failure to answer several significant questions.

Quantitative analysis of the data was carried out using the computer-based software called the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The focus of the analysis covered frequencies, means, standard deviations, chi-square significance tests, and percentages of responses. Representation of the data is reflected in the study using tables and graphic figures using histograms highlighting the most important results that lead to the interpretations of the results.

8. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Frequencies were the focus of analysis of the results. The study has four targeted issues that a group of research questions seek to investigate. Each of these issues is represented in the research instrument by a set of items (statements) that are meant to accumulate together an attempted answer for each issue. The following displays the results in relation to each one of the targeted issues.

8.1 Students' Satisfaction With the Teaching of Writing in the University

Items 8, 9, 10 & 13 of the questionnaire were designed to identify the students' attitude towards the teaching of basic writing curricula. Basic writing is a university prerequisite 101 course in all Saudi universities. Both, Arabic and English languages, have their own basic writing course.

Results show that the sample is undecided on the influence and quality of 101 writing skills course offered by the university to all freshmen, with an average of (2.68) on a scale of 5.00. Response to item #10 (I would like the 101 Writing Skills class to be linked to my major) with a mean of (3.45) indicates significance and confirms that students would like to study writing in relevance to their own majors as reflected in Appendix 1.1 (Table 2).

This form of reinforced teaching is logistically challenging, but can be managed as a student-centered activity by writing instructors. A score of cumulative agreement 55.6% is indicative such interest that can be considered. Item #9 (I received enough practical training in the writing classes that I have taken,) has also rendered significance in the sample's disagreement on the statement with a total score of (55.3%) who believe that the writing course did not offer enough training. This is very significant for the feasibility considerations for the WC solution which focuses its activities entirely on training and hands-on practice. Respondents also indicated with less statistical emphasis that curricular requirements such as homework assignments do not require them to write much, which should improve their writing skills as shown in the results item #13 have indicated.

Items # (20, 21, 22, 26, & 27) reflected in Appendix 1.2 (Table 3) in the research instrument results focused on the students' attitude towards the teaching of research

methods and what they feel can be improved in the way they are being taught. Item #26 on the need for technological applications to improve research skills such as SPSS and MS Excel applications and similar statistical solutions received a percentage score of (62.5%) who agreed that technology can make a difference to students' understanding and application of research. Such tools make a usual supplement to training programs in writing centers and students as well as instructors find training on such technological applications very helpful for their work. This is proven through another item (#21) in the study which indicated the need for application through practicums and hands-on internships with a mean of (3.60). Results in item #20 indicated that more than 40% of the participants have indicated that their problems with writing skills affect their performance much more than their inadequate understanding of research methods.

8.2 Myth and Reality Regarding Copyright Violations, Plagiarism, and File-Sharing

The study calculated the mean, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations for items # (14-15-17) and found in Appendix 1.3 (Table 4). Respondents were undecided on their perception of their fellow students' negative practices. The mean scores fell within the third category (2.88 out of 5.00). However, item #17 received in total percentage of (45%) of agreement that SSCs conduct assignments and academic tasks on the students' behalf. This agreement on the existence of file-sharing and plagiarism practices confirms the allegations raised in the Saudi press as reviewed earlier in this study.

A mean score of (3.24) was found on the item #14 regarding whether or not students depended on themselves to prepare their own papers. Item #15 scored the majority of the samples' denial of any prior use of SSCs or similar providers of illegitimate services with a percentage score of (64%) disagreeing with the statement and (48.8%) of the sample strongly declaring complete and honest denial of this allegation. Such blunt denial remains questionable because these SSCs continue to rent very expensive shops around university campuses providing services to their customers comprised mostly of university students.

8.3 Students' Readiness and Attitude Towards Voluntary Work

Interest in supplementary academic effort was investigated in this study using items (#11, 12, & 28). Responsesare displayed in Appendix 1.4 (Table 5) help develop the writing center's training programs and determine the degree of choice or compulsion that needs to be considered in the writing center's future activities. While respondents indicated their agreement that they work hard to improve their writing skills with a total agreement of 41.1% and 28.9% were undecided, 41.8%

agreed they do not utilize other educational resources to prepare their term papers and assignments. This proves that the students' hard work needs to be steered in the right direction so that their effort pays off and they reap the desired fruits out of their work. KAU has such programs (Figure 1), which are made available to students on campus. The university website and accounts for the social media continue to raise students' awareness of such programs.

Figure 1
An Example of Training Programs Announcements Posted on KAU's Website for Students to Join

The questionon students' readiness and need for the writing center was one of the main issues pursued using two statements, which rendered the results displayed in Appendix 1.5 (Table 6). The frequencies reflect genuine readiness to cooperate with supervisors when writing research among the study sample. 64% of the respondents reflected that positive attitude.

Two items scored high in the score ranges indicating significance that students follow the instructions given on assignments carefully with a mean of (3.77) and feel the need for immediate attention from instructors while engaged in writing their assignments and term papers with a mean score of (3.58). Both results fall within the fourth range of scores (3.41- 4.20) indicating significance of the respondents' attitude towards excessive and supplementary assignments, as well as follow-up that writing centers usually require from students. This indication is very important to considerwhenplanning for the operation of the writing center.

As for the respondents' readiness and capability to conduct advanced academic research, the study used items # (23, 24, 25) as shown in Appendix 1.6 (Table 7) to investigate that aspect. Interesting scores were found in this set of items. 44% of the sample (231 respondents) strongly agreed that they would like to receive training to improve their research and writing skills (Figure 2). This positive attitude indicates that high feasibility of the WC solution is quite high and encouraging.
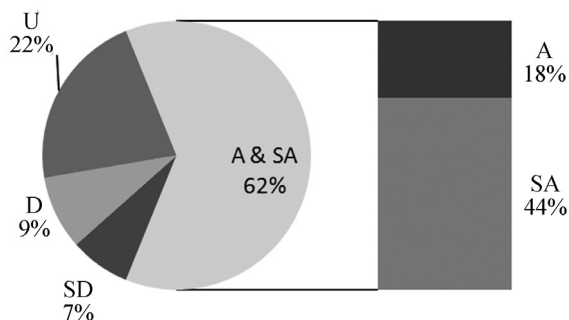
Figure 2
Desire to Receive Training to Improve Writing & Research Skills

8.4 Students' Self-Perception on Their Writing Skills and Capabilities to Undertake Remedial Tasks to Improve Their Skills

In items # 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 18, and 19 on students' perception of their writing skills as Appendix 1.7 (Table 8) reflects, respondents are undecided with regards to their perception of their writing skills. The mean ranged between (3.40-5.00), which falls in the middle of the scale (2.61-3.40) indicating undecidedness with regards to their perception. However, respondents indicated agreement on a number of statements including item #6: (My writing skills can be improved,) which scored significantly at 4.08 in agreement on a scale of 5.00. Also, item #18 (I often require more time to properly do my research papers and assignments myself) rendered significant results scoring (3.95) out of 5.00. The subjects' agreement on two items (6 & 18) indicating significance that students do believe that they can improve their skills and produce better writing if gave the time and proper training. Therefore, this means that students could gain more confidence in their skills and abilities to do their work themselves if a proper solution is adopted.

The scores on the other items that were lower than 3.90, including items (2, 3) which indicated that respondents agree to a lesser degree of impression that other students at KAU exhibit common problems with writing (3.48) and solicit illegitimate help from SSCs in Jeddah or online because of their inability to do their work themselves (3.78). This impression is supported by other responses in the survey. Items (19, 7, 5, 4) indicated an "undecided" position for the whole sample, whose scores have ranged between (2.68 to 3.17). These items were related to the respondents' perception of their problems with writing, when the problem started, how satisfied they are with their own writing skills, and how capable of writing they believe they are.

The question on students' readiness and need for the writing center was one of the main issues pursued using two statements, which rendered the results Appendix 1.8 (Table 9) displays. The frequencies reflect genuine readiness to cooperate with supervisors when writing research among the study sample. 62.4% of the respondents reflected that positive attitude. While 55%

said that they come across many questions that require immediate follow-up with an attending instructor during their work on research (Figure 3). A writing center makes the response to such needs very easy as it falls in the heart of their core business.
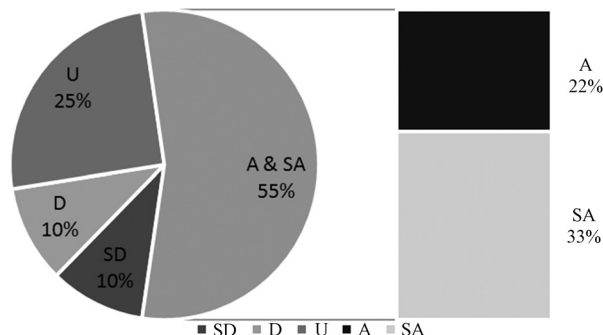

Figure 3
Students' Need for Immediate Follow-Up During Writing

Two items scored high in the score ranges indicating significance that students follow the instructions given on assignments carefully with a mean of (3.77) and feel the need for immediate attention from instructors while engaged in writing their assignments and term papers with a mean score of (3.58). Both results fall within the fourth range of scores (3.41- 4.20) indicating significance of the respondents' attitude towards excessive and supplementary assignments, as well as follow-up that writing centers usually require from students. This indication is very important to consider when planning for the operation of the writing center.

As for the respondents' readiness and capability to conduct advanced academic research which Appendix 1.9 (Table 10) displays, the study used items # (23, 24, 25) to investigate that aspect. 44% of the sample (231 respondents) strongly agreed that they would like to receive training to improve their research and writing skills. This positive attitude indicates that high feasibility of the WC solution is quite high and encouraging. More than half the respondents also indicated that they lack the ability to publish sound research papers in refereed journals with a frequency total score of 57% of the respondents. A writing center often makes the first stop for student writers seeking to publish their papers to improve their writing and research skills.

8.5 Students' Self-Perception on Their Writing Skills

Items # 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 18, and 19 cover the students' perception of their writing skills. Appendix 10 (Table 11.) reflects the major part of the targeted areas of investigations: the students' self-perceptions. The mean range was (3.40-5.00), which falls in the middle of the scale (2.61-3.40) indicating an undecided perception. However, respondents scored high frequencies in

agreement on a number of statements including item #6: (My writing skills can be improved,) which scored a significant mean of (4.08) on a scale of 5.00. The total frequency for agreement that writing skills can be improved was 73% (Figure 4)
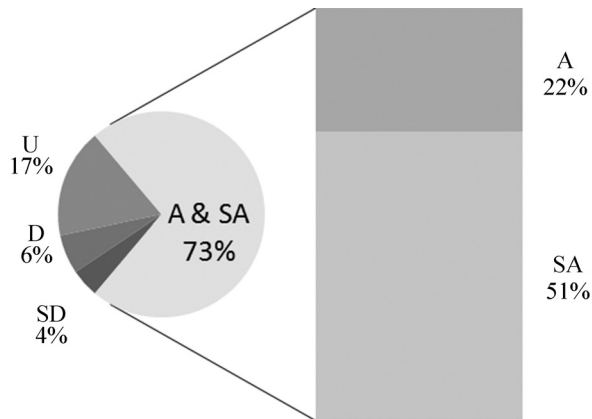

Figure 4
Respondents Indicating Their Writing Skills Can Be Imrpoved

Also item #18 on the respondents' need for time to properly write their research papers and assignments themselves rendered significant results scoring a mean of (3.95) out of 5.00. Additionally, agreement on two items (6 & 18) indicated significance that students do believe that they can improve their skills and produce better writing if gave the time and proper training. Therefore, this means that students could gain more confidence in their skills and abilities to do their work themselves if a proper solution is adopted.The frequency scores for item #3 indicated that a true problem does exist among students working on their term papers with a total of 51%.

The respondents "pointed fingers" at other students many more times than the times they admitted any form of ill-conduct. This includes their responses to whether or not they believe other students experience difficulties in writing or if they have used the SSCs services. The results also showed high frequency in the likely respondents believes exists that some students have to writproblems that lead them to seek the available help SSCs offer illegitimately.

An attention-grapping result was the indication from (48%) of the respondents that their problem with writing has started before college. This was a point of continued discussion between higher education instructors and primary education instructors. The results in this study indicate that the problem exists and should also be treated earlier.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study overall results indicated that the concept of establishing a writing center at KAU is a sound,

timely, and necessary idea. It is a priority that deserves immediate implementation. Students reflected the dire need for support to improve their technical writings, term papers, and research report. They also indicated a worrisome degree of reliance on help from questionable sources. The idea of having a place for students to find professional and focused help with their writing projects was found fitting and well-liked by most respondents. Indications also included early intervention introducing writing centers to secondary schools, which are now common in the United States educational system (Gehrman & Upton, 1990)(Childers, Fels, & Jordan, 2010). Writing centers in universities will have to deal with much more complex writing problems if secondary schools did not intervene with writing centers and other remedial solutions to improve their outcomes (Kania, 2005).

Government departments responsible for the licensing and observation of the SSCs operations are required to do much more to enforce the relevant copyright and intellectual property laws that continue to be violated in SSCs scattered around universities and colleges around the Kingdom. Such centers are in violation of many laws and go beyond the licensed activities related to stationary sales and photocopying documents. The writing centers will not be able to make a difference to improve the students' writing skills if the SSCs continue to exist and operate the way they do currently.

The indication that students believe their writing skills can be improved is a positive sign. Another encouraging finding is the suggestion that students will be willing and cooperative to work with their instructors and tutors on their papers. Such indications make the writing center works easier and more fulfilling. The students' self-perceptions and recognition of their writing and research needs to be attended is also supportive of the implication that a writing center will be well-utilized by students once established. This is expected as students have also indicated also that they believe they can write better papers and receive training to write publishable research papers.

The writing center is given a number of suggestions to be considered upon execution of its activities including linkage of training to students' majors as respondents indicated in their scores. Hands-on training is also supported by respondents, while it makes the majority of tutor-to-student activities carried out in writing centers. Theoretical instruction has always been the common practice and students should be able to write effectively if given the chance to do so.

Benefits are countless and students make the first stakeholder to reap the fruits of the writing center. However, "it is not only the students who benefit from such collaboration, of course; the tangible benefits ripple throughout the institution." (Mohamad & Boyd, 2010)

The following summarizes the recommended actions:
a) King Abdulaziz University is recommended to establish the writing center to serve its graduate and undergraduate students' writing and research needs.
b) Awareness programs directed to faculty members as well as students should be carried out to introduce the concept and culture of the writing center to KAU students, which should allow this center to start its activities smoothly.
c) To improve the quality of university outcomes, KAU is advised to increase writing-related assignments such as term-papers, writing assignments, and research elements.
d) Online tutoring has an equal weight in writing centers. KAU is recommended to include online tutoring services upon the commencement of the service to allow more students to benefit from the service.
e) Adoption of electronic solutions supporting the improvement of writing for KAU students should be considered by the university. This includes the use of software packages such as Turnitin® and similar packages.
f) Authorized government departments and agencies should take actions further to enforce the copyright and intellectual property laws and stop the academic hemorrhage caused by student service centers (SSCs) to universities by providing illegitimate services.
g) Since KAU offers scholarships to its faculty, it is recommended that a number of scholarship graduate students be directed to have their internships in writing centers to prepare them to serve in the writing centers at KAU.
h) The study highly recommends a similar activity for Arabic language majors at KAU, which should benefit from the writing center to a great extent.
i) KAU is a leading university in Saudi Arabia. It is the investigator's recommendation that KAU shares its experience with other Saudi and Arab universities to encourage them to adopt the foundation of writing centers to improve their outcomes.
j) Faculties are advised to cooperate with writing centers and realize the role they play in making their job easier and more effective in making KAU students better and more competitive.

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APPENDIX

1.1 Table 2
Quality of Teaching Writing Courses

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
10	I would like the 101 Writing Skills class to be linked to my major.	#	95	56	84	118	186	3.45	1.48
8	The 101 Writing Skills class is adequately effective.	#	89	76	129	110	134	3.23	1.39
13	Curricular requirements help improve my writing skills.	#	102	112	171	87	68	2.83	1.26
9	I received enough practical training in the writing classes that I have taken.	#	172	131	148	46	41	2.36	1.22
	Average							*2.68*	*1.34*

1.2 Table 3
Students'Attitude Towards the Quality of Teaching of Research Methods Courses

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
26	I wish I could benefit from technological applications to improve my research skills.	#	30	34	111	120	222	3.91	1.193
		%	5.5	6.2	20.3	21.9	40.6		
21	I believe hands-on application needs to be added to research methods courses.	#	54	66	99	136	178	3.6	1.329
		%	10	12	19	26	33		
20	My problem is my ability to write, not my understanding of research methods.	#	93	63	137	109	127	3.22	1.395
		%	17	11.5	25	19.9	23.2		
27	Increasing assignments and term-papers should improve my writing and research skills.	#	78	84	134	108	119	3.2	1.355
		%	14.3	15.4	24.5	19.7	21.8		
22	I am content with the teaching of research methods in the university.	#	106	84	144	86	115	3.04	1.404
		%	19.4	15.4	26.3	15.7	21		
	Average							3.4	1.335

1.3 Table 4
Copyright Violations, Plagiarism, and File-Sharing Among Respondents

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
17	Commercial Student Service Centers (SSCs) conduct many tasks and assignments on students' behalf.	#	87	76	129	92	146	3.25	1.42
		%	17	14	24	17	28		
14	I depend totally on myself to conduct my own term papers.	#	65	80	160	123	107	3.24	1.27
		%	11.9	14.6	29.3	22.5	19.6		
15	I have once or more bought a research paper from a student service center or other sources.	#	267	77	94	43	56	2.15	1.38
		%	50	14	18	8	10		
	Average							*2.88*	*1.35*

1.4 Table 5
Respondents' Readiness and Attitude Towards Voluntary Work

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
11	I work hard to improve my writing skills.	#	53	103	158	120	105	3.22	1.24
		%	9.7	18.8	28.9	21.9	19.2		
12	I look on campus for extra-curricular activities that can improve my skills and competencies in writing and research.	#	98	90	150	96	101	3.02	1.35
		%	17.9	16.5	27.4	17.6	18.5		
28	I often utilize extra-curricular resources from the library and other available educational resources to prepare my term papers and assignments.	#	138	91	127	73	88	2.77	1.42
		%	25.2	16.6	23.2	13.3	16.1		
	Average							*3*	1.33

1.5 Table 6
Respondents' Readiness for Cooperation With Instructors and Supervisors

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
16	I usually follow the instructions when I conduct research under supervision for any course.	#	33	46	112	158	183	3.77	1.2
		%	6	9	21	30	34		
29	I come across many questions that I feel need immediate follow-up with my instructor during my work on my research.	#	52	53	131	112	172	3.58	1.3
		%	10	10	25	22	33		
	Average							*3.67*	*1.2*

1.6 Table 7
Respondents' Readiness and Capability to Conduct Advanced Academic Research

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
24	I would like to receive training to improve my research and writing skills.	#	38	46	112	93	231	3.83	1.28
		%	7	9	22	18	44		
25	I should have the ability to write and publish research if I could only receive adequate training and internship.	#	71	71	124	109	148	3.37	1.37
		%	13	13	22.7	19.9	27.1		
23	I have the ability to publish sound research papers in refereed journals.	#	191	113	121	59	54	2.39	1.33
		%	34.9	20.7	22.1	10.8	9.9		
	Average							3.2	1.32

1.7 Table 8
Students' Self-Perception on Their Writing Skills

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
6	My writing skills can be improved.	#	24	33	92	117	273	4.08	1.14
		%	4.4	6	16.8	21.4	49.9		
18	I often require more time to properly do my research papers and assignments myself.	#	27	33	107	139	226	3.95	1.15
		%	4.9	6	19.6	25.4	41.3		
2	I have an impression that students have a problem doing their own research papers.	#	47	58	97	111	233	3.78	1.32
		%	8.6	10.6	17.7	20.3	42.6		
3	I have an impression that students have problems in writing.	#	49	72	146	123	153	3.48	1.27
		%	9	13.2	26.7	22.5	28		
19	My problem with writing is not limited to composition.	#	102	83	116	89	145	3.17	1.46
		%	18.6	15.2	21.2	16.3	26.5		
7	My problems with writing started before college.	#	141	66	77	80	174	3.15	1.61
		%	25.8	12.1	14.1	14.6	31.8		
5	I am satisfied with my writing skills in general.	#	96	114	138	103	89	2.95	1.33
		%	17.6	20.8	25.2	18.8	16.3		
4	I have good abilities to independently write good letters and papers without mistakes related to mechanics, stylistics or language.	#	121	138	136	91	57	2.68	1.27
		%	22.1	25.2	24.9	16.6	10.4		
	Average							3.4	1.32

1.8 Table 9
Students' Readiness and Need for the Writing Center

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
16	I usually follow the instructions when I conduct research under supervision for any course.	#	33	46	112	158	183	3.77	1.188
		%	6	9	21	30	34		
29	I come across many questions that I feel need immediate follow-up with my instructor during my work on my research.	#	52	53	131	112	172	3.58	1.309
		%	10	10	25	22	33		
	Average							3.67	1.25

1.9 Table 10
Respondents' Readiness and Capability to Conduct Advanced Reearch

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
24	I would like to receive training to improve my research and writing skills.	#	38	46	112	93	231	3.83	1.28
		%	7	9	22	18	44		
25	I should have the ability to write and publish research if I could only receive adequate training and internship.	#	71	71	124	109	148	3.37	1.37
		%	13	13	22.7	19.9	27.1		
23	I have the ability to publish sound research papers in refereed journals.	#	191	113	121	59	54	2.39	1.33
		%	36	21	22	11	10		
	Average							3.2	1.32

1.10 Table 11
Respondents' Self-Perceptions on Skills and Research Writing

#	Statement	%	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
6	My writing skills can be improved.	#	24	33	92	117	273	4.08	1.14
		%	4	6	17	22	51		
18	I often require more time to properly do my research papers and assignments myself.	#	27	33	107	139	226	3.95	1.15
		%	4.9	6	19.6	25.4	41.3		
2	I have an impression that students have a problem doing their own research papers.	#	47	58	97	111	233	3.78	1.32
		%	8	11	18	20	43		
3	I have an impression that students have problems in writing that makes them solicit illegitimate help from SSCs outside KAU.	#	49	72	146	123	153	3.48	1.27
		%	9	13	27	23	28		
19	My problem with writing is not limited to composition.	#	102	83	116	89	145	3.17	1.46
		%	18.6	15.2	21.2	16.3	26.5		
7	My problems with writing started before college.	#	141	66	77	80	174	3.15	1.61
		%	26	12	14	15	33		
5	I am satisfied with my writing skills in general.	#	96	114	138	103	89	2.95	1.33
		%	17.6	20.8	25.2	18.8	16.3		
4	I have good abilities to independently write good letters and papers without mistakes related to mechanics, stylistics or language.	#	121	138	136	91	57	2.68	1.27
		%	22.1	25.2	24.9	16.6	10.4		
	Average							*3.4*	*1.32*