

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**A FRAMEWORK FOR THE TRAINING NEEDS OF WRITING
CENTRE STAFF SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT SELECTED UOTS IN KZN**

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September 2025



**A FRAMEWORK FOR THE TRAINING NEEDS OF WRITING CENTRE
STAFF SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTGRADUATE
STUDENTS AT SELECTED UOTS IN KZN**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in** Management Sciences
Specialising in
Human Resources Management
in the
Faculty of Management Sciences
at the Durban University of Technology

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SEPTEMBER 2025

APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the training and development needs of Writing Centre staff who supported postgraduate students at two Universities of Technology (UoTs) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Drawing on human capital, behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist, social learning, and humanistic learning theories, this research aimed to develop a contextually grounded framework for tutor preparation that would enable responsive, discipline-sensitive academic writing support. A parallel mixed-methods design was employed: qualitatively, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 6 Writing Centre practitioners and 10 postgraduate students, and focus-group discussions with 10 tutors; quantitatively, a closed-ended questionnaire was completed by 336 postgraduate students. Qualitative data was subjected to Thematic Content Analysis with the aid of NVivo version 15 software to identify prevailing training gaps and participants' experiences, while quantitative responses were analysed for frequencies and correlations among key Writing Centre support dimensions using SPSS version 28. The findings suggest that while Writing Centre staff are generally perceived as competent and supportive, there is a clear need for ongoing training and professional development. Findings revealed that existing tutor training had not been tailored to postgraduate needs and relied primarily on initial orientation, peer learning, role-play and reflective exercises. On the basis of these results, a conceptual training framework was constructed, encompassing foundational pedagogical theories, discipline-specific genre conventions, scaffolding, diversity awareness, reflective practice feedback strategies and ongoing professional development through mentorship and communities of practice. This study has demonstrated the transformative potential of well-trained tutors in addressing the challenges of postgraduate writing support and in contributing to the broader goals of higher education. As Writing Centres continue to evolve, the insights and recommendations from this study serve as a valuable resource for fostering excellence in academic support and empowering postgraduate students to achieve their full potential.

Keywords: Writing Centres; staff; training; training needs; postgraduate students; higher education; tutors; learning theories

DECLARATION

I, **Patience Mutsvairigwa**, student number 21143359, hereby declare that this thesis is my own, original work and has not been previously submitted to any other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 1 September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We make it in life because of God and the people who give us a chance, the people who believe in us, the people who never give up on us, the people who come, the people who go, and the people who stay.

Thank you to my PhD supervisors, Dr Nereshnee Govender and Professor Melanie Lourens. Your contribution to this work is immeasurable.

Thank you to my immediate family, to my Mum, my late Dad, my siblings, Martin, Petronella and Pamela. To my relatives, Mamncane Egnés, Shylet, Priscilla, to my late uncle Cephas, thank you for the ways in which you have contributed to my journey.

To all friends and colleagues at DUT and MUT, thank you - I am blessed to have known you, and to have crossed paths with you. To the HR Department staff, the boardroom crew and the secretary, thank you. A special thank you to all the DUT and MUT Writing Centre practitioners, tutors and students who granted me the time and opportunity to interview you as part of my study; I couldn't have done this without you. To the amazing DUT Writing Centre secretary Ms. Shahieda Kraft, thank you. To Mrs Lana-Ann Brady, your love is amazing; and to my GenEd Entrepreneurship family, thank you for your support. To Mrs Mercillene Mathews, ma'am, I love you plenty.

To my DCC family, from DCC Alhambra and DCC Jesus Dome, thank you for being my spiritual home. To my former flat mates, Vuvu and Bongie, thank you for five years together. To my sisterhood of SheUniversal - Blessing, Linah, Tafadzwa, Faith and Thelma - thank you so much ladies for this love and community that we have. To my Oga, Theophilus Adedokun, thank you for showing up at all the right times.

To Concern, my friend - to the moon and back. To friends who have become family, to Gilbert and Charlotte, I love and appreciate you. To Cynthia Moyo, thank you for allowing your home to become my safe haven.

Thank you all. God bless you...As I look towards my next... Whatever it is...

DEDICATION

To my Mum, Nomusa Tshuma; for all the dreams you had to sacrifice for my sake.

To my late Dad, Majoteni Mutsvairigwa, for being the pioneer of my educational journey.

To my siblings, Martin, Petronella and Pamela, for your love and moral support; see what the Lord has done.

To Dr Nereshnee Govender; for not giving up on me; this work is the culmination of your patience and forbearance with me.

To my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for always being there, Emmanuel – God with us; Jehovah Shammah – the Lord who is there. Always.

Oluwadara – the Lord is Good

Oluwadarasimi – the Lord has been Good to me

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ABBREVIATIONS

CoPs:	Communities of Practice
DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT:	Durban University of Technology
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
MKO:	More knowledgeable other
MUT:	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NDP:	National Development Plan
OJT:	On the Job Training
UoTs:	Universities of Technology
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

“Universities have prioritised support services aimed primarily at undergraduate students, with insufficient support at the post-graduate level, and this has negative implications for post-graduate students’ well-being, success and, ultimately, the knowledge-creating project in the South African higher education context.”

(Namakula and Ndaba 2024)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Writing Centres play a pivotal role in supporting postgraduate students by providing tailored academic writing assistance, fostering critical thinking, and enhancing academic writing practices. Writing Centres are student-focused, collaborative spaces within universities or colleges where students receive guidance on academic writing through one-on-one or group consultations with trained tutors (North 1984; Archer and Parker 2016; Namakula 2024). These centres emphasise dialogue, process-oriented learning, and student agency, aiming to help students become more confident, independent, and effective writers rather than simply correcting grammar or editing papers (Gustafsson and Ganobcsik-Williams 2016; Clarence 2019; Merkel 2020;). Furthermore, Writing Centres typically offer voluntary, non-evaluative support, fostering a non-judgmental environment for students at all levels and from diverse backgrounds (Merkel 2020; Namakula 2024). Writing Centres can therefore be regarded as dedicated spaces in educational institutions that support students’ development as writers, focusing on improving writers rather than just their writing (North 1984; Clarence 2019; Sefalane-Nkohl and Mtonjeni 2019).

The importance of Writing Centres cannot be over-emphasised. They help students understand academic conventions, develop critical thinking, and improve their writing processes, which are essential for academic success across disciplines (Drennan, 2017; Gustafsson and Ganobcsik-Williams, 2016; Merkel, 2020; Archer and Parker, 2016). Moreover, by focusing on the writer’s growth, Writing Centres build students’ confidence, sense of belonging, and academic identity (Namakula, 2024; Okuda and Anderson 2018; Handford *et al.* 2021; Archer and Richards 2011). Furthermore, Writing Centres provide safe, inclusive environments that encourage experimentation, dialogue, and the development of authorial voice, supporting students from diverse

linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Namakula 2024; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023; Clarence 2019; Govender 2023). With the rise in technological advances, Writing Centres have continued to evolve to address new challenges, such as digital writing, multimodal assignments, and academic integrity in the age of AI, ensuring their continued relevance (Moussu 2025; Bell and Hotson 2021; Govender 2023). They serve as hubs for writing support, faculty development, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, contributing to broader institutional goals of access, retention, and academic excellence (Drennan 2017; Archer and Parker 2016).

However, the effectiveness of Writing Centres largely depends on the competencies and preparedness of their staff, who must navigate the unique challenges faced by postgraduate students, particularly in the context of Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa. These institutions often cater to a diverse student population with varying academic backgrounds, research needs, and writing proficiencies, prompting the need for a specialised approach to staff training and development.

South African writing centre scholarship has made valuable contributions to understanding writing centre pedagogies, with studies focusing on multilingualism and language diversity, scaffolding academic literacies, first-year student transitions, theoretical approaches to tutor training, inclusive and socially just writing centre practices, and more recently, the implications of Artificial Intelligence for writing support (Clarence and McKenna 2017; Muna *et al.* 2019; Kadenge *et al.* 2019; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Khumalo and Reddy 2021; Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza, 2022; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023; Archer 2023; Mdodana-Zide and Mafugu 2023; Govender 2023; Namakula 2024). However, much of this body of work has been conducted at traditional universities or across multiple institutional contexts and has predominantly foregrounded undergraduate writing support. The absence of empirical research examining the training needs of Writing Centre tutors who support postgraduate students is particularly concerning given increasing institutional pressures on UoTs to improve postgraduate throughput and research productivity (Namakula and Ndaba 2024), thereby underscoring the need for a focused investigation into tutor preparedness for postgraduate writing support within these two institutions.

This study seeks to address the gap in understanding the specific training needs of Writing Centre staff, particularly tutors who support postgraduate students at two selected UoTs in Durban, namely the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). It explores postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff and the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students. By developing a comprehensive framework for staff training, this research aims to enhance the capacity of Writing Centres to meet the evolving demands of postgraduate education. In addressing the training needs of Writing Centre staff, this study seeks to enable the development and implementation of transformative support practices for postgraduate students, consequently contributing to the advancement of academic excellence and research output at the selected universities.

Historically, South African higher education was marred by the legacy of apartheid which, to a large extent, hindered students from 'black' communities from accessing and succeeding in universities (Badat 2010). Mzangwa (2019) laments the continued remains of the apartheid legacy in higher education especially in terms of marginalisation, race, and socio-economic status. A significant number of historically disadvantaged students face obstacles and challenges that make it difficult for them to thrive in universities. Such challenges include language, communication and writing difficulties, all of which stem from disparities in access to quality primary and secondary education (Adonis and Silinda 2021). The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 has put in place measures to address these challenges and furthermore predicted a 25% rise in the number of Masters and PhD students enrolled in South African universities by 2030 (National Planning Commission 2022). Carr and London (2019) state that the field of higher education has long acknowledged the practice of supplementing course instruction with other academic support resources to assist students with meeting academic standards and successfully completing their higher education degrees. The more universities that can invest in a wide variety of services, the more they will be able to satisfy the demands of student growth and learning, hence maintaining a high index of student satisfaction and lowering the level of university dropout rate (Boughey and McKenna 2016; Dipitso 2021). Ciobanu (2013) further states that among the services available to students, the most important are those which meet their academic, personal development and emotional needs. Academic writing, particularly

at a postgraduate level, remains the primary way to build new knowledge and contribute to the field of research. However, Zewotir, North and Murray (2015) note that South Africa is lagging behind other countries with regard to producing postgraduate students. More recently, Mphekgwana *et al.* (2020) cited in Namakula and Ndaba (2024) lament that South African higher education institutions continue to face challenges in improving postgraduate throughput and lowering attrition rates in order to meet the Department of Higher Education and Training's targeted 80 per cent success rate by 2030. According to Thakane (2020), postgraduate student throughput rates have long been a source of concern in South Africa's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Chankseliani, Qoraboyev and Gimranova (2020) assert that postgraduate students help to build a knowledge base for the country's economy through innovation and research. This further underlines the significance of ensuring that postgraduate students are supported in their academic journeys.

Consequently, a shift in the teaching and learning environment is required to generate graduates who are engaged citizens and capable of contributing to the well-being of the economy as well as social justice (Namakula and Ndaba 2024). The DUT and MUT Writing Centres are part of a larger community of teaching and learning and play an integral role in the provision of academic support services. The key focus of the Writing Centres at these universities is on one-on-one consultations between Writing Centre tutors, other academic staff, and students. The training of Writing Centre staff therefore becomes important in enabling staff to adequately support postgraduate students in their academic writing for success in universities. Furthermore, there is a need for structured, ongoing training in Writing Centres as the benefits accrued from the training can potentially have a positive impact on the academic support structures in the South African higher education landscape (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Aldohon 2021). As such, suitable learning theories for the training of Writing Centre support staff will be explored and discussed in this study. Conradie (2014) suggests that there is no one correct theory of learning, therefore this research aims to integrate the best of each theory to develop a framework that will contribute to enhancing the training and development of Writing Centre tutors to effectively support postgraduate students at UoTs in South Africa.

This introductory chapter begins by outlining the background and context of the study, showcasing the importance of Writing Centres in postgraduate development. Thereafter, the problem statement is provided as well as the research aim and objectives, and research questions that guide the study. The significance of the research is discussed, accentuating its potential to contribute to the improvement of Writing Centre practices and the overall quality of postgraduate education. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, ethical considerations and the structure of the thesis, preparing the way for subsequent chapters that delve into the theoretical framework, literature review, and empirical investigation.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Higher education institutions, as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), have raised concern about the increasing number of postgraduate students who do not complete their studies on time or drop out entirely (Badat 2019). Khauoe and Fore (2020) posit that despite a policy move by the DHET to increase student throughput rates, a substantial number of institutions in South Africa continue to have high drop-out rates. Research has shown that postgraduate students often take more than three years to complete their studies, consequently resulting in a high retention rate for universities (Botha 2018; Khauoe and Fore 2020; Saidi 2024). Furthermore, the South African Human Rights Commission highlights low student success rates as one of the challenges to the transformation and social integration in South African universities (SAHRC 2017). According to the Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, “transformation must be performed to...promote just pedagogies; broaden opportunities and increase success rates for black students...” (Goedgedacht Forum 2017: 3). Therefore, there is a need for universities to enable the development and implementation of transformative teaching and learning approaches (Filho *et al.* 2018: 288). Teaching and learning approaches need to be effective in catering for diverse students including those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Boughey and McKenna 2016; Lockett and Shay 2017; Mugambi 2017). As such, it is important for academic staff to be aware of and understand the needs of students in order to contribute to student success in HEIs.

Writing Centres have become a significant part of HEIs through supporting the teaching and learning agenda by enabling students to develop criticality in their writing and feel confident in their roles as lifelong learners. Richards, Lackay and Delport (2019: ix) explain that Writing Centres provide students with the constancy of a safe space, encouraging them to be active participants in their own learning. Writing Centres further enable students to craft their academic voice, develop their critical thinking and strengthen their academic writing. Therefore, Writing Centres are well-placed to contribute to the success of students in HEIs and developing well-rounded graduates and critical citizens that can make valuable contributions to society. Current higher education research often focuses mainly on the need to increase throughput rates and student success in higher education (Botha 2018; van Zyl, Dampier and Ngwenya 2020; Khuluve and Mathibe 2021) and does not adequately address academic support as a necessary tool in contributing to the university's agenda towards building the citizen scholar. As such, a review of academic support training and development programmes is needed to equip Writing Centre tutors with the powerful knowledge in working with postgraduate students. This will not only develop tutors who are postgraduate students themselves but, will also enhance their role in postgraduate student development and success.

In both MUT and DUT, Writing Centres provide structured academic literacy support to a diverse student body; however, existing tutor training models largely reflect pedagogical priorities historically associated with undergraduate support. As a researcher situated within the UoT context, a key concern was whether Writing Centre tutors at MUT and DUT are sufficiently trained to support postgraduate students who require advanced guidance in areas such as research argumentation, disciplinary conventions, theoretical positioning, and academic voice - particularly in multilingual and diverse academic contexts. Writing Centre tutors at these institutions are often postgraduate students or recent graduates who receive limited, short-term training that may prioritise surface-level writing concerns over the deeper epistemological and rhetorical demands of postgraduate research writing.

This gap in training is not unique to MUT and DUT but reflects a broader national discourse on the need for theoretically grounded and structured tutor development in South African Writing Centres. Govender and Ndadziyira (2023) argue for ongoing,

academic-literacies-based tutor training that equips tutors with a deeper understanding of their pedagogical role in facilitating student learning and transforming thinking (in a UoT context).

However, within the specific contexts of MUT and DUT, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence on how well current training prepares tutors to meet the intricate writing demands of postgraduate students nor how institutional expectations for postgraduate throughput and research outputs intersect with tutor preparedness. This disconnect raises questions about the effectiveness and relevance of current training approaches and highlights the need for a systematic investigation into the training needs of writing centre tutors who support postgraduate writers at these two UoTs.

This research aims to fill the gap in literature pertaining to the analysis of training and development needs of academic support staff supporting postgraduate students in HEIs in order to increase student success and throughput rates. This research is timely in that the National Development Plan (NDP) recommends that higher education institutions should double the percentage of their postgraduate degree holders by 2030 (NDP 2013). Moreover, the findings from this research can potentially augment strategies that contribute to postgraduate success in higher education.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research is to develop a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- Explore the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Analyse the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.

- Analyse postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Explore the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Develop an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN?
- What are the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students?
- What are the experiences of postgraduate students in consulting with Writing Centre staff?
- What is the relationship between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at the selected UoTs in KZN?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The work of the Writing Centre is essential to contributing to transformative teaching and learning practices in higher education (Archer 2008; Govender and Alcock 2020). Additionally, the Writing Centre has an essential role in promoting and sustaining inclusive postgraduate learning. Structured training is therefore important for enhancing Writing Centre tutors' understanding in fostering critical thinking and writing in their work with postgraduate students. This is aligned to the universities' strategic objectives, such as the ENVISION2030 in the case of DUT, one of whose tenets is "innovative curricula and research" (ENVISION2030 Strategic Map). Increasingly, South African universities are becoming more research-oriented following a global trend to increase research output (Universities South Africa 2019: 48). However, this increase in the quantity of research outputs must be balanced with quality. Therefore, focus on postgraduate students, who play a significant role in enabling universities to attain global world rankings, coupled with a focus on Writing Centre staff who play a significant role in guiding postgraduate students on their academic journey, is

important. This study contributes to understanding the training needs of academic support staff and how this can foster a responsive, transformative, and collaborative approach to supporting postgraduate students. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the explorations in this study will be a catalyst in the designing of training programmes that sufficiently equip Writing Centre staff with the powerful knowledge needed in their work with postgraduate students to achieve the desired outcome of contributing to postgraduate student success in higher education.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research is delimited to the higher education sector in South Africa, with particular focus on selected UoTs in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. As such, traditional universities are excluded from the study due to situational factors. Furthermore, the study includes academic support staff employed at the selected UoTs, namely DUT and MUT. The study acknowledges the existence and influence of other factors on the success of postgraduate students. However, the study limits itself to the contribution that academic support services, specifically the Writing Centres, play towards postgraduate student success. Writing Centre staff work with students from a wide range of disciplines and educational levels, from first year to postgraduate, as well as staff members (Farrel, O'Sullivan and Tighe-Mooney 2015; Nichols 2017). However, the scope of this research was confined to postgraduate students in various disciplines who consult with the Writing Centre as they play a significant role in contributing to universities' research output and, as a result, have an influence on university global rankings (Razeghi 2019). The study was further limited to postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre and thus have had sufficient experience with working with Writing Centre staff such as tutors and practitioners. Lastly, for this study, postgraduate students refer to students in the Advanced Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, Masters and Doctorate levels at both DUT and MUT.

1.8 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher brings a unique dual perspective shaped by her extensive involvement in UoT Writing Centres and her current role as a PhD student in the Department Human Resources Management. She served as a Writing Centre tutor at DUT from 2016 to

2021 and at the MUT Writing Centre from 2021 to 2024. This extensive experience provided her with deep insights into the dynamics of tutoring and the unique needs of postgraduate students. As a postgraduate student herself, the researcher also utilised the Writing Centre services and received support from her peers, gaining valuable assistance in her research and writing journey, particularly in areas such as literature review development. This dual perspective has given her a comprehensive understanding of both the challenges and rewards of tutoring, as well as the support needed by postgraduate students to navigate the challenges experienced during their academic journeys. Combining her passion for Human Resources Management and Writing Centre work, driven by this rich experience, the researcher aimed to explore the perspectives of Writing Centre tutors on their role in assisting postgraduate students, the training they believe they need, and the improvements that could be made to enhance the effectiveness of Writing Centre support for postgraduate students. In addition to exploring the perspectives of Writing Centre tutors, the researcher was equally interested in understanding postgraduate students' experiences of using the Writing Centre, the quality of the support they receive and the improvements they believe could enhance academic support. This multifaceted inquiry aimed to identify areas for growth and to ensure that Writing Centres continue to effectively support postgraduate students in developing their academic writing.

1.9 LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Mutsvairigwa, P; Govender, N and Lourens, M. 2025. Empowering Writing Centre Tutors: Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Training for Postgraduate Support in Universities of Technology. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Economics and Business Law (IJEBL)*, 14(Special Issue): 11-36.
- Presented a paper at the 2nd International Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Student Support conference hosted by UNISA from 05-07 May. The paper was titled "Navigating academic writing: Postgraduate students' experiences with Writing Centre support at selected UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa".

- Presented a paper at the Council on Higher Education (CHE) - Higher Education Conference, 2025 - Theme: The State of Quality of Higher Education in South Africa Three Decades into Democracy from 26 to 28 February 2025 at Birchwood Hotel. The paper presentation was titled “Quality Tutoring Practices in Higher Education: A Focus on the Role of Writing Centres in Supporting Postgraduate Students in South Africa”.

1.10 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

This section offers a preliminary review of literature on this study’s subject matter, namely Writing Centres and training and a more in-depth literature review is provided in the study’s two dedicated literature chapters, namely Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

1.10.1 The Writing Centre as an academic support space

In the academic environment, it is necessary for students to develop the necessary writing abilities required for success. However, a disproportionate percentage of students do not receive the guidance and support required in developing their writing to meet university standards (Alostath 2021). According to Schulze and Lemmer (2017), postgraduate students specifically, need to be guided in developing their academic writing and therefore Writing Centres are instrumental in working with students on developing their confidence in writing. Clarence (2019) states that the concept of a Writing Centre dates back to the 1970s in the United States of America (USA) and it has continued to evolve over the years into a space offering academic writing support for university students from first year level and beyond, across multiple disciplines. Archer and Richards (2011) state that in South Africa, the first Writing Centres were established in the 1990s, namely the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the University of the Western Cape (UWC), which are all traditional universities. These traditional universities began by looking at how transformation in higher education would occur in the post-apartheid era and the support required for students to succeed in higher education. As such, in understanding the work of the Writing Centre in South Africa, it is important to note that the history and role of the Writing Centre have been heavily influenced and shaped by

the apartheid legacy which as a result of Bantu education, resulted in unequal access to schooling for historically disadvantaged groups (Richards *et al.* 2019).

Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni (2019) state that several new Writing Centres were developed around the nation in the latter half of the first decade of the twenty-first century, particularly in former Technikons, now UoTs. The creation of these Writing Centres signalled an understanding that increasing access had not always resulted in increased success for many students, and that students across the institution required structured support and guidance to become effective and confident writers (Archer and Richards 2011). The Writing Centre therefore becomes important in assisting students to navigate the university space through supporting the development of student writing and student adoption of academic literacies.

An academics literacies approach enables the creation of opportunities for students and tutors to question the ways in which they are working with knowledge and demonstrating that knowledge through their writing (Clarence 2016; Govender and Alcock 2020). Lower expected academic literacy, according to Papashane and Hlalele (2014), limits students' access to epistemology and academic engagement. As a critical cognitive catalyst for the development of long-term learning ecologies, it is imperative that students' academic literacy be improved. The authors claim that creating a supportive atmosphere that aligns with students' learning styles is a key component of sustainable learning ecologies. Regardless of a student's educational or socioeconomic background, this setting should be open, dynamic, flexible, and adaptive to meet their intellectual, material, and spiritual needs (Papashane and Hlalele 2014). The Writing Centre is perfectly positioned to offer a space that supports the academic development of students in a friendly academic space where users develop their reading and academic writing.

The Writing Centre's justice-oriented pedagogies are intended at empowering students to grasp, engage, and criticise dominant discourses. Rambiritch (2018: 58) suggests that social justice is enacted "to empower students, give them a voice, develop them holistically, and contribute meaningfully to their learning as they find their way to academic success". The necessity to overcome the epistemic limitations that students who speak English as a second or third language primarily experience is what drives justice-oriented pedagogies. The core of the Writing Centre approach, according to

North (1984), is dialogue, and this exchange can enable students to participate in the discourses within their chosen fields. Additionally, according to Rambiritch (2018), the student is an equal participant in the Writing Centre consultation, and the discussion benefits much from his or her voice, ideas, and concerns. As a result, ontology and epistemology - two concepts that are closely related - are combined in Writing Centre pedagogies (Dall'Alba and Barnacle 2007). According to Archer and Parker (2016: 44), the core of Writing Centre pedagogy is the development of critical "beings" using debate and argument. Writing centres are therefore dialogic spaces that embrace the complex relationship between written and spoken language. Sefalane-Nkohla, and Mtonjeni (2019) therefore assert that the Writing Centre is a learning space which can nurture students to perform well academically.

The importance of sound academic writing practices for university students cannot be overstated, considering that success in higher education has been intrinsically tied to academic literacy. However, Khumalo and Reddy (2021) observe that the majority of students at South African higher education institutions, particularly UoTs, fail to master and maintain the requisite academic writing standards and this has been shown to impact their academic progress and throughput. Given the extent that such high levels of attrition are attributable to poor academic literacy, there is a need to create effective academic support programmes to mitigate the challenges experienced by postgraduate students. According to Hoon *et al.* (2019), postgraduate students are often faced with challenges during their thesis writing. Thus, Govender and Alcock (2020) posit that Writing Centres in universities are well-positioned to respond to students' reading and writing needs and challenges and support them in becoming more confident in their writing and in being able to use their academic voice in their writing. Writing Centre tutors are senior students in the institutions, i.e., postgraduate students from various faculties who are selected for their academic success as well as their willingness to assist their peers in developing their academic writing and as lifelong learners (Hill 2019). The Writing Centre is a collaborative learning space that offers writing companionship to staff and students using one-on-one and group consultations. The Writing Centre at the case study UoTs have tutors who guide, advise and support staff and students with, among other services, strategies for writing in different disciplines, proposals, dissertations as well as creative writing.

1.10.2 The role of training in Writing Centres

Training refers to a process of enhancing the knowledge, developing skills and altering employee attitudes, actions and abilities to enhance effectiveness whilst development involves employee growth and planning for the future (Divyaranjani and Rajasekar 2014). Training and development have an important role in human resource management and the organisation as a whole. Likewise, Writing Centres at universities can benefit from effective training and development which empowers its tutors and practitioners to successfully work with students in their academic development.

As noted by Bhattacharyya (2015), training and development reduces the redundancy of skills while at the same time ensuring that human resources are effectively utilised hence, increasing performance. Training and development must therefore be an ongoing activity, specifically in Writing Centres, if it is to be effective and responsive to students' needs. The benefits of training and development to the organisation include the improvement in organisational efficiency and effectiveness and can contribute to equipping employees with an enhanced ability to deal with a greater amount of responsibility (Janev, Hadzi-Vasileva and Sofijanovska 2018). Therefore, in the context of higher education, and the Writing Centre in particular, training is a process of nurturing, growing and developing tutors and practitioners' ability through continuous, structured training programmes. Janev *et al.* (2018) suggest that academic staff training and development can improve teaching and learning in higher education. The training of academic staff as well as academic support staff, such as those in the Writing Centre, is significant as it can provide students with the ability to adapt to changes in their learning environments, future workplace and the economy. The Writing Centre contributes to the development of a students' academic and social resilience through the affective nature of the work and contributes to students as developing human beings. Tutors at the selected UoTs receive training throughout the year and therefore this study will identify suitable learning theories appropriate for training Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students to address the possible gaps in order to provide a responsive Writing Centre practice and contribute to postgraduate student success.

1.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by a multi-theoretical framework that draws on Human Capital Theory, Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, Social Learning Theory, and Humanistic Theory to examine the training needs of Writing Centre tutors who support postgraduate students at selected Universities of Technology (UoTs) in KwaZulu-Natal. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how tutors acquire knowledge and skills, how learning occurs during writing consultations, and how institutional investment in tutor development contributes to postgraduate student success. According to Conradie (2014), there is no one right theory of learning, therefore this research aims to integrate the valuable aspects of each theory to develop a framework for conducting structured, well-aligned training in Writing Centres. Simpson and Richard (2019) state that theories are important for the training of Writing Centre tutors because they provide a framework for understanding how individuals learn and how instruction can be designed to support learning. Therefore, by understanding these theories, Writing Centre tutors and practitioners can proffer effective instructional strategies and interventions that meet the diverse needs of their students, including postgraduate students.

The five theories will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this study; however, the section below provides a brief overview of these theories.

1.11.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory posits that investment in education and training enhances individuals' skills, productivity, and overall performance, yielding benefits for both individuals and institutions (Mayilyan and Yedigaryan 2022; Akyıldız 2025). In the context of this study, the theory frames Writing Centre tutors as valuable institutional assets whose effectiveness depends on continuous professional development. The theory informed the study's focus on tutor training, competence, and professional development, positioning these as critical factors influencing the quality of postgraduate writing support. By applying Human Capital Theory, the study examines how structured tutor training contributes to improved Writing Centre services and, ultimately, postgraduate academic success at DUT and MUT.

1.11.2 Behavioural Theories

The theory of behaviourism concentrates on the study of overt behaviours that can be observed and measured. Clark (2018) postulates that behaviourism regards the mind as a 'black box' in the sense that reaction to input may be quantified, completely dismissing the notion of cognitive processes taking place in the mind. There are a number of key contributors to the development of behaviourism theory, such as Pavlov, Thorndike and Skinner (Le Roux 2018). A contribution made to education by behaviourism according to Masethe *et al.* (2017), is the behaviouristic belief that the teacher has the duty to create a favourable environment for learners. In case of positive and negative reinforcers, Skinner (1950) as referenced by Zhou and Brown (2015), highlights the importance of generalised reinforcers such as giving praise and points to students immediately after their performance of desired behaviours. This enables students to repeat the desired behaviour. Writing Centres provide feedback to students regarding their work and Yaman (2016) states that when feedback is given with the aim of enhancing writing performance, the assumption is that it evokes encouragement and reflection on the content and the process of writing. As such, mindful reception of the feedback in Writing Centre consultations can promote learning and improved performance. However, Behaviourist approaches are effective for teaching foundational writing skills, such as grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, by reinforcing correct responses and shaping behaviour through practice and feedback. These approaches to teaching and learning do not adequately engage students in the complex cognitive processes required for key university higher order skills such as critical thinking and writing, argumentation, and creative composition (Nurani 2022).

1.11.3 Cognitive Theories

The origins of cognitivism as a learning theory can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century (Mukhalalati and Taylor 2019). The inadequacy of the behaviourist tradition to explain why and how people make sense of and absorb information led to the transition from behaviourism to cognitivism (i.e., how the mental processes work). Edward Chase Tolman, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and German Gestalt psychologists all contributed to the major change away from behaviourism and toward the cognitive idea (Ferreira 2022). According to Adefolalu (2018), the focus of cognitive theories is on how the learner acquires, processes, stores, retrieves, and activates knowledge during the many stages of the learning process. The cognitive

school of thought views learning as an active process including the acquisition or restructuring of the cognitive structures through which humans acquire and retain information, and the learner as an active participant in the knowledge acquisition and integration process. Munje *et al.* (2018) state that in Writing Centres, peer tutors work side-by-side with students in the Writing Centre, literally and metaphorically, and work with them to question, challenge, assist, and advise them as they participate in the tough effort of developing their written work. Through the use of cognitive approaches in Writing Centres, students are better equipped to adapt their skills to different writing situations and audiences (Parsons *et al.* 2018).

1.11.4 Constructivist Theories

Constructivism is the current face of learning paradigms, and it is the foundation of many adult self-regulated and self-directed learning theories (Shunk 2018). Constructivists believe that knowledge is produced in the learner via the integration of learning activities with the learner's past experiences (Alanazi 2016). The fundamental concepts of this method were defined in part by Vygotsky and Piaget (Schunk 2012). According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) hypothesis, learning that happens through interaction between the learner and the 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) is of better quality and depth than learning that occurs alone (Shabane 2016). In the context of the Writing Centre, the tutor takes the position of the MKO who takes the student towards a level of independent performance through guiding and supporting the student in acquiring academic literacies and developing their writing (Clarence 2017). The ZPD therefore refers to the extra depth of understanding that students achieve when they receive guided support from a facilitator such as a Writing Centre tutor, compared to learning alone (Bhushan 2020). Al Zoubi (2018) further affirms that students' confidence in writing, as well as their creativity and self-awareness is increased when the constructivist strategies and approaches to learning are used.

1.11.5 Social Learning Theories

In social learning theories, people learn through observing someone they consider to be trustworthy and competent (Cilliers 2021). Albert Bandura established a well-known social learning theory that encompasses both cognitive and behavioural frameworks that include attention, memory, and motivation (Fryling 2011; McLeod 2016; Cilliers

2021). His learning theory proposes that humans learn in a social setting, with notions like modelling, observational learning, and imitation assisting learning. This is supported by Clarence (2017) who asserts that guidance and demonstration (modelled learning) play a significant role in the development of the student. In addition, Carstens and Rambiritch (2020) suggest that the Writing Centre provides a safe social space which provides the benefits of a collaborative approach to learning where the student learns through interaction with tutors.

1.11.6 Humanistic Theory

Humanistic Theory foregrounds the holistic development of the learner, emphasising dignity, empathy, agency, and self-actualisation (Wang 2024). Drawing on the work of theorists such as Carl Rogers (1957) and Abraham Maslow (1943), this perspective positions Writing Centres as humanising spaces where postgraduate students' identities, emotions, and lived experiences are recognised and respected. In this study, Humanistic Theory informed the focus on inclusivity, trust, and supportive tutor-student relationships, highlighting the importance of affective and relational dimensions in effective writing support.

Collectively, these theories informed the research design, data collection instruments, and analysis of this mixed-methods study. Human Capital Theory provided the overarching rationale for examining tutor training as an institutional investment, while Behaviourism and Cognitivism explained instructional and cognitive dimensions of tutoring practice. Constructivism and Social Learning Theory illuminated the interactive and relational processes that characterise effective postgraduate writing support, while Humanistic Theory underscored the importance of inclusive, ethical, and student-centred learning environments. Together, the theories underpin the conceptual framework of the study by explaining the relationships between tutor training, tutor competence, tutor-student interaction, and the effectiveness of Writing Centre services at DUT and MUT.

1.12 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The purpose of this section is to explain how the study is carried out, as well as how the data is gathered and analysed. It covers study design, data collection and questionnaire design, as well as data analysis technique.

1.12.1 Research design

The process of collecting, assessing, analysing, and reporting data for a study is known as research design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017). Furthermore, according to Punch (2017), research design encompasses all aspects of planning and conducting a study, from identifying the issue to summarising and disseminating the results. In order for the researcher to get relevant data that addresses the research questions, the research design must be in line with the aims and research questions of the study (Dornyei 2017).

1.12.2 Research philosophy

This study employs a pragmatism paradigm to capture the experiences of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students. Pragmatism is a research philosophy that focuses on solving real-world problems and treating methods as tools chosen for their usefulness, not their ideology (Kelly and Cordeiro 2020; Gillespie *et al.* 2024). It is widely used to justify and guide mixed methods research, where qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined in one coherent design. In mixed methods research, Elgeddawy and Abouraia (2024) suggest that pragmatism provides a flexible, problem-focused philosophy: it legitimates using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, guided by the research questions, context, and desired real-world impact, rather than by allegiance to any single paradigm. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with quantitative survey data from postgraduate students. Given the research problem - understanding the training needs of Writing Centre tutors in supporting postgraduate students - a single-method approach would not sufficiently capture the complex, context-dependent realities of Writing Centre practice. Pragmatism therefore provides the philosophical foundation for integrating these methods, allowing the researcher to explore both the lived experiences of Writing Centre staff and students (qualitative) and the patterns and relationships between variables (quantitative).

1.12.3 Research approach

This study used the mixed-method research approach combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Morgan (2017), one of the most basic choices the researcher is likely to face is between using the qualitative research method or quantitative research method, or a combination of the two (known as the mixed-method approach). Using the mixed-method approach was most relevant to this study as it enabled the researcher to utilise the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and to have a comprehensive understanding of the topic as well as a depth of data generation. Quantitative research involves using statistics to outline, analyse, and resolve various issues (Creswell 2019). To make sense and be meaningfully relevant, these figures must, nevertheless, make sense in the context of other numerical and non-numerical facts. According to Kumar (2011), quantitative research gathers data using time-consuming tools like organised interviews or questionnaires as well as extensive survey research. Even though this method of research involves a lot of participants, interaction with them happens much more quickly than it would with a qualitative research approach. This study used the quantitative approach in order to collect data from postgraduate students using a structured closed-ended questionnaire in line with the objectives of the study. Qualitative research is used to obtain insights into participants' experiences, feelings and thoughts (Sutton 2015). This study was therefore well-suited to employ a qualitative approach as it sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of Writing Centre staff to develop a framework for the training and development of Writing Centre staff as they support postgraduate students with their academic writing and with their research journeys.

1.12.4 Target population

Zikmund, D'Alessandro, Winzar, Lowe, and Babin (2014) emphasise the importance of a well-defined population in order to produce excellent research findings. Specifically, Struwing and Stead (2018) define the target population as the combined total of all the elements one is focusing on in research. In light of the aforementioned, for the qualitative aspect of this study which included semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the target population comprised 52 Writing Centre staff (senior practitioners and tutors) and 1098 postgraduate students from both DUT and MUT. For the quantitative component of this research which focuses on questionnaire

responses, the target population comprised the same 1098 postgraduate students at both DUT and MUT who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre. A detailed breakdown and calculation of the target population numbers is provided in Chapter 4 of this research.

1.12.5 Sampling

Sampling is the practice of selecting a portion of a population to study in order to make judgments about the entire population (Cooper and Schindler 2011). When compared to total coverage, sampling enables more informed testing, monitoring, and processing of the data. There are two types of sampling, namely probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling, according to Sarantakos (2017) is the process of selecting respondents based on the probability principle and comprises four methods, namely simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified random sampling, and cluster sampling. In non-probability sampling, not every member of the population has a known or equal chance of inclusion; samples are chosen by researcher judgment or accessibility rather than random selection (Berndt 2020; Mukti 2025). Typical methods of non-probability sampling are convenience, purposive/judgmental, quota, self-selection and snowball sampling (Berndt 2020; Wang 2024). The researcher used non-probability convenience and purposive sampling for the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study respectively. This is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4.

1.12.6 Selection of sample size

The sample size for the quantitative component (questionnaire for participants) of the study was calculated using Sekaran's (2003: 294) "Sample Size for a Given Population" table. The total sample size for both DUT and MUT respondents was therefore 364 respondents who comprised postgraduate students who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre. According to Dattalo (2009), a larger sample size helps the researcher to collect exploratory, in-depth data from a greater segment of the population while minimising response bias. The sample size for the qualitative component of this research was not statistically calculated; however it was determined by scholarly guidelines which account for data saturation in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thus, 6 semi-structured interviews with Writing Centre practitioners, 10 semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students and focus

group discussions of 14 Writing Centre tutors were conducted. This is further explained in Chapter 4.

1.12.7 Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria, namely inclusion and exclusion criteria, determine and define the characteristics and parameters of the members of the target population who will be considered eligible or ineligible to participate in a research study (Nikolopoulou 2022). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this research are outlined below:

(a) Inclusion criteria

Writing Centre staff: Participants had to be employed as staff members in the Writing Centres of the selected UoTs in Durban, KZN at the time of the data collection.

Postgraduate students: only those postgraduate students (from Advanced Diploma to Doctoral level) who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre were included in the study.

Availability and willingness to participate: Participants had to be available and willing to dedicate time to engage in the research activities, such as interviews, surveys, or training sessions, as required at the time of this study.

(b) Exclusion criteria

Non-Writing Centre staff: individuals who were not directly employed as Writing Centre staff members were excluded from the study.

Postgraduate students: Students who had not utilised the services of the Writing Centre were excluded from the study.

1.13 DATA COLLECTION

This study analysed the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students at three levels, namely senior practitioners; Writing Centre (tutors); and postgraduate students. Qualitative data collection was conducted face-to-face and via MS Teams for interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative data collection was facilitated using Microsoft forms. Parallel data collection was used in this study to gather qualitative and quantitative data at the same time.

1.13.1 Interviews

Part of the qualitative data collection aspect of this research involved the use of semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with four (4) and two (2) Writing Centre practitioners at DUT and MUT respectively. Writing Centre practitioners at these institutions are permanent staff members who oversee the operational and pedagogical functioning of writing centres, including the training, management, and support of Writing Centre tutors. Permission to conduct semi-structured interviews from the practitioners was sought through the sending of a formal email request inviting them to participate in this study. This was after permission to conduct research had been obtained from the two respective institutions' institutional research committees. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the respective Writing Centre offices of the practitioners according to their willingness and availability. The primary costs to the researcher related to transport to travel to and from the interview locations at both DUT and MUT; no financial costs were incurred by respondents. The semi-structured interviews included questions on the Writing Centres' current training programme, and the procedures and anticipated future training needs, particularly in terms of working with postgraduate students.

The researcher further conducted semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students from both DUT and MUT who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre. For these postgraduate student interviews, the number of participants was ten (10), five for each selected UoT due to saturation of data (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018). The recruitment process involved students being drawn from the database in the WCOOnline platform used at both Writing Centres. The WCOOnline platform was used to send out emails to postgraduate students who had consulted with the Writing Centre as the system records students who have used the Writing Centre. The postgraduate students were emailed a request for participation in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the willingness and availability of participants.

The interviews with Writing Centre practitioners and postgraduate students were also semi-structured, enabling the researcher to collect as much detailed data as possible in line with the research objectives and questions. The semi-structured interviews were approximately 30-40 minutes each. These were conducted in the Writing Centre offices of both DUT and MUT Writing Centres. The researcher used a notepad to take notes,

as advocated for by Creswell (2013) who advises that notes serve as a useful backup in case of the recording failing. Furthermore, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher with the aid of MS Word Transcribe. The researcher took time to carefully read through the transcribed data to ensure accuracy of the data collected. Transcription was done to ensure the accurate capturing of relevant, important and useful themes, patterns or specific information for the data analysis process for synthesis with the research questions.

1.13.2 Focus groups

The researcher conducted two (2) focus group discussions (one for tutors at the DUT Durban Campus and one for tutors at the MUT Main Campus) of ten (10) and four (4) participants respectively. Writing Centre tutors were recruited by email invitation to participate in the focus groups. The emails contained a letter of information and consent, outlining the purpose of the research. Tutors who expressed interest to participate in the focus groups formed part of the focus group. In addition, the researcher was guided by a moderator guide. According to Taylor (2020), the research instrument used for focus group discussions is typically a moderator guide. This guide outlined the key topics and questions that were to be covered during the discussion and helped to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences. In this study, the guide included questions such as: “What components of training have worked well in you supporting the development of postgraduate students.”

1.13.3 Questionnaire

A structured closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre to gather their responses pertaining to the research topic. The researcher used the WOnline platform to email postgraduate students a MS Forms link to the research questionnaire, together with the letter of information and consent, requesting postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre to participate in the study.

1.14 PILOT STUDY

To determine the feasibility of the methods used, preliminary work in the form of a pilot study was conducted. According to Rhodes (2014), before using a research instrument in data collecting, it is critical to analyse it. Piloting a research instrument necessitates a thorough examination of each question's intelligibility and connotation as perceived by participants. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) mention that the primary goal of a pilot study is to ensure that the population sample understands the researcher's intended questions, and that they can respond expressively. The purpose of the pilot study conducted for this current study was to test the research instruments, not to produce generalisable findings. Thus, the researcher sought to have just sufficient participants to reveal issues with clarity, flow, timing and relevance of the research instruments in line with the objectives of the study.

According to Mumba (2023), there is no codified way of determining the sample size for piloting research instruments. Therefore, for this research and also in consideration of data saturation as advised by Rahimi and Khatooni (2024), the sample of the interview schedule for Writing Centre Practitioners was piloted on five (5) academic support staff from each (3 from DUT and 2 from MUT) who do not form part of the study's targeted respondents. For the postgraduate interview schedule, the pilot was conducted on 5 students (3 and 2 from DUT and MUT respectively) who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre but did not form part of the study's respondents. Both pilot studies were used to identify any necessary modifications and make improvements to the questions in the final research instruments.

The researcher also conducted a pilot test for the focus group discussions by selecting a small number (5) of respondents (3 and 2) academic support tutors DUT and MUT respectively) who are similar to the intended focus group participants and invite them to participate in a trial discussion. Based on the feedback received, the researcher did not make any significant changes to the moderator guide as it proved effective in length and other aspects for achieving the research objectives. Finally, a pilot test was also conducted on the structured closed-ended questionnaire for postgraduate students. The questionnaire was pilot tested on 30 randomly selected postgraduate students who would not form part of the study respondents in order to identify potential issues

with the wording, flow, and clarity of the questions as well as to ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability.

1.15 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability were measured for the quantitative component of the research which comprised a structured closed-ended questionnaire. According to Sarantakos (2017), validity tells the researcher if the measurement is exact and correct and if the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. While Maree (2017) claims that reliability pertains to the consistency or repetition of a measure or instrument, Neuman (2018) emphasises that validity implies truthfulness.

For the quantitative aspect of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot test to ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument through resolving any shortfalls in the questionnaire such as unclear questions. Also, the researcher sought the services of a qualified quantitative research statistician to evaluate the quality of the questions in the structured closed-ended questionnaire. The research instrument was assessed against the study's research objectives. Feedback was received from the statisticians with recommended changes based on their expertise which were then implemented in the final structured closed-ended questionnaire. After the pilot study, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient for the overall scale was 0.948, indicating strong internal consistency and supporting the validity of the instrument in capturing the key dimensions of the Writing Centre services as perceived by the postgraduate students. This is explained in further detail in Chapter 6.

1.16 RIGOUR AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Ensuring rigour and trustworthiness is critical in qualitative research, particularly when exploring complex social phenomena such as the training needs of Writing Centre tutors supporting postgraduate students. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical measures of validity and reliability, qualitative research prioritises credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish confidence in the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These criteria were applied throughout the qualitative

component of this study, which involved semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students and focus group discussions with Writing Centre tutors at DUT and MUT.

1.17 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed for both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of this study. A convergent parallel design was used to collect and analyse data concurrently. According to Demir and Pismek (2018), a convergent parallel design requires that the researcher simultaneously conducts the quantitative and qualitative components in the same stage of the research process, weigh the approaches equally, analyse the two components independently, and interpret the findings jointly. Following the completion of both analyses, the results were compared, and conclusions drawn.

For the qualitative aspect of this research, the data was analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA) due to the qualitative and interpretive nature of the research. The first step in the analysis was to code the data into meaningful units, which were followed by a recursive process of finding major themes, patterns, and categories informed by the literature and the theoretical frameworks using version 15 NVivo software. Greater detail of this process is provided in Chapter 5.

Closed-ended structured questionnaire responses were collected to produce a composite data set for the quantitative element of this research. Responses were analysed using the most recent version 28 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. The use of the SPSS software allowed for the use of suitable statistical tests such as descriptive and inferential statistics for empirical analysis.

1.18 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gatekeepers' permission to conduct the research was sought from the relevant institutional research ethics committees of the selected UoTs. Once permission had been granted, a letter of informed consent was received from the institutions giving the researcher the approval to engage in the research. The intended participants were invited to participate in the research through formal emails. The researcher provided a

letter of information and consent to the respondents to make them aware of the nature, purpose and objectives of the study. The letter introduced the researcher and explained the value of participants' opinions in terms of the research focus area, so that they could feel free to express themselves. Furthermore, the letter explained the voluntary nature of participation and the respondents' freedom to withdraw from the study at any given time. The respondents' informed consent was obtained before they participated in the research. In addition, the researcher provided the respondents with a cover letter to explain the procedural issues to be followed during the research. Anonymity was ensured using pseudonyms for the participants, however, the actual names of the departments from which the participants come from were used. With respect to confidentiality, participants were assured that their responses are confidential and would be used strictly for research purposes. Furthermore, participants were free to ask questions for clarity. In addition, data collected for this study was stored in a secure place only known to the supervisor and the researcher.

For the qualitative component, digitally recorded voice files (of interviews and focus group discussions) through the use of a voice recording application, was stored in MP3 format and the transcriptions in password protected Microsoft Word documents. Physical copies such as notes taken during focus groups and interviews were stored securely in a locked cabinet when not in use and accessible only to the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years before being disposed of. Physical data will be destroyed through shredding, and the researcher will physically delete and deactivate the voice recording application and also delete the Microsoft Word file documents.

1.19 STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTERS

This research study consists of seven (7) chapters as outlined below:

Chapter One: Introduction and background to the study

This chapter introduced the research and provided the problem statement, research objectives and questions, a summary of the literature reviewed and research methodology of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – the place of the Writing Centre in higher education

This first chapter of the literature review examines various secondary sources on Writing Centres in higher education, including their history from an international and local perspective. The chapter further provides a discussion on the role and importance of academic support staff, particularly Writing Centre tutors and practitioners in improving students' academic success in higher education institutions such as the selected UoTs.

Chapter Three: Literature Review – the role of training in Writing Centres

The second literature chapter focuses on building a theoretical framework by reviewing literature pertaining to training, with a particular focus on the different learning theories used in and suitable for capacitating Writing Centre staff, namely, behavioural, cognitivist, constructivist and humanistic social learning theories.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

This chapter explains in detail the research methodology and design that was used. This includes the tools and techniques used to collect data from the participants, as well as issues of validity, reliability and ethics.

Chapter Five: Qualitative data analysis and discussion

The researcher will present, analyse and discuss the qualitative data collected through interviews with Writing Centre practitioners and postgraduate students as well as focus group discussions with Writing Centre tutors at the two selected UoTs.

Chapter Six: Quantitative data analysis and discussion

Chapter Six is an analysis and discussion of the quantitative data collected through the structured closed-ended questionnaire from postgraduate students at the two selected UoTs. The chapter also provides graphical and tabular illustrations of the findings.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion, recommendations and the framework formulation

The researcher will make conclusions based on the empirical findings and thereafter provide recommendations based on empirical analysis. This chapter proposes a

framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at the two selected UoTs. The framework was constructed by the researcher based on the extensive literature review conducted, and the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The chapter concludes with directions for future research.

1.20 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study and provided the aim and objectives. It explored the important role played by Writing Centres in supporting the development of postgraduate students who face complex and unique academic writing challenges. This chapter has demonstrated that postgraduate students require specialised support. This support hinges on the effective training of Writing Centre staff, an area that remains underexplored in higher education literature. This study therefore aims to address a significant gap in the specific training needs of tutors who work with postgraduate students. This will contribute to the enhancement of Writing Centre practices and the development of postgraduate students.

This chapter outlined the research problem which underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the competencies required by Writing Centre tutors and to address current gaps in training programmes. Regarding the research methods, the chapter introduced the research paradigm and approach employed to gather comprehensive data relating to the study. The study's theoretical grounding comprises six theories, namely, human capital, behavioural, cognitive, constructivist, social learning and humanistic theories which provide a foundation for understanding how tutors develop their expertise and how their training can be tailored to meet the unique needs of postgraduate student writing support.

The findings from this study will inform the development of targeted training programmes that can enhance the practices and confidence of Writing Centre tutors, thereby improving the quality of writing support provided to postgraduate students. Subsequent chapters build on the literature review, research methodology and empirical findings to provide an in-depth understanding of and develop a framework on the training needs of Writing Centre tutors in postgraduate student context. The

ensuing chapter is the first literature review chapter, which focuses on the place of the Writing Centre in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PLACE OF THE WRITING CENTRE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

"We don't give students their voice – they already have voices, but we help them to develop their voices and work out ways of being heard"

(Richards 2021).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to provide postgraduate students with supportive spaces to be able to succeed while on their academic journeys. Writing Centres have become integral parts of HEIs worldwide, including in South Africa, serving as vital hubs of academic support while fostering the development of students' academic writing practices. Writing Centre tutors within these spaces therefore have a key role in actively supporting and guiding postgraduate students through the often-challenging postgraduate journey. Supporting and improving the student experience from initial contact through graduation is crucial to success in higher education today for both the student and the institution.

The previous chapter provided an introduction and background to the study. This chapter focuses on the role of university Writing Centres in supporting the development of postgraduate students. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the place of Writing Centres in higher education. It offers a discussion on the role and the importance that academic support staff, particularly Writing Centre tutors and practitioners play in improving students' academic success in higher education institutions such as the selected UoTs.

This chapter begins by offering an overview of the South African higher education landscape to provide context of postgraduate education in South Africa and academic support services such as Writing Centres. The chapter first examines the historical and socio-political factors that have shaped South African higher education, highlighting the legacy of apartheid and its impact on access, equity, and quality. In situating Writing Centres within the broader landscape of higher education, this chapter lays the foundation for the subsequent exploration of tutor training needs in Chapter Three. The chapter provides the literary and contextual ground necessary to understand the

challenges and opportunities encountered by Writing Centre tutors, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and targeted training programmes. The chapter also provides a history and background of Writing Centres from an international perspective and draws focus on the establishment and growth of Writing Centres in South Africa. This research delineates the evolution of Writing Centres and analyses their function, accentuating the universal principles that govern Writing Centre pedagogy, while also illuminating the distinct problems and opportunities encountered by Writing Centres in South Africa.

Through the current literature review, the study aims to underscore the importance of Writing Centres in supporting postgraduate students and to emphasise the importance of equipping tutors with the competencies and knowledge needed to excel within the Writing Centre context.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The South African higher education landscape has evolved significantly over the years. The major influences on the development of South African education were the spread of European influence and colonialism, and the impact of the rise and fall of the apartheid state. According to Cloete (2014), transformation in higher education in South Africa in the first 20 years of democracy was strongly shaped by post-apartheid pressures. Similarly, Chiramba and Ndofirepi (2023) add that in the context of South Africa's complex historical legacy of inequality, access to higher education and academic success have become pressing concerns for governments, institutions, and scholars globally. These influences have had a major impact on the access and equity of South African education, issues which are still pertinent today.

In a 2002 report by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal narrated that the origins of the current institutional structure of the higher education system can be traced back to the apartheid era, and to Hendrik Verwoerd's vision of 'separate but equal development' (DHET 2002). According to the Minister, this was achieved through the enactment of the Universities Extensions Act in 1959 whose purpose was firstly to ensure that historically white institutions served the educational, ideological, political, cultural,

social and economic needs of white South Africa, and secondly, to establish institutions that would produce a pliant and subservient class of educated black people to service the fictional homelands of apartheid's imagination. Thus, the system was initially designed to serve the educational, ideological, political, cultural, social, and economic needs of White South Africa. The apartheid legacy continues to burden the higher education system, which remains fragmented along racial lines. As such, in understanding the South African higher education landscape, which provides the context in which this study is centred, it is imperative to provide an overview of the history and development of higher education in South Africa. This is expounded on below.

2.2.1 Historical insight and challenges in the higher education landscape in South Africa

The National Party victory in 1948 hastened a move from segregation to apartheid in all areas of life, with education being no exception. Apartheid education can be divided into two distinct periods (Johnson 2022). The period 1948-73 was characterised by Verwoerd's policies of 'Grand Apartheid,' which sought to relegate all Africans (the term used at that time to mean both Bantu and Coloured people) to the status of permanent manual labourers, with education providing trained manpower for the White economy (Bronkowski 2024). African education was based on the theories of neo-Calvinist philosophy, which espoused that God had ordained different roles for different race groups. According to Makubalo (2021), this was to be reflected in educational provision for different race groups, with Africans receiving an education that was designed to provide them with skills to serve the needs of the exclusive White society. This ultimately resulted in a dual education system with disparities in funding and facilities that were separate but far from being equal. Strong, Odendaal and Kelly (2022) assert that the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was a turning point in that it entailed a specific curriculum for Africans with the aim being complete 'detribalisation.' This meant that students were to be educated in their mother tongue up to a certain point after which a second language would be introduced, and the rest of their education imparted in that second language.

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, the landscape of education changed dramatically in South Africa. De Villiers (2023) reflects that the legacy of the previous

unjust educational systems left the country with major imbalances in resource distribution and attendance. Bunting (2006) confirms that South Africa's democratic government inherited 36 unequal institutions of higher learning from the apartheid government in 1994. This landscape created by social inequality and colonialism, especially at historically white universities, compromised equity and academic outcomes for students (Badat 2010; Asea 2022). Progress has been slow, yet significant changes have been made in addressing the imbalances of the past, and the current educational system is reflective of this work (Adonis and Silinda 2021). Today, education, training, and youth development is a sector that enjoys the largest allocation in the national budget.

South Africa has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of its higher education system in the past twenty-five years. There has been a significant increase in student enrolments in higher education since 1994 (Muswede 2017; Matsolo, *et al.* 2018). This massive increase can be attributed to policy changes in the mid-1980s which opened the doors of higher education to a much broader sector of the population than the tiny elite that was the focus of the apartheid system (Hall 2023). This new policy direction was given added impetus by the mid-1990s when the post-apartheid government decided that one way to redress racially discriminatory policies would be to increase access to higher education, particularly for Black students (Heleta and Dilraj 2024). By 2000, Van Schalkwyk *et al.* (2022) narrate that several universities had doubled their student enrolments and a number of technikons (including the Durban University of Technology and Mangosuthu University of Technology) and comprehensive universities were established to cater specifically for increased Black participation. Notably, since 2000, South African students' enrolment has grown at a rate of 4.2% per year on average (Matsolo *et al.* 2018). This figure considers the negative growth which took place between 2004 and 2005 during the merger of higher education institutions. In 2004, the Further Education and Training (FET) sector was brought into the higher education system (Maloney 2021), and this has further expanded opportunities for higher education access. Subsequently, between 2005 and 2009, there was a noticeable decline of up to 2.3% per annum. Unexpectedly, between 2010 and 2011 the figure increased up to 6.2% with 55 000 additional students registered in the system (Steyn and De Villiers 2006).

Three main sources of data on student enrolment at higher education institutions in South Africa are the annual Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data collection (Lemmens *et al.* 2021), the first-year student surveys conducted among graduates by individual institutions, and the national labour force surveys conducted by Statistics South Africa (CHE 2024). The primary function of the HEMIS data collection is to inform the Department of Education about the staffing and student profiles at South African universities and Technikons (Evans and Yu 2021). This is done through the aggregation of information from individual student records collected by institutions for the purposes of state subsidies and through the completion of an aggregated table with similar information on staff (Molokeng and van Belle 2021). Data collected on individual students include age, gender, population group, and province of origin, as well as enrolment status, method of study, and field of study (Evans and Yu 2021). This includes details of undergraduate and honours degree students and some details of post-graduate students.

Today, South Africa's higher education landscape is characterised by three types of universities (Webbstock 2024). Firstly, traditional universities, which offer a range of qualifications across various disciplines; universities of technology, which focus on vocational and applied sciences; and comprehensive universities which offer a combination of both academic and vocational qualifications. According to Professor Ahmed Bawa of Universities South Africa, the private higher education sector in South Africa is relatively small compared to the public sector, comprising just above 20% of total enrolments in higher education in South Africa (Dlamini 2025).

Over the past two decades, the higher education sector in South Africa has experienced significant expansion, marked by increased enrolments, diversification of institutions, and greater participation from previously underrepresented groups (Barbosa *et al.* 2018; Matadi and Uleanya 2022; Sithole 2024). With growing enrolments, the profile of students accessing higher education has changed (Walker *et al.* 2023) resulting in the need not only to increase student academic literacies but also to diversify the modes of teaching and support. Along with this, pressure has come from various role players (government, industry, parents, and students) for institutions of higher learning to produce qualified graduates, often narrowly defined as those who meet the needs of industry (Saidi 2024). In response to what has become a complex

social justice issue, many students who enter higher education institutions today, particularly those from previously disadvantaged communities, are not necessarily coming into university environments that are academically user-friendly (Chiramba and Ndofirepi 2023). As a result, in South Africa, Muswede (2017) argues that the data pertaining to higher education trends in South Africa reveals a concerning statistic with approximately half (50%) of students who enrol in higher education institutions leaving within the first three years. An even more alarming figure is that around 30% of these students drop out during their very first year. Inadvertently, these dropout rates continue to postgraduate levels.

Success in learning often requires students to negotiate unfamiliar academic and disciplinary discourse communities. Students often experience difficulties in accessing required information and constructing and presenting new knowledge in ways valued in a particular discipline (Chiramba and Ndofirepi 2023). This presents students with the issue of acculturation into these communities often without appropriate levels of language and cognitive academic skills, especially for those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, which is the context in which most students in the selected UoTs of this study are from. The following section provides a brief overview of the two selected UoTs in this study, namely, the Durban University of Technology and Mangosuthu University of Technology.

2.2.2 Durban University of Technology as a Higher Education Institution in South Africa

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) was formed as a result of the merger in April 2002 of two prestigious technikons, ML Sultan and Technikon Natal (Manjeya 2021; Funeka and Govender 2022; Daweti and Munyeka 2024). ML Sultan originated in 1918 as the Technical School (Tshango 2022). Technikon Natal only had a short-lived existence as a university when it was incorporated into the Durban Institute of Technology in 2001. However, within a year this decision was reversed and on 1 April 2002 the institution was granted university status under its present name, Durban University of Technology (DUT). This finally saw the birth of DUT as it is known today. DUT has multiple campuses, has an extensive history of association and partnership with the wider world, in which the exchange of knowledge and experience and

integrated teaching and learning practices, technological training and research is embedded. Currently, the university has over 34 400 students (DUT 2025).

2.2.3 Mangosuthu University of Technology as a Higher Education Institution in South Africa

Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) was founded in 1979 (Tuffs 2024). It is located on the outskirts of Durban, South Africa in Umlazi Township (Matumba 2021; Thembane 2023). It was named after Mangosuthu Buthelezi (founder of the Inkatha Freedom Party), a farsighted leader and an activist for higher education and the Minister of Education in the KwaZulu Bantustan at that time (Matumba 2021; Universities of South Africa 2024). Originally known as the Umlazi Technikon, the institution underwent a significant transformation in 2007 when it was rebranded as Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) (Cupido 2022). The renaming was done to recognise Buthelezi's contributions to the university. The university's vision reiterates its commitment to playing a leading role in the development of the southern African region. The vision holds that external partnerships, including those that involve other higher education institutions, the private sector, and the state, are crucial to the growth and development of the university.

It is this history of access to educational opportunity by people who have had to aspire, strive for and achieve sociopolitical improvement against the odds imposed by the various forms of Apartheid in a complex and divided society, that forms the backdrop to the evolution of a dedicated facility for historically disadvantaged people to access education in the fields of Science and Technology in the Durban area. MUT has three faculties, namely Engineering, Management Sciences and Natural Sciences (Tshibangu and Tshibangu 2023; Gumede, Sithole and Gumede 2023). Over four decades later, MUT has a total population of about 14,500 students with a gender parity of 50/50 (MUT Institutional Audit 2022; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023). Nearly 90% of the university's student body is housed on campus and in 43 outsourced residences (Talloires Network of Engaged Universities 2024).

2.3 ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The need for comprehensive academic support has become increasingly evident as the academic landscape continues to evolve and become more challenging. In response to this growing demand, universities in South Africa have implemented various initiatives to provide effective academic support for postgraduate students (Awuzie and Emuze 2017; Nayager 2018; van Vuuren and Smith 2024). These initiatives aim to address the unique needs of postgraduate students and offer them the resources, guidance, and tools necessary to excel in their studies (Saidi 2024). One such initiative is the establishment of specialised support centres within universities. These centres serve as a hub for postgraduate students, offering a wide range of services, including individualised academic counselling sessions, workshops on research methodologies, writing assistance, and access to relevant research materials (Lavhelani *et al.* 2020). By providing a centralised space for postgraduate students to seek assistance, these support centres create a supportive and conducive environment for their academic growth.

Students, more pertinently postgraduate students, need academic, social and welfare support while on their academic journeys. As such, South African Higher Education has recognised the significance of academic support for postgraduate students (CHE 2020). These students, who have embarked on a journey of advanced education, require tailored assistance to navigate the complexities that come with pursuing higher levels of study. Academic support services have played a significant role in supporting students in their academic journeys at universities (Lumadi 2021; Tiroyabone and Strydom 2021; Chauke 2025). According to Sikhulo and Lekhetho (2019), student academic support services are seen as key components of many academic systems as a result of their role in contributing to student success. Furthermore, Nsamba (2017) adds that in addition to their academic success, academic support services contribute to the quality of students' learning experience. Consequently, current research shows an increase in the provision of student support services in recent years (Shabani and Maboe 2021; Lumadi 2021). Additionally, universities have recognised the importance of fostering a sense of community and collaboration among postgraduate students (Woldegiorgis and Chiramba 2025). To achieve this, regular seminars, conferences, and networking events should be provided to enable students to engage with their

peers and academic staff (Naidoo and Van Schalkwyk 2021). These platforms not only facilitate knowledge sharing and critical thinking but also provide opportunities for mentorship and guidance from experienced academics and researchers.

Furthermore, technological advancements have paved the way for innovative forms of academic support. Universities now offer online platforms and resources specifically designed for postgraduate students. These platforms provide access to e-books, scholarly articles, research databases, and online forums where students can interact, seek advice, and collaborate with their peers. The integration of technology in academic support has made assistance more accessible and convenient for postgraduate students, enabling them to overcome geographical barriers and engage in meaningful academic dialogue.

The academic support practices vary and may include learning centre resources, subject-specific tutorials, academic skills development courses, and programmes tailored for students from diverse schooling backgrounds (Paideya and Bengesai 2017). While there are particular programmes and services that fall under the category of academic support, a broad distinction can be made between learning-centred and non-learning-centred services. Learning-centred services directly impact students to increase their academic ability. These services include learning assistance centres such as the Writing Centre; tutoring; supplementary instruction; and learning communities (Boughey and McKenna 2021). Non-learning-centred services are concerned with creating a supportive environment and increasing the general academic capacity of the institution. These services include diagnostic testing, policy changes (for at-risk students), faculty training, and various others (Mngomezulu *et al.* 2017; Msomi and Rzyankina 2025). These two types of services are necessary to both increase student retention by keeping students with low academic ability in South African higher education and raise the academic capacity of all students (Council on Higher Education 2016). This is particularly relevant to South African higher education where there are a high number of students with learning difficulties from previously disadvantaged educational backgrounds. Research suggests a growing demand for academic support services (Makoe and Nsamba 2019), and by extension, an increased need for providing evidence as to which programmes and services are

effective in increasing student learning and success in South African Higher Education (Boughey and McKenna 2021).

South African higher education has been in a state of change since the 1994 democratic elections (Cele 2014; Scott and Ivala 2019; Luvalo 2019). Democracy brought a new era to higher education that has resulted in an increase in student enrolment, funding, and the provision of expanded student services. These changes have been in response to the needs of a diverse student population and a demand for highly skilled graduates who can contribute to society and the economy (Ntombana *et al.* 2023). The need for a highly skilled workforce is directly related to the changing economy of South Africa (Chitiga-Mabugu 2021). The demand for highly skilled workers has increased as South Africa moves closer to a knowledge and information-based economy (Li 2024). This change in the economy has increased the demand for access to higher education. While there have been increases in access to higher education (Van Schalkwyk 2022) student failures and dropouts are particularly prevalent in the first year, as well as in postgraduate studies (Paideya and Bengesai 2021; De Waldt 2022; Uleanya 2022; Vergottini 2023). This problem has been recognised by many institutions and resulted in a growing interest in programmes and services designed to increase student retention and success in South African higher education. Several South African higher education institutions, including DUT and MUT are seeking ways to address the pertinent issues of student performance and drop-out rates (de Waldt 2022; Namakula and Ndaba 2024). Furthermore, universities are under pressure to increase access for historically disadvantaged groups as mandated by the South African Constitution of 1996 (Jansen 2023).

A significant number of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are the first in their families to pursue a university education and are called 'first generation students' (Sims and Ferrare 2021; Walker 2022). These students often struggle with academic demands as they are often underprepared for higher education (LeBouef and Dworkin 2021; Toutkoushian *et al.* 2021). To address this, Mohzana (2024) notes that academic support interventions have been implemented to assist students facing difficulties. These initiatives focus on remedying learning challenges and are separate from broader efforts to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in South African higher education. Therefore, academic support is a critical part of

student support services as academic support services play a variety of functions designed to strengthen and enhance student learning and success. The components of academic support are outlined in the section below.

Academic support services encompass a variety of resources to assist students in achieving a valuable educational experience (Omari and Kefilwe 2021). These services may include library access, housing and dining options, recreational activities, healthcare services, postal services, student leadership and development opportunities, mental health and wellness counselling, academic guidance, career placement assistance, and financial aid, among others (Saidi 2020; Jiang *et al.* 2023; Sfeir 2023). Academic support in higher education is therefore an important aspect of quality education provision. In the view of Voisin *et al.* (2023), academic support involves providing students with opportunities for skill development, immediate feedback, and low risk learning environments. The authors add that the academic support environment provides various forms of feedback such as engagements in the form of dialogue, and encouragement which can raise self-efficacy of those experiencing challenges while on their academic journeys (Vosin *et al.* 2023).

Academic support services, including Writing Centres, are staffed by academic support personnel who assist lecturers. As stated by Navaro (2015), their titles vary, including learning support assistants, teaching assistants, and classroom aides. However, for this study, they will be referred to as academic support staff. Keiler (2018) states that in many countries, the duties of such staff have grown from assisting lecturers with regular and non-teaching activities to engaging in instructional activities with students. Bossu *et al.* (2019) state that academic support staff are a critical component of the university's success, as they possess a wealth of institutional knowledge and intellectual capital necessary for the efficient operation of the university. Moreover, academic support staff in higher education institutions encompass a variety of roles, including individuals in leadership, administration, student support services, teaching support, library services, laboratory staff, IT professionals, and facilities maintenance staff (Bossu *et al.* 2019). Consequently, Rusticus *et al.* (2023) state that learning environments that promote positive emotions and a sense of safety can enhance students' confidence, encourage the use of flexible learning strategies, and facilitate engagement in higher levels of learning.

In recognising that support plays a significant role in student success, it can be said that student achievement is influenced by the ways in which institutions structure and provide support services. A range of academic support services are crucial for the success of postgraduate students in South African higher education institutions (Tiroyabone 2021). These services include academic advising, which can improve student engagement and success, and student counselling, which is essential for addressing barriers to learning and ensuring successful study and transition to the workforce (Omari and Maboe 2021; Tiroyabone 2021). Additionally, student support services cultivate a sense of belonging within educational institutions, ultimately improving the overall academic experience for students. Rusticus *et al.* (2023) state that learning environments that promote positive emotions and a sense of safety, such as academic support services, can enhance students' confidence, encourage the use of flexible learning strategies, and facilitate engagement in higher levels of learning. Academic support also plays a role in enhancing affective states, reducing anxiety, and increasing confidence, which can lead to improved academic performance and higher retention rates (Tashcheva *et al.* 2022). Academic support services are interdisciplinary and provide assistance and self-help support to individuals with different types of needs and requests (Fu 2023). Therefore, academic support in higher education aims to meet the diverse needs of students, enhance their learning experience, and contribute to their overall success. Furthermore, undergraduate research preparation is crucial for postgraduate studies, highlighting the need for a strong foundation in research skills.

Academic support services offer personalised tutoring, mentoring, and workshops on skills like research, writing, and time management, addressing the specific needs of postgraduate students and enhancing their academic experience (Boyd 2016; Ramírez 2021). Additionally, university support services can enhance the quality of students' independent study (Fugen 2011). Postgraduate students in South African higher education institutions often face a myriad of challenges that are unique to their academic pursuits. Academic support services play a critical role in addressing these challenges by providing tailored assistance and resources to help students excel in their studies. In addition to individualised tutoring and mentoring, academic support services offer a wide range of resources to meet the diverse needs of postgraduate

students (Dagdag *et al.* 2019). These resources encompass workshops and seminars focused on honing essential academic skills, such as advanced research methodologies, scholarly writing techniques, and effective time management strategies. These tools are indispensable for postgraduate students as they navigate the complexities of their programmes, equipping them with the necessary skills to conduct in-depth research, produce high-quality academic writing, and effectively manage their time amidst rigorous academic demands (Muchineripi *et al.* 2021).

Another crucial aspect of academic support services for postgraduate students in South African higher education institutions is providing access to scholarly resources. These resources may include online databases, academic journals, and research publications that are essential for conducting in-depth research and staying updated with the latest developments in their respective fields (Mafofo and Makoni 2020). Access to such resources is vital for postgraduate students, as it allows them to engage in rigorous academic inquiry and contribute new knowledge to their disciplines.

Academic support is becoming more widely recognised as a crucial component of student success in higher education and it is no longer limited to a small group of 'at risk' students but is deemed necessary for the entire student population. The support needs of students are far-ranging and diverse, including those related to access, retention, learning, and personal development. According to Voisin *et al.* (2023), having an academic support system can positively impact students' academic performance by reducing anxiety and increasing confidence, which is associated with improved academic outcomes and retention rates. The latter is important in the South African HEIs in which this study is located, where Botha (2018) emphasises that, as a way of redressing the effects of apartheid on higher education, there is a need to increase student throughput and retention rates, to a greater degree among postgraduate students. In effect, social support as well as support from academic support services, such as Writing Centres, can significantly influence academic achievement resulting in higher throughput rates. By recognising the multifaceted nature of academic support systems, comprehensive strategies (including training of academic support staff) that cater to diverse student needs, more pertinently those of postgraduate student, must be considered.

Many students hesitate to seek help from university instructors (Shikulo and Lekhetho 2019; Qayyum 2018); therefore, it is important for universities to find ways to provide learning support as students face various obstacles on their academic journeys; learning professionals outside the classroom can establish an emotional rapport and acknowledge students' emotions, which sets the stage for achieving learning outcomes (Jiang *et al.* 2023; Sharif *et al.* 2023). Vosin *et al.* (2023) posit that students can cultivate trusting relationships with academic support staff through collaborative efforts. Building trust can be achieved by actively seeking student input on challenging subjects. This trust serves as a cornerstone for collaborative learning in higher education.

Students, and more specifically postgraduate students in the case of this study, need academic, social and welfare support while on their academic journeys. Academic support services have a significant role in supporting students. According to Shikulo and Lekhetho (2019), student academic support services are seen as key components of many academic systems as a result of their role in contributing to student success. Current research in South Africa shows an increase in the provision of student support services in recent years (Shabani and Maboe 2021; Lumadi 2021). As highlighted by Nsamba (2017), academic support services contribute to the quality of students' learning experience and their academic success.

Student support services are essential in promoting student personal development, enhancing academic achievement, and reducing dropout rates (Council on Higher Education 2020). These services aid students in overcoming obstacles in their studies, while also building competencies to tackle challenges on both personal and academic fronts (Omari and Maboe 2021). Additionally, student support services cultivate a sense of belonging within educational institutions, ultimately improving the overall academic experience for students.

Academic support in higher education is an important aspect of quality education provision. Vosin *et al.* (2023) define academic support as fostering skill development and providing immediate feedback, aiding students in both coursework and employment-related matters. According to Jiang *et al.* (2023), Sfeir (2023) and Saidi (2020), academic support also plays a role in enhancing affective states, reducing

anxiety, and increasing confidence, which can lead to improved academic performance and higher retention rates. Academic support services are interdisciplinary and provide assistance and self-help support to individuals with different types of needs and requests (Tashcheva *et al.* 2022; Fu 2023). Therefore, academic support in higher education aims to meet the diverse needs of students, enhance their learning experience, and contributing to their overall success.

Providing academic support is a crucial component of delivering quality education in higher education institutions (Jiang *et al.* 2023). Moreover, Sharif *et al.* (2023) suggest that academic support, such supervisor, and peer support, significantly and positively influence transfer of training. Consequently, academic support is important in higher education for facilitating knowledge transfer and sharing within academic institutions. Inarguably, academic support services play a multifaceted role in promoting the academic success and professional growth of postgraduate students in South African higher education. By providing tailored assistance, essential resources, and networking opportunities, these services contribute to the holistic development of postgraduate students, enabling them to thrive in their academic endeavours and make meaningful contributions to their respective fields of study. Evidently, providing academic support is a crucial component of delivering quality education in higher education institutions. It proffers several advantages both to the institution (through enhanced throughput and retention rates) and to the students at large. To fully understand academic support services, especially in the South African context, there is a need for the unfurling of postgraduate education in South African higher education. A discussion on this follows in the section below.

2.4 POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is important to understand postgraduate education in the South African higher education context in order to further understand the role and importance of academic support services such as Writing Centres in the development and academic success of postgraduate students. The history of postgraduate education in South Africa has certainly been influenced by the country's unique socio-political context. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, there was a concerted effort to transform higher education to address the disparities and exclusions of the past. Postgraduate education in particular

became an area of focus for developing academic and research capacity in a system previously characterised by racial segregation and inequality. Since the introduction of the New Funding Framework (NFF) in 2004, there has been an overall increase in both Master's and Doctoral graduates in South Africa (Pillay 2004; Council on Higher Education 2009; Mouton 2011; Odhiambo and Ntenga 2015). This signals a commitment to expanding postgraduate education to produce more high-level qualifications, enhance research output, and contribute to global knowledge production. Public universities particularly saw an increase in research publications post-NFF implementation (DHET 2020). However, even with these advances, South Africa's growth in research publication outputs, although significant since 2004, is still much lower than rapid expansion seen in countries like China, India, and Brazil (Saritas and Kotsemir 2024). This has highlighted the need for further studies to determine whether the increase is directly attributable to the NFF or if it aligns with a general trend in the global proliferation of knowledge (Odhiambo and Ntenga 2015; DHET 2015; Heleta and Jithoo 2023).

The legacy of apartheid in South African higher education has necessitated significant transformation, with a focus on equity and quality (Badat 1999). This has involved a range of interventions, including financial support, academic development programmes, inclusive teaching methodologies, and the use of technology. However, despite these efforts, there is still a need for radical restructuring in specialised areas to address the representation of historically marginalised groups. The quality of education is also a critical concern, with ongoing challenges in this area such as student dropout and attrition rates (Gumede 2016; Gumede 2020). Furthermore, South African higher education institutions have been under pressure to not only address local societal needs but also maintain global competitiveness within an international academic community. This has necessitated a careful balance between local relevance and international standards of excellence in research and teaching (Semali *et al.* 2013). Postgraduate education in South Africa post-apartheid is one of transformation and growth, with a focus on equity and excellence. It reflects a broader commitment to addressing past injustices while striving to meet the challenges of a globalised education and research environment.

For the first two decades since its formation, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) focused more on undergraduate education than on postgraduate studies (Luescher 2016; CHE 2021; Saidi 2024). This was due to undergraduate programmes and students comprising about 90% of the higher education system and having the most urgent problems to address (National Research Foundation 2024). While this focus on undergraduate studies was understood, there was also a concern that ignoring postgraduate education was unsuitable for the South African higher education system (Universities South Africa 2023; Namakula 2024; Saidi 2024). Undergraduate education prepares students for postgraduate studies, and postgraduate education produces the academics who will teach undergraduates and manage undergraduate programmes. This strong connection between the two denotes that focus on one without consideration of the other could lead to ineffectiveness.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the importance of postgraduate education in South Africa broadened from the classical apprenticeships in the higher faculties to the country's dire need of postgraduates to compete in the global economy (van Dyke 2005; Cloete 2014). This trend was strongly influenced by the emerging new economic and political dispensation of the country, the impact of globalisation on the South African economy, the scarcity of the required skills for national development, and the increase in employment market demands for postgraduate qualifications. These expected impacts of postgraduate education on the country's demands and the near-emergency level of need for human resource development are strong driving forces for the promotion of postgraduate education in South Africa, in both the academic and professional contexts (Sengane and Havenga 2014).

Postgraduate students are increasingly being seen as valuable resources due to their advanced knowledge and problem-solving skills, which significantly contribute to the development of the 'knowledge economy' by generating new concepts, products, processes, and businesses. This makes intellectual capital a prime force in building competitive advantages for individuals, organisations, industries, and nations (Mouton *et al.* 2013; Cloete *et al.* 2015). At the national level, the importance of increasing the production of postgraduate students includes developing leadership and a critical mass in fields of strategic importance for the country's development, building capacity in higher education, reducing the brain drain and skills drain to other countries, and

fulfilling South Africa's mandate to contribute to the global pool of knowledge with indigenous research and innovation (Badat 2010; DHET 2021). These roles and impacts of postgraduate education are now more critical to the country's near and long-term future than at any time, particularly as South Africa seeks to address socio-economic challenges and strengthen its global competitiveness (Cloete 2016; CHE 2018).

Postgraduate access to higher education in South Africa remains a critical issue, particularly for historically disadvantaged groups at both remote and contact institutions. Although black South Africans have seen increased representation at universities, their participation rates still fall below their population percentage (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2021). South Africa's higher education system is divided into public and private institutions, with the 26 public institutions further categorised into traditional universities, which focus on theoretically oriented degrees, and universities of technology (formerly technikons), which offer vocationally oriented diplomas and degrees (Cloete 2016). Despite efforts to consolidate these sectors, inequities persist, resulting in uneven access and limited articulation opportunities for postgraduate programmes (Badat 2010). Traditional universities, which are the primary providers of university education, dominate research activity and host the majority of National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researchers (CHE 2018). However, DHET (2020) has been pushing for UoTs to focus on improving postgraduate education and research outputs. Additionally, while white South Africans constitute only 3% of the student population at traditional universities, they still account for 58% of the postgraduate student body (CHE 2018). This disparity is significant, as research indicates that postgraduate students are more likely to complete their degrees when supervised by someone of the same race or gender (Mouton *et al.* 2013). Consequently, the lack of diverse supervisors poses a challenge in meeting the needs of an increasingly black postgraduate student population, potentially exacerbating attrition rates if adequate academic and supervisory support is not provided (Cloete *et al.* 2015).

Postgraduate studies play a crucial role in the development and advancement of individuals within South African higher education (Mafenya 2014). They provide in-depth knowledge and understanding in specific fields, allowing individuals to specialise

and excel in their chosen areas (Machingambi and Wadesango 2012). Furthermore, postgraduate studies also contribute to the research output of institutions, helping to address societal challenges and contribute to the growth of knowledge within various disciplines. In addition, postgraduate qualifications enhance the skills and expertise of individuals, making them more competitive in the job market and better equipped to contribute to the economic and social development of South Africa (Higher Education Qualifications or Degrees in South Africa 2023). As the demand for highly skilled professionals continues to grow, postgraduate studies have become increasingly important in ensuring that individuals are equipped to meet these demands and drive innovation and progress in their respective fields. Postgraduate studies serve as a platform for individuals to delve deeper into their fields of interest, conduct original research, and contribute to the academic and professional discourse within their disciplines (Wisker *et al.* 2019; Holloway *et al.* 2020). The advanced level of learning and research in postgraduate studies enables students to critically analyse existing knowledge, identify gaps in understanding, and propose innovative solutions to complex problems. This intellectual rigor not only enriches the individuals themselves but also adds substantial value to the broader academic community and society at large.

Moreover, a postgraduate qualification often opens doors to leadership positions, allowing individuals to assume roles that require specialised knowledge, critical thinking, and the ability to drive change. Through postgraduate studies, individuals not only enhance their technical skills but also develop essential competencies such as effective communication, collaboration, and adaptability, which are vital for success in the dynamic and competitive landscape of the modern workplace. Furthermore, the research conducted during postgraduate studies contributes to the body of knowledge within South African higher education, fostering a culture of academic excellence and continuous learning. This, in turn, positively impacts the country's ability to address complex societal challenges, innovate in various sectors, and remain globally competitive.

The pursuit of postgraduate studies in South African higher education is integral to cultivating a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce, driving meaningful research and innovation, and ultimately contributing to the overall socioeconomic development

of the nation. It is therefore important for postgraduate students to excel in academic achievement, as it not only enhances their individual prospects of finding a suitable job that matches their qualifications but also contributes to improving the economic status of their lives in the future (Mafenya 2014).

Postgraduate programmes are, like undergraduate ones, in a state of transition. In the past, there was a lot more emphasis on coursework Masters' degrees, but now there is a major drive from the Department of Education to increase the numbers of research postgraduate students (CHE 2021). Universities are responding to both the funding from the Department of Education and the NRF and are trying to increase the numbers of research students (Behera 2022; Bradbury 2023). At the same time, there is demand from industry and business for postgraduates with research skills, and universities are trying to encourage collaboration with the private sector in providing opportunities for students to research topics relevant to industry (Echono 2023). The future of postgraduate research education is likely to see an increase in opportunities for both Masters' and PhD students, particularly for part-time and industry-based students (Bentley 2018). This shift is driven by the need to make postgraduate degrees more relevant to employment prospects and to meet the needs of industry and education. The growing range of skills gained from postgraduate research, including those relevant to industry, is also contributing to this trend. As such, there is a need to ensure that postgraduate students are equipped with a broad range of skills to ensure their success in industry.

2.5 THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN POSTGRADUATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Research findings from authors such as van Staden and Naidoo (2022) indicate that although many academic institutions and systems offer a wide variety of student support services, they are not well developed or adapted to the constantly evolving needs of students. Postgraduate students have various needs in academic support, particularly in terms of academic writing. According to Cui *et al.* (2022), these needs include support in writing, supervision, and access to ICT tools for writing and language learning. Jeyaraj (2020) asserts that students (and, in the case of this research, postgraduate students) also seek English language support, workshops, and

programmes specifically focused on thesis writing, as well as peer support groups. Additionally, students require guidance from supervisors to clarify writing and institutional processes and procedures (Ooi *et al.* 2022). The role of supervision and self-esteem in influencing academic writing among postgraduate students has been found to be significant (Rocco *et al.* 2018; Gupta *et al.* 2022; Chugh *et al.* 2022; Mohammad *et al.* 2024). Furthermore, Okuda and Anderson (2018) state students, including those from English Second Language backgrounds (as is the case for most South African university students), spend considerable time seeking out writing support to improve their academic practice. These findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support services in Writing Centres to meet the diverse needs of postgraduate students. Providing developmental, structured support to postgraduate students can contribute to building their confidence and strengthening their academic writing. Writing Centres have a significant role in supporting the development of postgraduate students and therefore the need for this study in exploring the training needs of their staff who work with postgraduate students.

Postgraduate programmes often require students to engage in independent study, allowing flexibility for both full-time and part-time commitments that may impact the overall duration of the course. According to Alostath (2021), postgraduate students face heightened pressures and various responsibilities in their academic and personal lives, making their scholarly writing an additional challenge. While there have been numerous studies exploring the writing strategies and challenges of undergraduate students (Cresswell 2019; Luis and Braine 2020; Hartse 2020), there is a scarcity of adequate research focused on postgraduate students' scholarly writing approaches and the challenges they face while on their research journeys. Improving students' academic writing proficiency is an important focus for higher education institutions especially in contexts such as that of South African higher education where the majority of students are English second language speakers. Postgraduate students must therefore establish themselves within the academic community by demonstrating a high level of critical thinking and academic literacy.

Greater emphasis has been placed on the significance of academic writing due to the increasing research output expectations on universities (Odhiambo and Ntenga 2015; Wilmot and Lotz-Sisitka 2016; Temoso *et al.* 2023). Academic writing, particularly at

the postgraduate level, serves as the primary method to generate new knowledge and make contributions to a specific research field. In the absence of written documentation, research cannot be easily recorded, evaluated, shared, and utilised within society. Schulz and Lemmer (2017) state that at the postgraduate level, there is a heightened focus on the importance of academic writing proficiency. This is especially true for students whose first language is not English, as they often encounter challenges in meeting the expectations for thesis or dissertation writing. Given the aforementioned, it is imperative for Writing Centres to promote a positive and inclusive environment, highlighting their primary role as a place where all university students, including postgraduate students can seek help from dedicated tutors for their written tasks.

Postgraduate students in South African higher education institutions often require robust academic support services to excel in their studies (Woldegiorgis and Chiramba 2025). Many postgraduate programmes are rigorous and demanding, making it essential for students to have access to various forms of academic support. In this context, academic support services play a crucial role in providing assistance and resources to ensure that postgraduate students have the tools they need to succeed. Postgraduate students have very distinct needs and understanding this is a key step in initiating effective support. For many, they are juggling their research work with family responsibilities. This can be a trying time with numerous demands on their time and energy. For most postgraduates, learning how to become researchers is a challenging aspect of their degrees, often characterised by feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Regular contact with a supportive and interested supervisor is the most important form of support for many students.

Lastly, because most postgraduates are striving for improvement in their professional practice, they are generally focused on the future. They are learning things they see as useful for their career, and many are keen on establishing networks and contacts within the academic community (Sverdlik *et al.* 2018; McAlpine 2020). Postgraduates are often described as 'knowledge consumers,' as they actively seek out and apply knowledge to advance their careers and contribute to their fields, in contrast to undergraduates, who are typically 'subject consumers' focused on mastering foundational content (Bastalich 2020; Guerin 2022). This distinction highlights the

unique motivations and goals of postgraduate students, who are driven by a desire for professional growth, research impact, and academic collaboration (Gardner and Barnes 2021; Castelló *et al.* 2021). Support that enables linkage between theory and their existing professional knowledge, or that assists the transition into an academic career, is therefore highly valuable to postgraduate students. This therefore underscores the role of Writing Centres in offering holistic writing support due to the affective nature of their work with students.

Writing Centres in South Africa play a critical role in providing holistic support to students, addressing not only their academic writing needs but also the affective dimensions of learning. In a higher education landscape marked by diversity, inequality, and varying levels of preparedness, Writing Centres serve as spaces where students can develop both their writing abilities and their confidence. Writing is often an emotionally charged process, particularly for students who may face linguistic barriers, self-doubt, or anxiety about academic expectations. Writing Centres recognise this and adopt approaches that go beyond technical writing instruction to foster a supportive and empowering environment. By addressing the affective nature of writing, Writing Centres help students build confidence, develop resilience, and cultivate a positive relationship with writing.

One of the key ways Writing Centres achieve this is through one-on-one consultations, where tutors engage in dialogue with students to understand their concerns, goals, and challenges. These conversations are not just about grammar or structure; they are opportunities to validate students' ideas, encourage critical thinking, and provide constructive feedback in a non-judgmental way. This personalised approach helps students feel heard and supported, which is crucial for building their confidence as writers (Archer and Richards 2011; Clarence 2020).

Additionally, Writing Centres in South Africa employ strategies that emphasise process over product. By encouraging students to view writing as a recursive process involving brainstorming, drafting, revising, and reflecting, tutors help demystify writing and reduce the pressure to produce 'perfect' work. This approach allows students to experiment, take risks, and learn from their mistakes, which is essential for developing

both writing and self-assurance (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2018; van Heerden and Clarence 2021).

The affective dimension of Writing Centre work is also evident in the emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive space. Tutors are trained to be empathetic and culturally sensitive, recognising that students come from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. By fostering an environment of trust and respect, Writing Centres help students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and exploring their voices, which is particularly important for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Paxton and Frith 2019; Clarence 2022).

Moreover, Writing Centres often incorporate workshops and peer-led activities that promote collaborative learning. These sessions not only improve students' writing but also builds a sense of community among students. By working together and sharing their struggles and successes, students realise that they are not alone in their challenges, which can be reassuring and motivating (Archer 2020; van Heerden 2022).

In essence, the role of the Writing Centre in South Africa extends far beyond teaching writing mechanics. It is about nurturing the whole student intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Addressing the affective aspects of writing and employing strategies that build confidence helps Writing Centres empower students to become more effective, self-assured, and independent writers. This holistic support not only enhances academic success but also equips students with skills and resilience that benefit them long after they leave the university.

A range of studies have explored the support available to postgraduate students in South African higher education including that of Nwokedi (2020) who found that international postgraduate students reported a higher level of agency in their academic activities, possibly due to the diverse support activities available to them. However, Lumadi (2021) identified challenges in accessing student support services, including administrative issues and a lack of effective feedback. These findings are consistent with Lessing (2002), who highlighted the importance of meeting students' expectations in postgraduate supervision, particularly in the context of university transformation and increasing numbers of disadvantaged students. Lekhetho (2021) further emphasised

the need for effective supervision and academic support, particularly for students in a distance learning context, to improve graduation rates. Postgraduate students face a complex social landscape, with relationships that can be both supportive and competitive (Connelly 2021). This complexity is further compounded by the diverse nature of postgraduate study, which challenges both students and supervisors (Havenga 2018). Postgraduate students face a range of challenges, including personal, academic, and research-related issues. There is therefore a need for effective guidance and support for postgraduate students, particularly during the critical post-choice phase, that addresses the diverse needs of postgraduate students.

These findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support services in Writing Centres to meet the diverse needs of postgraduate students. Providing developmental, structured support to postgraduate students can contribute to building their confidence and strengthening their academic writing. A comprehensive understanding of the needs and experiences of postgraduate students is crucial in effectively shaping academic support services to meet their specific requirements. This understanding can be achieved through research studies that examine the writing experiences, support needs, and expectations of postgraduate students (Jeyaraj *et al.* 2020). Based on the mentioned sources, it can be inferred that postgraduate students in South African higher education are in need of various forms of academic support. This includes access to resources and assistance for academic writing, networking opportunities with faculty and experts, and tailored support to meet their individual needs. In addition, the provision of pre-support assistance prior to students' arrival can greatly enhance their experiences and sense of belonging in a university. This highlights the importance of providing targeted academic support services for postgraduate students in South African higher education. These services should be designed to address the specific challenges and needs of postgraduate students, including academic writing, research collaboration, and networking opportunities. Furthermore, these services should not only focus on institutional provisions but also recognise and support non-institutional factors such as peer collaboration. By addressing these areas of support, universities can enhance the academic experience and success of postgraduate students, ultimately contributing to the development of a diverse and skilled workforce in South Africa.

The role of academic support in enhancing postgraduate education is achieved through a variety of services and provisions. Some are embedded within the teaching and supervision process and are delivered on an individual or small group basis, whilst others are more generic in nature and are provided through targeted programmes, workshops, or online resources. These provisions are often tailored to meet the needs of postgraduate students and reflect the different academic and cultural contexts in which they study. Targeted provisions might include assistance with publishing work, developing specific research skills, support for students who are teaching whilst studying and preparing for an academic career or a research degree in an English-medium university. Generic services might include language and learning support, mentoring and induction programmes, or research and writing skills development.

The role of academic support in enhancing postgraduate education is to provide a value-added contribution to a student's field of study and the overall pursuit of knowledge. It does this by fostering an environment that promotes intellectual engagement (Ledertoug and Paarup 2021), helps students to become effective and independent learners, facilitates the successful transition from prior study to postgraduate work, and provides the personal and professional development opportunities that are conducive to completion and success (Perkmann *et al.* 2021). Writing Centres play a crucial role in this process by creating spaces for intellectual engagement through student-tutor dialogue, collaborative brainstorming, and reflective conversations. These interactions allow postgraduate students to articulate their ideas, refine their thinking, and engage critically with their research topics. For example, during one-on-one consultations, tutors encourage students to explore different perspectives, challenge assumptions, and develop coherent arguments, which deepens their intellectual engagement with their work (Clarence 2020; van Heerden 2022). Additionally, Writing Centres often facilitate workshops and peer discussions that promote brainstorming and idea generation, helping students to overcome writer's block and develop innovative approaches to their academic reading and writing. By fostering these collaborative and dialogic practices, Writing Centres not only enhance students' academic writing, but also contribute to their overall intellectual and professional growth, supporting their transition into confident and independent scholars (Archer and Richards 2011; Leibowitz and Bozalek 2018). Further details on the work of the Writing Centre is provided in section 2.7 and 2.8.

Students' academic support, in the view of Connelly (2021), should be tailored to the different stages of their academic journey, from entering to exiting their studies. It should also address the specific needs of postgraduate students, such as employability and further study. However, Abiddin (2014) argues that there is a need for improvement in the support and services offered to postgraduate students, as identified in a study conducted in a Malaysian public university. Moreover, Giordano (2012) emphasises that the quality of research supervision and the support provided by graduate schools and other service providers are also key factors in postgraduate research student achievement. Consequently, to facilitate the transition to postgraduate studies, Bunney (2017) asserts that a coordinated, programme-wide approach incorporating non-traditional teaching strategies is needed.

2.6 THE WRITING CENTRE AS AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICE

Understanding the Writing Centre and similar academic support services can help in developing policies and initiatives to assist the academic sector, pointing the way to improved service quality in higher education. This understanding also aids in the university's endeavour to build a well-rounded student who is able to contribute meaningfully to the society in which they exist (Clarence 2019; Govender and Alcock 2020). The Writing Centre is an academic support service that provides assistance to students in various aspects of writing (Khumalo *et al.* 2024; Maxhobandile 2024). According to Konoshonkin (2022), the Writing Centre offers guidance on writing annotated bibliographies, including tips on format, organisation, and composition. Additionally, the Writing Centre plays a role in supporting academic integrity by addressing issues related to source usage and citation, with student consultants acting as intermediaries and using directive and non-directive strategies (Garwood 2022). Clarence (2019) views Writing Centres as widely recognised components of academic support services for students at universities globally. Furthermore, Archer (2011) emphasises that writing support helps students enhance their academic performance, which may result in the student remaining in the university system and graduating.

Collaboration between academic libraries and Writing Centres is also observed, with some Writing Centres being located within libraries, providing support for developing

written communication skills (Forgarty 2020; Bollin 2022). In concurrence, Archer and Parker (2016) state that the Writing Centre serves as a collaborative learning environment that supports postgraduate student tutors in exploring and developing their academic identities during times of transition and transformation. Writing Centres are academic support services that provide assistance to students in various aspects of writing, research, teaching, and learning. They offer guidance on writing, organisation, and composition (Konoshonkin 2022). Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2022) notes that Writing Centres have been found to be beneficial in enhancing students' research and tutoring skills, reframing their roles in higher education, and preparing them for different career paths.

Despite the positive impact of Writing Centres on students' academic achievement, many institutions report low levels of usage (Arbee 2022). Factors such as time constraints and misunderstandings about the role of Writing Centres contribute to this situation. In the view of Bolin (2022), strategies to increase usage include providing evidence of the value of Writing Centre, and, pertinent to this study, the training of the Writing Centre tutors. The following sections provide an overview of the Writing Centre from its conception to its development and global presence.

2.6.1 International overview of Writing Centres

According to Nichols (2017), the idea of a Writing Centre originated from the United States of America. Clarence (2019) postulates that Writing Centres were originally established during the era of open admissions in the 1970s and have since become a common resource for students in higher education. These centres can now be found at numerous universities in various countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, continental Europe, and South Africa. The primary goal of these centres is to assist postgraduate and undergraduate students in improving their academic writing (Clarence 2019; Manjeya 2021; Chiramba and Ndofirepi 2023; Nabi *et al.* 2024), as many students find the expectations and conventions of academic writing at this level to be unfamiliar and challenging.

Writing Centres, originally called laboratories or clinics, were born out of the need of American universities to solve the writing problems of their students (Archer 2010). Thus, its initial motivation was remediative. In the second half of the 20th century, there was a change of name that underlay a change in the way of conceiving the teaching

of language, and which indicated that the Writing Centre was now an open space not only for those struggling with academic writing, but for everyone. One element that has remained in these spaces since their inception, and that has so far proven effective, has been collaborative learning through peer tutoring (Arango *et al.* 2017). Writing Centres have since evolved from their early beginnings as grammar clinics to their current role as multifaceted learning hubs.

Bouquet (2012) documents that Writing Centres sprouted in the 1930s within American universities, often called 'writing labs' or 'writing clinics.' Their primary focus was on grammar and mechanics, aiming to rectify errors and improve basic writing skills. This approach mirrored the dominant pedagogical methods of the time, with the centre serving as an extension of the classroom. The post-war era (1945-1970) witnessed a shift in focus, fuelled by the Open Admissions movement in the US. Remenick (2019) states that this influx of diverse students, many with non-traditional academic backgrounds, highlighted the need for more individualised support. Writing Centres began to embrace peer tutoring models, fostering a more collaborative and student-centred environment (Johnson *et al.* 2019).

The 1980s witnessed a pivotal turning point with Stephen North's influential article, 'The Idea of a Writing Centre' where he challenged the traditional error-correction focus (or fix-it shop mentality), advocating for a shift towards empowering writers and developing their critical thinking (North 1984). Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni (2019) assert that according to scholarly research, the inception of Writing Centres can be traced to the mid-1970s in response to a perceived literacy crisis in North America. It is estimated that there are now over 1000 Writing Centres in tertiary institutions and secondary schools in North America and Canada (Richards *et al.* 2019). The establishment of Writing Centres in the United States during the 1970s has evolved into a comprehensive service that supports students in various disciplines and levels globally (Clarence 2019). This ushered in a new era of process-oriented Writing Centres, where the writer's voice and agency took centre stage. While the history of Writing Centres is acknowledged, there is a call to reevaluate and refocus the core purpose and democratising function of these centres, particularly in the context of South Africa higher education institutions.

The story of Writing Centres is not solely confined to the West as countries around the world have adopted and adapted the concept, often facing unique challenges and opportunities. In South Africa, Writing Centres emerged in the post-apartheid era to address educational inequalities and support the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students (Myeni 2019). In Asia, centres navigate complex language policies and cultural differences (Lee 2021), while in Latin America, they often operate with limited resources amidst broader socio-economic challenges (Diaz-Maggioli and Lopes 2020).

Howard (2021) states that the rise of technology and the increasing globalised nature of education further impacted Writing Centres. Online platforms and communication tools facilitated remote consultations and expanded accessibility. Additionally, Markey *et al.* (2023) states that the growing understanding of diverse learning styles and cultural influences led to a focus on inclusivity and catering to the needs of a wider range of writers. Despite these diverse contexts, a common thread weaves through Writing Centres worldwide; a dedication to supporting writers in their journey to develop their craft and express themselves effectively. However, Carter (2022) argues that challenges such as funding limitations, institutional recognition, and the need for ongoing research to support best practices are some of the hurdles these centres face.

2.6.2 The development of Writing Centres in South Africa

Richards *et al.* (2019) indicate that in South Africa, the landscape of education is a battleground where constant negotiation takes place. Writing Centres play a crucial role in this ongoing struggle. During the 1970s and 80s, as historically white tertiary institutions began to integrate students of all racial backgrounds, it became evident that merely opening the doors of universities was not enough to address the deep-seated issues left by apartheid-era education (Bazana and Mogotsi, 2017). By the late 1980s, educators were already moving away from outdated deficit models towards more inclusive approaches to working with students from marginalised communities.

Writing Centres have played a crucial role in supporting students' writing development and promoting academic success in South Africa. However, the establishment and history of Writing Centres in South Africa are relatively recent compared to other countries. According to literature reviewed, the first Writing Centres in South Africa

began to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Muna *et al.* 2019; Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza 2022). These Writing Centres were influenced by the existing models and principles of Writing Centres in other countries, particularly the United States. They aimed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by South African students, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have had access to the same resources and educational opportunities as their counterparts. Since their establishment, South African Writing Centres have evolved and adapted to the unique context of the country. Today, Writing Centres in South Africa function as inclusive spaces that provide support for students at all levels of writing proficiency (Muna *et al.* 2019; Ngubane *et al.* 2020). They offer various services, including one-on-one consultations with trained tutors, workshops on writing skills and strategies, and access to resources such as writing manuals and online writing resources. These Writing Centres also engage in research and collaboration with other academic departments to continuously improve their services and contribute to the advancement of writing pedagogy in South Africa.

The history of Writing Centres is a complex one, marked by significant shifts in both location and practice (Lecluyse 2021). The #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa, for example, led to the temporary closure of physical Writing Centres, prompting a move to online spaces (Nanima 2019). However, this transition has not been without its challenges, with Western Writing Centres being accused of complicity in global neocolonialism (Hotson 2022). Despite these challenges, the importance of documenting the work of Writing Centres has been emphasised (Moghabghab 2021). Furthermore, Writing Centres in South Africa have been at the forefront of promoting multilingualism and inclusive writing practices. Writing Centres recognise the importance of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in shaping their writing journey and strive to create a supportive environment that values and celebrates diverse linguistic and cultural identities (Archer 2011; Govender and Alcock 2020). Moreover, South African Writing Centres have also played a crucial role in promoting the decolonisation of academic writing and challenging the dominance of standardised English in higher education.

South African Writing Centres have had a transformative impact on students' academic development. They have helped students develop confidence and competence in their

writing, provided resources and support for overcoming challenges such as writer's block, and fostered a sense of community among students, where they can freely express themselves and engage in meaningful discussions about writing (Govender and Alcock 2020). Thus, Writing Centres in South Africa have proven to be beneficial in supporting students' writing and promoting inclusive and diverse writing practices. These Writing Centres have played a crucial role in recognising and addressing the academic writing challenges faced by students.

In South Africa, Writing Centres are essential in providing academic support to undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as staff within the university community. Over time, the purpose and function of Writing Centres have evolved and transformed (Nichols 2017; Richard *et al.* 2019). The history and role of Writing Centres in South Africa have been significantly influenced by moments that opened access to higher education for students who had been denied admission due to limitations imposed by Bantu education and the previous system of separate development (Archer 2010; Archer and Richards 2011). These challenges led to debates on transformation and education access, providing a context and historical background for Writing Centres in South Africa. Transformation highlighted a shift away from a rigid system that previously restricted the majority of students from opportunities to learn at institutions of higher education. The evolving landscape sparked discussions on how these changes opened doors that had previously been closed to many individuals.

Writing Centres evolved beyond simple grammar correction, embracing a more holistic approach to writing development (Archer and Parker 2016). Concepts like peer tutoring, collaborative learning, and critical thinking have since gained traction, emphasising student agency and empowerment. This is because Writing Centres started catering to a wider range of students, including postgraduate researchers and international students (Carstens and Rambiritch 2019).

Writing Centres were established in South African universities in the 1990s (Rambiritch and Drennan, 2023). Richards *et al.* (2019) state that during this period, Writing Centres in South Africa began to establish themselves at prominent universities such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Cape Town (UCT), and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Clarence (2019) states that Writing Centres

were initially perceived as a remedial intervention for disadvantaged students, but they however soon proved to be more progressive. Writing Centres trained students to collaborate with peers in a personalised manner, fostered necessary literacy skills for academic success, encouraged critical thinking, supported students in defining their academic identities, and empowered them to actively engage in university life.

Clarence (2019) documents that Writing Centres in South Africa began to emerge in the early 1990s at institutions such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) all of which are traditional universities. According to Manjeya (2021), these South African universities began to consider the transformation of education in the post-apartheid era. The initial focus was on providing support in areas like grammar, mechanics, and organisation, addressing the legacy of unequal education under apartheid. Clarence (2019) adds that these Writing Centres were created in response to the challenges faced by black students who had been disadvantaged by the apartheid government's education policies. Specifically, these students often lacked the necessary academic skills due to their background. As such, the establishment of Writing Centres was part of a broader effort to support student academic development. According to Archer and Richards (2011), the establishment of Writing Centres in the mid-1990s at University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), University of Cape Town (UCT), and University of the Western Cape (UWC), and their subsequent expansion to various tertiary institutions in South Africa, indicates the significant impact and potential future contributions of Writing Centres in reimagining the transformation of higher education in the post-apartheid era.

These centres aimed to provide a campus space where students, particularly those who were historically marginalised, could receive assistance with the writing and reading requirements of higher education. During this time, the field of academic development was evolving, leading to changes in how Writing Centres operated and supported students. Research has since shown that students from diverse backgrounds should not be viewed as a homogenous group, prompting Writing Centres to adopt more inclusive and tailored approaches to meet the needs of all students (Ahmad *et al.* 2019). These views underscore the focus of this study on the

training needs of Writing Centre tutors which will contribute to the development of tailored approaches to meet students' needs.

Sefalane-Nkohlhla and Mtonjeni (2019) citing Dison and Clarence (2017) state that during the transition into the 2000s, Writing Centres in South Africa experienced notable changes in both the higher education and schooling sectors. The latter part of the first decade of the 21st century witnessed the establishment of numerous new Writing Centres in the country, particularly in former technikons now known as universities of technology (Dison and Clarence 2017). These new Writing Centres were created in response to the realisation that increased access to education did not always translate to academic success for all students. It was recognised that students at all levels of the university required extra guidance and resources to improve their writing and confidence in meeting university standards.

To summarise this section, the history of Writing Centres is a testament to the transformative power of writing and the value of collaborative learning. From their beginnings as grammar clinics to their current role as multifaceted, flexible learning hubs, these centres have evolved to meet the ever-changing needs of writers worldwide. As they continue to navigate new challenges and embrace emerging technologies, Writing Centres remain a vital resource for empowering writers and fostering a love for writing.

2.7 TUTORING IN WRITING CENTRES

The Writing Centre holds a unique position on campus, both physically and in its role within the institution (Jones *et al.* 2020). It aids students across various disciplines, catering to their academic writing needs. In addition, by utilising the Writing Centre, students can overcome the constraints of traditional classroom settings, which sometimes constrain students' freedom of expression. Thus, the pedagogical methods used in the Writing Centre (namely one-on-one consultations) differ from those in regular classes and create a safe space for engagement between the student(s) and the Writing Centre tutor. Furthermore, the centre plays a crucial role in enhancing the communication abilities of its student users throughout the campus. This is because in

the Writing Centre, students have the opportunity to work with their peers to improve their writing, rather than relying solely on their professors.

2.7.1 Writing Centre tutors

Tutors are typically a diverse group of individuals who play a critical role in supporting students' academic writing development. They are often advanced postgraduate students (such as Masters' or PhD candidates) or undergraduate students who have demonstrated strong writing and communication skills. These tutors are selected not only for their academic expertise but also for their ability to engage empathetically with students from varied linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds (Archer and Richards 2011). Tutors in South African Writing Centres are trained to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique challenges faced by students in a highly diverse and unequal higher education context. Many students come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and may struggle with academic writing in English, which is often not their first language. Tutors are therefore skilled in providing support that goes beyond grammar and structure, focusing instead on fostering critical thinking, clarity, and confidence in writing (Clarence 2020; van Heerden and Clarence 2021). Additionally, Writing Centre tutors often act as mentors and role models, particularly for postgraduate students who are navigating the complexities of academic writing and research. They create a safe and inclusive space where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and challenges, which is essential for building trust and encouraging intellectual growth (Paxton and Frith 2019). In combining their academic knowledge with a commitment to student development, Writing Centre tutors play a vital role in empowering students to succeed academically and beyond.

Rambiritch (2022) notes that these centres are presented as safe and non-judgmental spaces where students can receive individualised writing support from their peers. Writing Centre tutors work diligently to engage the students who seek their help, with the goal of fostering better writers. Moreover, Govender and Ndadziyira (2023) state that postgraduate tutors offer a friendly, non-judgmental environment for students to engage, learn, and grow. The authors assert that tutors have an important role in understanding students' developmental needs and supporting and guiding them during their university journey. Harris (1986), cited in Liu and Harwood (2022), proposed six tutor roles: coach, commentator, counsellor, listener, diagnostician, and activator.

These roles can be adapted and changed during consultations based on the needs of individual students. Mack (2023) found that tutors often adopt multiple roles, including proofreader, translator, coach, teacher, and mediator, depending on the interaction with the student. Trained peer writing tutors help students develop, revise and refine their writing assignments before it is submitted for assessment. Tutors collaborate with the students through asking questions, engaging in discussion, and giving advice and guidance. This is mainly done through one-on-one or group consultations.

One-on-one consultations serve as the primary support for postgraduate writers at South African Writing Centres. At universities such as UCT, Stellenbosch, and the Wits, individual sessions provide access to academic discourses, foster critical thinking, and address both writing and broader research challenges (Daniels and Richard 2016; Grossman 2016; Archer 2017; Kadenge *et al.* 2019). In addition, Archer (2017) reports that multimodal pedagogies in these consultations enhance meaning-making and writing production, while Daniels and Richards (2016) describe targeted, supportive feedback that helps students navigate higher-order writing issues. Liu and Harwood (2022) suggest that one-on-one writing consultations are a fundamental activity in Writing Centres, where tutors work with individual students on specific pieces of writing, usually for assessment by content faculty.

Burke (2020) highlights the value of the Writing Centre's model, which involves well-trained student tutors. This model creates a non-hegemonic space for interaction, allowing writers to discuss their work with peers instead of instructors or figures of authority in the academic field. Learning occurs during the conversations between the Writing Centre tutor and the student, making one-on-one consultations particularly effective (Rambiritch 2022). Moreover, Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza (2022) posit that, during these consultations, tutors utilise various strategies and tools to ensure satisfaction and successful student outcomes. Tutors engage in dialogue with students to understand their specific needs, whether it is brainstorming ideas, structuring an argument, or refining a draft. This student-tutor interaction is particularly important in South Africa, where diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds require tutors to be culturally sensitive and adaptive (Archer and Richards 2011). For example, tutors often help students navigate the challenges of academic writing in English, which may not be their first language, by encouraging them to express their ideas clearly and

confidently (Clarence 2020). Additionally, consultations emphasise the writing process rather than just the final product, allowing students to experiment, revise, and reflect on their work, which is crucial for building both skills and self-assurance (van Heerden and Clarence 2021). Through these personalised and dialogic approaches, Writing Centres in South Africa play a vital role in empowering students to become effective and independent writers.

2.7.2 Tutor Training

Tutor training is an essential element in enhancing the effectiveness of Writing Centres, particularly in the context of South Africa's evolving educational landscape. Writing Centres provide critical support for students seeking to improve their writing while fostering critical thinking and effective communication. The extent of their impact largely depends on the capabilities and preparedness of the tutors facilitating these sessions. Research indicates that comprehensive and ongoing tutor training significantly contributes to the overall success of writing centres (Landry *et al.* 2023; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Researchers such as Jones *et al.* (2020) have expressed concerns about the lack of established standard practices for writing tutors, the absence of replicable and data-supported research in Writing Centre studies, and the potential lack of training for working with students from different levels of study.

In South Africa, tutor training programmes within Writing Centres are vital to providing quality support to students. The multifaceted nature of writing assistance necessitates a variety of training styles that ensure tutors are well-equipped to handle the diverse needs of the student population. Given the socio-economic complexities and educational disparities that characterise South African higher education, effective training must address various components, including pedagogical skills, emotional intelligence, cultural competence, and discipline-specific knowledge.

Targeted tutor training can take various forms, and further study is needed to determine which practices effectively improve tutor confidence and the quality of individual sessions, regardless of subject matter. One specific type of tutor training involves foundational pedagogical skills that focus on writing instruction methods. According to Yang and Shaman (2022), training programmes often incorporate workshops that highlight instructional techniques, such as scaffolded learning, peer feedback

strategies, and collaborative writing exercises. These approaches enable tutors to guide students through the writing process, helping them improve not only their writing, but also their critical thinking and analytical abilities. For instance, research by Harrington *et al.* (2024) highlights the significance of employing metacognitive strategies in writing consultations, allowing tutors to help students reflect on their writing processes and improve their self-efficacy.

Another critical aspect of tutor training is the development of empathetic communication and emotional support. Tutors often interact with students who face anxiety or lack confidence regarding their writing (Alamri 2024). For example, Hewit *et al.* (2016) state that students often fear judgment or have experienced negative feedback, which can heighten anxiety. Perfectionism and unfamiliarity with academic conventions also contribute to stress and low confidence. Additionally, Mihrshahi and Baur (2018) state that language barriers for multilingual students and past academic struggles can exacerbate these negative feelings. Therefore, training programmes frequently include components on how to create a supportive atmosphere conducive to open dialogue and constructive feedback. Mentorship frameworks within these training sessions can help new tutors learn from experienced ones, fostering an environment of support where they can share strategies for addressing emotional barriers to writing (Koh *et al.* 2023).

Cultural competence is also a vital focus in training programmes, particularly in the South African context, where diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds can significantly impact students' writing experiences and needs. Tutors are trained to understand how historical and socio-economic factors affect students' academic performances, enabling them to sensitively navigate issues related to language differences and educational access. This is crucial in Writing Centres, which serve a wide range of students, including those for whom English is not a first language (Motswai 2022). Training in cultural awareness equips tutors with the knowledge needed to engage effectively with diverse student populations, promoting inclusivity in writing support.

Furthermore, discipline-specific training is increasingly recognised as essential for tutors working in Writing Centres. As academic writing expectations often vary across

disciplines, tutors benefit from targeted training that prepares them to address the specific writing conventions and styles of various fields of study. For instance, a tutor may require different strategies to assist engineering students compared to those in humanities (Magwentshu *et al.* 2023). This specialised training can involve collaboration with discipline-specific faculty members to design workshops or seminars that align Writing Centre practices with departmental expectations.

Ongoing professional development represents another important training dimension that ensures tutors remain current with evolving educational practices and technologies. Programmes that encourage continuous learning and adaptation often include opportunities for tutors to engage in peer review of their tutoring approaches and receive constructive feedback. This reflective practice is essential for improving writing support, as it allows tutors to adjust their methods based on real-time experiences and outcomes (Toniolo *et al.* 2024).

The types of tutor training in Writing Centres in South Africa are diverse and essential to create a productive and effective writing support environment. By focusing on pedagogical skills, emotional intelligence, cultural understanding, discipline-specific strategies, and ongoing professional development, Writing Centres can significantly enhance the competencies of their tutors. Such comprehensive training not only improves the quality of student support but also contributes to fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational landscape.

Tutor training should focus on how tutors can navigate tutoring session agendas and emphasise inquiry. This active participation in writing consultations leads to more meaningful revisions, requiring tutors to effectively communicate across cultures. Tutor training programmes should encompass a range of pedagogical approaches and expand tutors' ideas related to teaching. By having a variety of instructional skills, tutors can address sentence-level issues while also focusing on the overall text. This approach benefits tutors in their support of multilingual students.

Specialised training can also improve the quality of tutoring, advancing students' writing capabilities in their intended professional fields. This method enables tutors to adapt to unfamiliar material by examining past successful papers and familiarising

themselves with instructors' expectations. Jones *et al.* (2020) state that the improvement of tutor training programmes can impact the important work of Writing Centres. Govender and Ndadziyira (2023) state that this can be through the promotion of reflective practice, improvement in tutor confidence as well as enhancing tutor understanding and responsiveness.

Tutors often feel less comfortable tutoring in genres different from their own discipline. A previous study by Malenke *et al.* (2023) introduced an assignment-specific tutor training model to improve Writing Centre tutoring sessions between engineering students and writing tutors. The transfer of learning that a tutor may receive in their training or coursework to become a tutor may be similar. Writing tutors are instructed in the acceptable methods of helping to create better writers, often referred to as Writing Centre lore. However, tutors may not be adequately prepared for work in every genre and will need to employ a heuristic that can be utilised across various fields of study (Appleby-Ostroff 2017). The need for tutors to be able to work with students across genres is central to their ability to conduct a successful session. As a result, training programme must prepare tutors to work with a variety of genres and writing conventions. If tutors have been trained to work with students in a variety of genre conventions, they can explain the writing conventions of the student's discipline. The subsequent chapter delves into greater details around tutor training in Writing Centres.

2.8 THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING CENTRES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Without an institutional writing support structure, students often struggle to navigate academic writing on their own, relying solely on the writing assignment guidelines and feedback they receive (Burke 2020). Writing Centres have a crucial role by bridging the gap between stated expectations and the process of producing quality academic writing. They offer an alternative environment by providing support beyond formalised directions, nurturing students' writing development. In this sense, Writing Centres are similar to libraries that support core literacy initiatives.

2.8.1 DUT and MUT Writing Centres

The official launch of the DUT Writing Centre on September 11, 2013, marked the beginning of a model for writing development at DUT (Manjeya 2021). It is however

imperative to note that, although this was the official opening of the DUT Writing Centre, there had already been an operational Writing Centre at the City Campus of DUT since 2008. The creation of a Writing Centre at DUT generated a facility for students' access to one-on-one assistance with academic assignments and dissertations as well as creative writing. As a result, the need for development of academic writing and support was the basis of the creation of the Writing Centre's move towards the growth of curricular for the university. Given the increasing demand for this service among students, the existing Writing Centre required expansion to accommodate a greater number of DUT students, as it was solely located at the City Campus. There was thus, a proposal to expand the project of the Writing Centre to the other campuses which included Steve Biko, ML Sultan, Pietermaritzburg campuses and Riston campus respectively (Manjeya 2019). There are currently six Writing Centres spread around its campuses in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The DUT Writing Centre staff compliment constitutes approximately 35 to 40 tutors per annum, six Writing Centre Practitioners across seven campuses, one Co-ordinator, and one Secretary. With an emphasis on fostering students' academic literacies, the Writing Centre provides a collaborative learning environment that is student-centred.

Through writing tutorials, responsive workshops, and one-on-one and group consultations, it provides writing companionship to all staff members and students. Postgraduate students from many fields are recruited by the Writing Centre to serve as writing tutors. The DUT Writing Centre is one of the university's special projects and is entirely supported by the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG).

The DUT Writing Centre has a creative writing component which is used to target budding writers. Thus, the centre hosts an annual creative writing competition (Mheta 2016) where it encourages writing of various genres from poetry to essay writing. This initiative is a strategy to counter the stigma that is often associated with using Writing Centres, that only students with difficulties use the Writing Centre. According to Mheta (2016), the main aim of the DUT Writing Centre is to develop student writing; create confidence to write more in budding writers; and promote reading and writing within and outside disciplines.

While the DUT Writing Centre was established in 2013, MUT's Writing Centre is still fairly new as it opened 2020 (Mhlongo *et al.* 2023). The centre began its operations under the leadership of Dr. Katie Bryant from Carleton University in Canada as its Co-ordinator. Institutionally, it is located within the Teaching and Learning Development Centre (TLDC) which is found on the first floor of MUT's Main Campus Library building. The MUT Writing Centre opened with a staff compliment of two practitioners and six Writing Centre tutors who conduct one-on-one consultations with students. Its mission is to continue to develop a strong academic and research culture at MUT. Its modalities of support are three-fold, namely, one-on-one writing support; writing pedagogy support for academic staff; and research writing support for MUT staff. One-on-one support is offered for both undergraduate and post-graduate students where students are supported with various writing tasks in their modules. Writing pedagogy support for academic staff focuses on supporting lecturers to develop evidence-informed writing tasks (i.e. assignments) in their modules. Lastly, the MUT Writing Centre offers writing support to staff to help them obtain their academic and research writing goals such as workshops, regular writing sessions, and writing coaching sessions.

Both DUT and MUT Writing Centres are located outside of the academic departments or faculties and serve students from all disciplines. At DUT and MUT, the Writing Centres embrace their identity as support structures for students across disciplines, from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. Tutors collaborate with students at various levels of writing proficiency. Collaborative engagement is a fundamental principle of Writing Centres' pedagogy, emphasising a critical approach to developing students' academic, research writing and critical thinking. Consequently, Writing Centres serve as dialogic spaces that recognise the complex relationship between spoken and written language.

2.9 CHALLENGES FACING WRITING CENTRES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Writing Centres at South African higher education institutions face distinct and intersecting challenges (Archer 2010; Kadenge *et al.* 2019; Nkala and Sobantu 2021; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023; Namakula 2024). These challenges are manifold and deeply intertwined with both the changing educational landscape and the historical context of the country. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South African higher education

institutions have undergone significant transformation, however Writing Centres continue to grapple with issues such as access, resource constraints, literacy levels, and evolving pedagogical approaches. Understanding these challenges is critical to improving the effectiveness of Writing Centres and enhancing the academic success of their users.

One of the most pressing challenges is the impact of socio-economic disparities on students' writing skills and their willingness to seek assistance. The legacies of apartheid created vast inequalities in educational access and quality, resulting in many students entering higher education without adequate preparation for the demands of academic writing. Writing Centres often find themselves at the frontline in addressing these disparities, yet they may lack sufficient resources to provide tailored support to students from diverse backgrounds (Arbee 2020; Landa *et al.* 2021; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023). South African Writing Centres operate in a complex sociolinguistic context, navigating issues of language diversity, multilingualism, and cultural differences (Daniel and Richards 2017; Clarence 2019; Sibiya 2023; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023). Additionally, students from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds may inherently feel apprehensive about utilising such services, fearing stigma or believing that support is unnecessary for their academic journeys (Nanima 2019). This is supported by Nkala and Sobantu (2021) who reports on stigmatisation issues, concurring that some students feel stigmatised by peers for using Writing Centre service. This perception can discourage engagement with Writing Centre resources.

Studies report that linguistic diversity and academic literacy issues are prominent; for example, Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza (2022) note that English Second Language students (who constitute the majority of students in this current study) struggle with support models that focus on higher-order academic discourse than on basic grammar needs. This is supported by studies such as those conducted by Zide and Mafugu (2023) who state that students lack the ability to provide sound and coherent arguments and academic voice. In addition, findings from their study revealed that English Second Language students experienced challenges in academic writing such as structure, organisation, coherence, paraphrasing, referencing, and in-text citations. As such, Khumalo *et al.* (2016) assert that

University students are diverse not only in their demographics, but also in their academic literacy needs.

Institutional factors also play a critical role in the challenges faced by Writing Centres. Archer (2010) reports that Writing Centres often endure resource constraints due to limited funding and compete for space and recognition within universities. Kadenge *et al.* (2019) describe Writing Centres as poorly recognised structures within universities, often relegated to marginal physical spaces. The authors further state that Writing Centres in South African universities have traditionally been underappreciated entities in higher education and have been viewed as ‘asides’ to the university’s fundamental functions. Because of this lack of recognition, Writing Centres have been relegated to demeaning physical settings within institutions, limiting the full potential of their work. Earlier research by Leibowitz (1997) focusing on the University of Western Cape’s Writing Centre also emphasised resource constraints as a key challenge to Writing Centre work. These findings suggest that Writing Centres often operate under significant resource constraints, which may limit their ability to provide comprehensive support to student.

Insufficient staff development is also highlighted in literature as an obstacle that hinders Writing Centres from meeting diverse student needs. Kadenge *et al.* (2019) discuss challenges faced by writing consultants in balancing content expertise and writing support. Their research focused on Wits University tutors who highlighted the challenges of navigating between the two roles and having a feeling of ‘inbetweenness’ which affects how they engage with students. Consequently, Zuma *et al.* (2016); Carroll (2018) and Welch *et al.* (2022) advocate for the need for continuous staff development to meet diverse student needs.

Moreover, the integration of digital technologies into education has introduced new dynamics to the functioning of Writing Centres. The transition to remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, as many students faced challenges related to internet access and digital literacy (Landa *et al.* 2021). Writing Centres that may have operated effectively in face-to-face modes were required to pivot quickly to online platforms, which necessitated not only technological adaptations but also training for staff and students in effective online communication and

collaborative writing processes (Ravhuhali *et al.* 2024). This transition revealed disparities in digital literacy and access to resources that further marginalise certain student populations, complicating the efforts of Writing Centres to serve all students equally (Archer 2023).

In addition to technological challenges, the expectations placed on Writing Centres can often be unrealistic and may originate from a misunderstanding of their roles and capabilities (Sithole 2024). Staff members may encounter pressure to function as quick-fix solutions to complex writing problems, leading to a narrow focus on surface-level issues such as grammar and punctuation rather than fostering deeper, critical engagement with writing as a process (Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni 2019). This deficit model of student writing overlooks the varying degrees of prior experiences and potential within the student body, presenting a significant barrier to the effective promotion of academic literacy (Arbee 2020).

Another critical issue confronting Writing Centres in South Africa is decolonising academic discourse. The ongoing calls for decolonising university curricula highlight discontent among students regarding Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that dominate educational practices (Heleta 2016; Mheta *et al.* 2018; Sibanda 2021; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023a). Writing Centres are tasked with creating spaces that promote inclusive and diverse perspectives while also aligning with the institution's broader aims of equity and transformation (Mhlongo *et al.* 2023b). However, the challenge lies in integrating indigenous knowledge and alternative epistemologies into writing practices, ensuring that students from various backgrounds feel valued and engaged (Church 2023).

Furthermore, there is a notable challenge of insufficient funding and human resources, which severely restricts the capacity of Writing Centres to expand their reach and improve their services. Many Writing Centres operate with limited budgets, which can hinder their ability to hire qualified staff, procure teaching materials, or develop comprehensive programmes tailored to specific student needs (Akintolu *et al.* 2022; Mhlongo *et al.* 2023b). Staff burnout due to increased workloads during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic has further compounded this issue, affecting the quality of writing support and mentorship provided to students (Fynn and Walt 2023).

The question of how Writing Centres will continuously adapt and respond to the evolving educational landscape also looms large. Educational institutions are increasingly recognising the need for interdisciplinary approaches to writing support, yet Writing Centres may struggle with the implementation of such integrative models, particularly when resources and institutional backing are lacking (Khumalo and Reddy 2021). Collaborations with other departments and services within the university can foster a more holistic understanding of writing as a cognitive and social skill, but without clear pathways for engagement, such interdisciplinary initiatives may not materialise fully (Chiramba and Ndofirepi 2023).

Writing Centres in South Africa are situated within a complex and challenging educational environment marked by socio-economic disparities, evolving digital landscapes, and the call for pedagogical transformation. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes increasing awareness of Writing Centre roles, securing necessary resources, fostering collaborations, and promoting inclusive practices that recognise the diverse backgrounds and needs of students. Through these means, Writing Centres can more effectively contribute to the academic success of all students in South Africa's higher education landscape.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This literature review chapter has explored the multifaceted role of Writing Centres in higher education, particularly in the South African context, highlighting their significance as critical support structures. This chapter provided a historical background of the higher education landscape in South Africa as well as postgraduate education in South Africa and the role of the Writing Centre as an academic support service in enhancing postgraduate student success. The importance of the Writing Centre in the higher education space was emphasised while an overview of challenges faced by Writing Centres was also provided. The reviewed studies underscore that Writing Centres are not merely peripheral spaces but dynamic environments that foster academic literacy, critical thinking, and disciplinary communication. They cater to diverse student needs, bridging gaps in writing proficiency and empowering students to engage more effectively with their academic work. Furthermore, Writing Centres

contribute to institutional goals of retention, inclusivity, and academic excellence by providing tailored support that aligns with the evolving demands of higher education. The literature further revealed gaps and challenges, such as the need for greater integration of Writing Centres into disciplinary curricula, and the underrepresentation of multilingual and non-traditional students. These areas present opportunities for further research and innovation.

Writing Centres are indispensable to the academic ecosystem as they play a pivotal role in shaping students' writing competencies and confidence. As this chapter has demonstrated, their impact extends beyond individual skill development to influence broader educational outcomes. The next chapter conceptualises training in the Writing Centre and unpacks learning theories applicable to tutors' work with postgraduate students.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW - THE ROLE OF TRAINING IN WRITING CENTRES

“Every writer needs preliminary readers, and [the] careful responses and questions such readers provide. Writing Centre tutors are those readers, and they need to be equipped with particular features to achieve the goals of Writing Centres.”

(Saydam 2025: 357)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Writing Centres have become an integral part of higher education institutions (HEIs), offering support and guidance to students in developing their writing. Effective training programmes for Writing Centre tutors are crucial in ensuring the provision of high-quality assistance and support to students. The role of training in shaping Writing Centre practice remains a dynamic and underexplored area within the broader scholarship on Writing Centre theory and pedagogy in the South African higher education context. The effectiveness of Writing Centre practice relies heavily on the competence and training of its tutors. Training programmes play a pivotal role in equipping tutors with the necessary approaches and knowledge to assist students with their written tasks. Therefore, the significance of ongoing training and professional development for Writing Centre tutors, ultimately contributing to student success and academic achievement, cannot be over-emphasised.

The previous chapter provided a review of literature on the place of the Writing Centre in higher education. This chapter explores the vital role of training of tutors in university Writing Centres. This second literature review chapter seeks to examine the existing body of work on training practices in Writing Centres, exploring how it can influence tutor development, shape institutional goals, and ultimately contribute postgraduate student learning outcomes and success. This chapter discusses the importance of training in enhancing Writing Centre tutor competence, fostering effective tutoring strategies, promoting student engagement, and maintaining the overall effectiveness of Writing Centres. It also examines various training approaches and best practices, drawing upon relevant literature and research. It further discusses theories related to Writing Centre praxis, namely behavioural, cognitive, constructivism and social

learning theories and offers analysis and critique of these theories in relation to the research focus area.

It is pertinent to highlight that the researcher's personal experience working within the Writing Centre has deeply informed her interest in this subject as mentioned in Chapter One. Having been both a tutor and a postgraduate student, she has witnessed firsthand the transformative potential of engaging in writing centre consultations and the value of effective tutor training programmes, as well as the challenges that arise when training is under-prioritised or misaligned with the needs of tutors and students. This dual perspective, grounded in both scholarly inquiry and practical experience, motivates a critical exploration of the literature, with the aim of identifying gaps, synthesising key insights, and contributing to a deeper understanding of how training can be optimised to enhance Writing Centre practice particularly in supporting the development of postgraduate students.

3.2 CONCEPTUALISING TRAINING IN WRITING CENTRE WORK

Training, as defined by Sudhakar and Basariya (2018) is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies with the specific objective of enhancing one's capacity, capability, performance, and productivity. Milhem *et al.* (2014) indicate that training and development involve the acquisition and transfer of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform specific activities or functions. Therefore, the advantages of training and development, both for the organisation and individuals, are strategic in nature and have a broader impact. According to Sangurde and Vidyavihar (2019), it is necessary for every organisation to have individuals who are well-trained and knowledgeable to successfully carry out the required tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, training and development in higher education institutions can be seen as a process of developing the skills of academic staff and academic support staff (such as those in Writing Centre) through regular, well-structured training programmes. Training programmes are designed to meet the goals of the organisation and Dardar *et al.* (2012) agree that training and development practices help employees to gain skills and knowledge that are meant to increase competitiveness and sustainability. Truitt (2021) notes training and development as being an intervention that forms part of the crux of the employment relationship and is an important aspect in the successful realisation of this. Furthermore, training and development is an intervention that is integral in the

employment relationship and is vital for the successful accomplishment of the goals and objectives of any institution. The development aspect of training and development can be viewed from the perspective of the progress made. It can be defined as realisation of an individual's ability through both conscious and unconscious learning (Truitt 2021).

Training and development are integral interventions in the employment relationship and are fundamental for the successful accomplishment of institutional goals and objectives (Latif 2012; Kuruppu 2021; Bhakuni and Saxena 2023; Tumacole 2024). In the context of Writing Centres, this principle holds particular significance, as the effectiveness of these spaces relies heavily on the continuous growth and adaptability of tutors in their work with students. Writing Centre training is not limited to formal, structured programmes; it also encompasses the subtle, often unconscious learning that occurs through daily interactions with students. These interactions, characterised by dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, create opportunities for tutors to refine their skills, develop new strategies, and gain insights into the diverse needs of student writers. In this way, learning in the Writing Centre happens constructively through both formal training and the organic exchange of ideas during consultations (Sherwood 2021; Rambiritch and Carstens 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024; Pandey 2024).

Training and development hold significant value for any organisation, as they enhance employees' skills and modify behaviours in ways that align with institutional goals (Tumi, *et al.* 2022). In the context of Writing Centres, this is particularly crucial for tutors, who often come from diverse academic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. While the tutors' varied experiences enrich the Writing Centre environment, a structured approach to training that introduces them to the subtle yet highly valued behaviours and approaches can profoundly impact students. Writing Centre consultations are not solely about providing feedback on writing; they are deeply interpersonal interactions that require tutors to embody empathy, patience, and cultural sensitivity which are essential for building trust, encouraging learning, and supporting diverse student needs (Lee 2015; Okuda and Anderson 2018; Okuda 2019; Schwartz 2020; Brooks-Gillies and Moore 2024). As such, training must go beyond technical

skills to address the nuanced aspects of communication and behaviour that shape the student-tutor dynamic.

Training and development play a pivotal role in helping organisations meet their human resources requirements while simultaneously enhancing the market value of the individuals being trained (Burhan Ismael *et al.* 2021). In the higher education context, this principle is particularly relevant to Writing Centres, where tutors are essential to the institution's mission of supporting students' academic success. For tutors to effectively fulfil their roles, they must undergo comprehensive induction and ongoing training that equips them with the confidence, skills, and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of their support roles. Without proper induction, tutors may feel uncertain or unprepared, which can hinder their ability to provide meaningful assistance to students. Training, therefore, serves as a critical intervention that not only prepares tutors for their responsibilities but also empowers them to perform their roles with competence and assurance.

In the Writing Centre context, induction programmes are essential for introducing tutors to the centre's philosophies, methodologies, and expectations (Carstens, *et al.* 2021). Tutors often come from diverse academic disciplines and cultural backgrounds, and they may initially lack a clear understanding of the collaborative, non-directive approaches that are central to Writing Centre pedagogy (Epstein and Draxler 2020). Through training, they learn how to balance providing guidance with fostering student autonomy, a skill that is crucial for effective writing consultations. Additionally, Chang Liu *et al.* (2022) assert that induction training helps tutors develop the interpersonal and communication skills needed to build rapport with students, manage challenging consultations, and create an inclusive environment for writers of all abilities and backgrounds.

When tutors feel confident in their roles, their motivation and job satisfaction increase, which in turn enhances their performance and commitment to the Writing Centre's mission (Kriswanto *et al.* 2021). This sense of confidence and competence also contributes to their personal and professional growth, increasing their market value within and beyond the higher education sector (Ampomah *et al.*, 2023). For instance, the skills they acquire - such as critical thinking, communication, and cultural

competence - are transferable to a wide range of careers. As such, Kirchhoff (2016) posits that by investing in the training and development of tutors, Writing Centres not only meet their immediate human resources needs but also contribute to the long-term professional development of their staff, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that fosters motivation, excellence, and sustainability.

3.2.1 Practical approaches and strategies to tutoring at the Writing Centre

It is imperative that Writing Centre tutor training equips tutors with practical approaches and strategies for effective consultations (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). These approaches include active listening, questioning techniques, and the ability to provide constructive feedback to students (Munje *et al.* 2018). Paul Nwati Munje, Robert Doya Nanima, and Sherran Clarence highlight the importance of questioning in writing tutorials (Munje *et al.* 2018). They argue that the nature of questions asked by tutors influence the outcomes of tutorials and impacts the learning process. Effective questioning can make tutorial sessions student-focused and productive, fostering critical thinking and engagement (Munje *et al.* 2018). This is key when working with postgraduate students who are expected to engage in academic writing that shows critique and the building of sound academic arguments.

Training also needs to address the specific challenges of working with diverse student populations, including English Second Language (ESL) writers (Pilin 2020). In addition, Pilin *et al.* (2020) underscore the need for specialised training to support tutors working with ESL writers. They found that tutors perceive a need to develop their ability to explain grammatical rules and improve their pedagogical skills. Research by Carlse (2019) aimed to initiate dialogue on how elaborating the role of writing consultant as a critical friend could open up university Writing Centres as spaces of exploration and empowerment for student writers, aiding them in nurturing their academic thinking and voice. The consultant, primarily a friend, would exercise active listening and pose questions while offering advice and reassurance to writers' abilities, promoting trust and helping the writer develop tools to reason, and therefore freedom and confidence to articulate arguments (Banda 2019; Carlse 2019; Nichols *et al.* 2019). Carlse (2019) investigates framing and facilitating trusting dialogues that can encourage writers to think differently about tasks, assisting them in overcoming hurdles and finding their voices in order to succeed at university. By embracing critical friends, consultants

advocate for the success of writers and provide unusual opportunities to establish supportive relationships that take into account individual journeys, self-reflection, and simply directing through the task at hand (Raymond and Quinn 2012; Carlse 2019; Liu and Harwood 2022; Namakula 2024).

Additionally, body language plays a critical role in creating a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere (Paloma Opazo *et al.* 2024). Tutors therefore need to be trained to adopt open and approachable postures, maintain appropriate eye contact, and use gestures that convey attentiveness and encouragement (Gerwing *et al.* 2019). Similarly, politeness and tone are essential components of effective communication. A respectful and friendly tone can help ease students' anxieties, particularly those who may feel intimidated or uncertain about their writing abilities. Training programmes therefore need to emphasise the importance of these behaviours, providing tutors with practical strategies to ensure their interactions are supportive and inclusive.

Moreover, tutors must be made aware of the cultural dimensions of communication, as students from different backgrounds may interpret body language, tone, and politeness differently (Carstens 2021). In fostering an understanding of these subtleties, training helps tutors navigate cross-cultural interactions with greater sensitivity and effectiveness. Ultimately, these behavioural modifications not only enhance the quality of consultations but also contribute to a positive and empowering experience for students, reinforcing the Writing Centre's role as a space for growth and learning. Through ongoing training and reflective practice, tutors can continually refine these skills, ensuring that their interactions with students remain impactful and aligned with the centre's mission.

Writing Centre training should also focus on developing tutor identity and agency. Kadenge *et al.* (2019) discuss how Writing Centres can exert agency to become more responsive to student needs. They highlight the importance of creating opportunities for consultants to grow from generic writing consultations to content-specific writing development. This shift has implications for the training and pedagogies of Writing Centre consultants, as well as for their identity as students and mentors (Kadenge, 2019). The changing role of writing tutors requires training that prepares them to navigate various personal and operational tensions (Kadenge 2019). These tensions

may include deficit perceptions from both staff and students, and unrealistic expectations of students that their writing problems will be solved instantly (Kadenge 2019). Therefore, in addressing these challenges, Writing Centres can create opportunities for growth and enhance academic literacy support.

Archer (2017) explores the affordances of multimodal pedagogies in Writing Centre environments. She suggests that Writing Centres have the potential to function as change agents, contributing towards changing dominant attitudes towards language and texts. Training should encourage the use of a range of modes (such as talk, writing, music, and images) and resources (including multilingual, experiential, embodied, and technology-enriched resources) (Archer 2017). This approach recognises Writing Centre tutors and students as agentive, resourceful, and creative meaning-makers.

Clarence (2020) argues that the training and development of those who work with writers need to fully account for the affective dimensions of postgraduate writing. For example, at the doctoral level, writers need to take on a confident authorial voice in their work, both written and in conversation with others. Peer writing development work needs to understand the nature of postgraduate learning and writing from more than just the technical perspective of writing a successful thesis (Mannon 2021; Liu and Harwood 2022). Writer-focused work at this level, and indeed at all postgraduate levels, needs to account for the affective dimensions of writing and research as well, to engage students in more holistic, critical, and forward-looking conversations about their writing, and their own developing scholarly identity. Furthermore, Clarence (2020), Mannon (2021) and Liu and Harwood (2022) offer suggestions for a whole-student tutoring approach at this level. This approach acknowledges the emotional and psychological challenges that postgraduate students may face and provides tutors with strategies to support their well-being and academic success.

3.2.2 Writing Centres as inclusive, collaborative learning spaces

Writing Centres are widely recognised as inclusive academic support spaces that seek to address the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds of students in higher education. Within the South African context, Writing Centres have been positioned as critical sites for promoting academic access and epistemic inclusion, particularly in institutions serving historically marginalised student populations.

Inclusivity in Writing Centres extends beyond providing remedial support and is increasingly understood as fostering equitable participation in academic discourse and knowledge production.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced universities globally to adapt to digital learning platforms, and Writing Centres played a crucial role in creating safe, enabling learning environments for students (Archer 2023). A study by Govender (2023) explored how Writing Centres can negotiate inclusive learning spaces, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic including initiating innovative tutoring techniques and using digital platforms to foster criticality and academic and social resiliency in students. Govender (2023) used Paulo Freire's idea of a Humanising Pedagogy and Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice (CoP) to gain insights into the contextual dynamics that shape a Writing Centre's practice. The findings revealed that the Writing Centre acknowledges the socio-economic difficulties faced by students and sees the value of CoP and a humanistic approach in its work in assisting students in coping with challenges and the realities that currently confront them. It found that tutors are central to contributing to transformative, multi-modal learning, and the Writing Centre can serve as a vehicle for promoting and sustaining inclusive learning environments and new ways of supporting students during uncertain times such as during a pandemic (Govender 2023).

In his study, Fouch (2006) examined the experiences of nine tutors at the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Reading and Writing Centres, who are all in different regional offices across Africa, to determine what extent administrative support, professional development and colleague support influence tutors' feelings of isolation. The paper took the position that if feelings of isolation are curbed, staff retention will be improved, which in turn means the university retains valuable experience (Fouch 2006). Findings showed that contact with and collaboration between colleagues significantly decrease feelings of isolation. Fouch (2006) suggests that other important methods of curbing isolation are regular training and continuous support. Training programmes should provide opportunities for tutors to connect with one another and build a sense of community. In line with the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP), this can transform the Writing Centre into a true community of writers, where tutors learn from

each other and support one another (Houston and Johnson 1993; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023).

Research by Khumalo *et al.* (2024) explored the interdisciplinary collaboration between the Writing Centre and the nursing department at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in developing undergraduate (UG) nursing students' academic research writing skills. Guided by the Social Learning Theory, the study aimed to evaluate the role of the Writing Centre support in enhancing nursing students' research writing proficiency. The findings revealed the Writing Centre's best practices in assisting undergraduate nursing students, including creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment that addresses individual students' unique learning styles and research writing needs (Khumalo *et al.* 2024). These best practices can also be included in utilised for postgraduate students.

Ongoing training that encourages tutors to share their day-to-day experiences fosters a culture of collaborative learning. By creating spaces for tutors to reflect on and discuss their practices, Writing Centres enable 'learning by doing', a theory promulgated and advocated by John Dewey (Li 2023). This approach not only reinforces formal training but also allows tutors to learn from one another, exchanging techniques and strategies that have proven effective in real-world scenarios. The sharing of practices during training sessions is particularly valuable, as it cultivates a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger and Snyder 2002) where tutors can collectively navigate challenges and innovate solutions. This dynamic process of learning, rooted in both formal instruction and peer-to-peer exchange, ensures that tutors are continually developing their abilities, both consciously and unconsciously, to better support student writers and contribute to the overarching mission of the Writing Centre.

Collectively, these studies foreground Writing Centres as inclusive, collaborative learning spaces that rely on trained, supported, and interconnected tutors to function effectively. They also highlight the importance of ongoing training that encourages reflection, peer learning, and the sharing of practice, consistent with Dewey's notion of 'learning by doing' (Li 2023). By fostering CoPs, Writing Centres enable tutors to continually develop their pedagogical approaches and adapt to evolving academic

challenges. However, while existing literature demonstrates the value of inclusive and collaborative Writing Centre practices, there remains limited empirical focus on how such practices are extended to postgraduate students, particularly in relation to tutor training and preparedness. This gap provided a strong rationale for the present study.

3.2.3 Theoretical grounding of Writing Centre work

A strong theoretical foundation is crucial for effective Writing Centre tutor training (Carstens 2021). Carstens and Rambiritch (2021) argue that awareness of different theoretical approaches to learning and writing is essential for Writing Centre tutors. They identify three main theoretical paradigms underpinning Writing Centre work: the Current-Traditional paradigm, Expressivism, and Socio-constructionism (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). These paradigms shape tutors' beliefs about how students learn to write, which in turn guides their tutoring strategies.

The Current-Traditional paradigm emphasises correctness and adherence to rules, focusing on the product of writing rather than the process. Expressivism, on the other hand, values the writer's personal voice and self-discovery through writing. Socio-constructionism views writing as a social act shaped by context and community (Carstens 2021). Understanding these paradigms allows tutors to critically evaluate and adapt their approaches to suit specific historical and local contexts (Carstens 2021). Carstens and Rambiritch (2021) propose that South African Writing Centres should identify analytical lenses appropriate to their institutional contexts. They advocate for a framework that acknowledges the complexities of the local environment while drawing on established theories. This approach ensures that tutor training is relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the students and the institution.

Clarence (2016) explored a tutor programme within a South African Writing Centre aimed at offering ongoing cumulative growth using a balanced approach, which included scholarly research and practice-based training. Using narrative data provided in reflective written reports, she demonstrates the kinds of tutor thinking and action possible when training is theoretically informed, coherent, and oriented towards improving practice (Clarence 2016). Furthermore, Clarence (2016) argues that peer tutors need in-depth academic support to fully realise their role as partners to both lecturers and students. This support should be ongoing and cumulative, allowing tutors

to develop their skills and knowledge over time. In recognising the role of peer tutors differently, universities can create and sustain environments that are better able to facilitate students' engagement with knowledge and learning (Clarence 2016).

This current research discusses six (6) theories related to Writing Centre work which underpin this study in detail in section 3.5 of this literature review.

3.3 TYPES OF TRAINING IN WRITING CENTRES

Traditionally, Writing Centres have focused on undergraduate writing support through one-on-one tutorials, emphasising rhetorical approaches and the genre-audience-purpose triad (Gustafsson and Ganobcsik-Williams 2016). However, there is a growing number of students pursuing postgraduate studies, which necessitates that Writing Centre tutors be trained on consulting with postgraduate students as they present unique needs which may differ from undergraduate students. Training helps equip tutors with competencies and qualities that they need to effectively consult with students. Firstly, Boehm (2019) states that tutors need to provide clear, objective feedback, promote intellectual curiosity and have a broad interest in various writing genres and fields of study, strong writing skills and knowledge, and an interest in individuals and their writing processes. In addition, tutors need to have an understanding of their own writing processes, appreciation for student diversity, a clear understanding of the roles of tutor and student, willingness to act as a positive role model, and an engaging personality (Okuda 2019; Zuo 2024; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Finally, it is important for tutors to possess good listening and facilitation skills, the ability to ask insightful questions, the capacity to motivate others, a sense of humour, patience, and a welcoming body language and eye contact (Mackiewicz and Thompson 2014; Hill 2016; Mackiewicz and Thompson 2018; Mannon 2021; Knorr and Edlich 2024).

Writing Centre tutor training is crucial for effective, quality student support. A comprehensive training programme typically includes orientation on procedures, roles, and policies, followed by training in communication, and critical thinking (Sithole 2024). The debate between directive and nondirective tutoring styles remains a central issue in Writing Centre pedagogy, with implications for classroom-based peer collaborations

(Corbett 2013). Effective tutoring is viewed as an intervention in the composing process, requiring tutors to understand and address students' specific needs rather than simply providing information or editing services (North 1984). Ongoing training and development of tutors' skills are essential for Writing Centres to maintain high-quality support for students across disciplines, emphasising the importance of adaptable, process-oriented tutoring approaches. Training programmes typically begin with initial training and are followed by ongoing training to enhance the skills and expertise of Writing Centre tutors. Further explanation of these is provided in the sections below.

3.3.1 Initial Tutor Training Programmes (Training Workshops)

Writing Centre management, namely at the DUT and MUT Writing Centres, typically conduct training workshops at the beginning of the year which serve as refresher courses for returning tutors and informative sessions for new tutors. Training new tutors in the Writing Centre is a critical component of being able to meet the needs of student writers. Initial training programmes focus on what novice tutors need to know and be able to do to succeed in a Writing Centre. Initial training programmes for Writing Centre tutors are designed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support student writers. Each initial training programme is likely to cover areas including core theories, skills, policies and practices for peer tutoring, and tutoring considerations.

The aim of initial training programmes for Writing Centre staff are to provide knowledge, techniques, and strategies for collaboration and to give them the confidence to work effectively with students (Ryan and Zimmerelli 2016). During initial training, Writing Centre tutors are introduced to the theoretical aspects of Writing Centres, such as social constructivist approaches to tutoring (Bruffee 1984), and they also acquire practical skills like active listening and Socratic questioning (Harris 1995). They are familiarised with key principles to consider during consultations, for example, adopting a non-directive stance (North 1984) and employing collaborative negotiation techniques (Boquet 1999) when providing critique or facilitating student reflection.

Training often begins with an introduction to Writing Centre theory, which includes understanding the institutional, theoretical, and historical context of tutoring. This helps

tutors grasp the broader framework within which they operate and equips tutors with the necessary skills and knowledge to support student writers effectively (Gorkemli 2007; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Understanding theories relating to Writing Centre work is essential for tutors to effectively support students in this process. Knowledge of Writing Centre theories, such as the Current-traditional paradigm, Expressivism, and Socio-constructionism, provides a foundation for tutors to adapt their strategies to suit specific educational contexts. This theoretical grounding helps tutors align their practices with the pedagogical goals of Writing Centres (Burlaga and Costino 2003; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). Furthermore, embedding theory into tutor training programmes equips tutors with the necessary skills to transform student learning. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of their role in facilitating cognitive development and encourages a more responsive Writing Centre practice (Stock and Liechty 2022; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Moreover, understanding theoretical frameworks helps tutors navigate their roles effectively, whether as proofreaders, coaches, or allies. This clarity enables tutors to adapt their approaches to meet the diverse needs of students and align with Writing Centre policies (Aldohon 2020; Liu and Harwood 2022). As such, through the integration of theory into tutor training, Writing Centres can enhance the overall learning experience and help students become better writers across different contexts.

Initial training programmes also encompass the integration of theory with practice, enabling tutors to apply what they learn in real-world scenarios. This includes role-playing, simulations, and reflective practices to enhance their tutoring skills (North 1982; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Encouraging tutors to reflect on their experiences and roles helps in their cognitive and professional development, fostering a deeper understanding of their impact on student learning (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Role-playing is a valuable tool in Writing Centre tutor training, particularly for addressing lower-order concerns such as grammar and style. It helps tutors move beyond instinctual knowledge and rules of thumb, providing them with a more concrete understanding of grammatical rules and effective communication strategies.

Role-playing in Writing Centre tutor training is essential for developing tutors' ability to explain writing concepts clearly and confidently. It helps break the reliance on simplistic

rules of thumb, fostering a deeper understanding of writing mechanics and enhancing the overall effectiveness of tutoring sessions. According to Warrington (2011), role-playing allows tutors to practice explaining grammatical rules and writing strategies in a safe and friendly environment. This practice helps them articulate why certain writing choices are effective, moving beyond instinctual responses to more informed explanations. By simulating real tutoring scenarios, role-playing helps tutors become more comfortable with addressing complex writing issues. This confidence is crucial for avoiding overly directive teaching and instead fostering a collaborative learning environment (Warrington 2011). Furthermore, many tutors rely on rules of thumb, such as placing commas where one would pause in speech. Role-playing exercises challenge this reliance by encouraging tutors to explore and understand the underlying grammatical principles, leading to more accurate and helpful guidance for students.

Aside from role-plays, reflective practices in Writing Centre tutor training are crucial for cultivating effective writing support strategies that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. This training approach underscores the importance of tutors reflecting on their experiences, pedagogical strategies, and interactions with students, fostering a deeper understanding of their roles within the educational ecosystem. From a foundational perspective, reflective practices enable tutors to articulate and analyse their lived experiences, as emphasised by Govender and Ndadziyira (2023). By utilising qualitative methods, such as written reflections, tutors can gain insights into the complex dynamics of their interactions with students, thereby enhancing their pedagogical effectiveness. This aligns with the broad concept of reflective practice, which requires ongoing evaluation and adaptation of instructional strategies to meet diverse student needs effectively (Clarence 2016; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Furthermore, it has been shown that maintaining a focus on collaborative learning and peer tutoring enhances critical thinking skills in both tutors and students, transforming the educational environment into one that emphasises autonomy and reflection (Brandt and Dimmitt 2015; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021).

The role of Writing Centres as collaborative spaces for learning and engagement is also emphasised in literature that outlines the crucial developmental transition tutors undergo during their training. As noted by Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam, Writing Centres provide safe spaces that encourage tutors to experiment with various tutoring

approaches, fostering reflective practices that can dynamically evolve based on student interactions (Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam 2023). Similarly, Clarence discusses a cumulative approach to training that integrates theoretical knowledge and practical experience, allowing tutors to reflect on their developmental process and improve their pedagogical practices (Clarence 2016). These cumulative experiences highlight the necessity for Writing Centre programmes to incorporate structured opportunities for tutor dialogue and reflection, which are pivotal in enhancing tutoring competence and adaptability (Landry *et al.* 2023).

Moreover, the experiences of multilingual tutors and their reflections underscore the importance of acknowledging diverse student backgrounds in Writing Centre practices. Luyt (2022) argues that peer tutors must navigate the complexities of language and identity during tutoring sessions, and that understanding these social dynamics can significantly enhance the tutoring experience. The training of writing tutors, therefore, must encompass an awareness of these intercultural aspects, ensuring that tutors can provide equitable support tailored to the needs of individual students (Eckstein 2016). Additionally, as explored by Munje *et al.* (2018) the tactical use of questioning during writing tutorials can facilitate deeper engagement and reflection among tutors and tutees alike. This form of methodical questioning not only enhances the learning environment but also enables tutors to reflect more critically on their instructional methods and areas where they can improve (Munje *et al.* 2018). Such an emphasis on reflective questioning fortifies the theory-practice connection essential for successful tutor training in Writing Centres (Ganobcsik-Williams *et al.* 2022).

The integration of reflective practices into tutor training within Writing Centres not only enhances tutors' competence but also significantly improves the educational experiences of the students they serve. Writing Centres must strategically incorporate opportunities for reflection and dialogue, fostering an environment conducive to continuous growth and development in both tutors and students. Some training programmes are tailored to address the needs of specific disciplines, such as engineering or law, ensuring that tutors can provide relevant and effective feedback across different fields (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; Jones *et al.* 2020). Moreover, some training programmes incorporate interdisciplinary methods to improve the effectiveness of tutoring across various academic fields (Weissbach

and Pflueger 2018; Jones *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, with the increasing diversity of student populations, many programmes include specialised training for working with ESL students, focusing on language acquisition and cultural differences (Kennell 2014).

Initial training programmes typically use theory and practice, assignments and activities, to teach what tutors should know (knowledge) and how they should apply their new learning in a tutoring session. Boehm (2019) posits that the initial training programme should provide tutors with the necessary expertise to effectively work with a diverse range of students in different writing situations. This training typically includes an in-house tutor manual that covers tutoring theory, effective practices, operational details (e.g., session format, record-keeping), assessment strategies, and more. For example, Writing Centre practitioners at DUT provide Writing Centre tutors with a Tutor Handbook which provides tutoring strategies to new tutors which they can refer to throughout their work at the Writing Centre.

3.3.2 On-the-job Training (Practical Tutoring Experience)

On-the-job training (OJT), as the name implies, is a training strategy that enables workers to pick up new abilities as they go about their work (Ma *et al.* 2021). A typical illustration of OJT is when a Writing Centre practitioner trains tutors on how students can book a session through the WOnline platform. WOnline is an online scheduling and consultation platform widely used by Writing Centres to manage appointments, track student visits, provide written feedback and facilitate both in-person and online writing support. It provides features such as appointment scheduling which allows students to book one-on-one or group sessions with writing centre tutors and record keeping and reporting which tracks consultation history and session outcomes for institutional assessment. Many university Writing Centres use WOnline to streamline operations, ensure accessibility, and maintain records for programme improvement (Kourbani 2019; Govender 2023; Kwan 2023).

OJT tutoring within Writing Centres is a dynamic and layered process of professional development, particularly because tutors are consistently exposed to a wide range of students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, academic disciplines, and writing needs. Each consultation becomes a learning opportunity, pushing tutors to adapt their

approaches, cultivate empathy, and develop strategies tailored to individual student contexts. This engagement sharpens tutors' ability to respond thoughtfully and flexibly, nurturing both technical proficiency and interpersonal sensitivity. The variety of student encounters enriches tutors' understanding of academic writing and reinforces the value of writing as a situated, social practice.

New tutors, when first entering the Writing Centre space, often begin by shadowing experienced colleagues. This practice draws on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning occurs most effectively in the space between what a novice can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Through observation and gradual participation, novice tutors internalise the "ways of being and doing" in the Writing Centre environment - how to frame questions, manage session flow, and negotiate meaning with students. Shadowing offers an invaluable bridge between theoretical training and the nuanced realities of practice, helping new tutors gain confidence and align with the ethos of the centre. Tutors also often draw upon their recent educational experiences and training during OJT sessions. However, their tutoring styles may sometimes reflect directive approaches learned in earlier educational settings, such as secondary school, rather than the non-directive, collaborative methods emphasised in their training (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). This highlights the need for Writing Centres to align training and practices, ensuring that tutors can effectively transfer their learning into practice (Truesdell 2015).

At both DUT and MUT, new tutors are provided the opportunity to observe experienced tutors' consultations. Observing peers in Writing Centres serves as a valuable learning experience for tutors, aiding in the refinement of their tutoring techniques and approaches. Peer observation allows tutors to identify each other's strengths and areas for improvement, which encourages a collaborative culture and continuous development of best practices (Ribosa *et al.* 2023). This practice not only enhances individual tutoring but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of the Writing Centre (Bleakney 2017). Feedback discussions following observations often contain specific suggestions for change or enhancement, and over time, the specificity and usefulness of feedback tend to increase. According to Parr and Hawe (2017) and Flores *et al.* (2024), there is evidence that tutors and teachers utilise this feedback to change and improve their practice. The process also promotes reflection and awareness of one's

own tutoring methods, further supporting professional development (Flores *et al.* 2024). Engaging in structured reflective discussions with fellow tutors enables the purposeful addressing of individual needs and enhances interactions within the centre. Evers (2019) observes that when staff participate in peer reflection and evaluation, this promotes systematic quality improvement, collaboration, shared learning, and a reduced sense of isolation.

Equally important is the peer learning that occurs among tutors themselves. Writing Centre tutors come with different academic backgrounds, strengths, and communication styles, and the sharing of strategies, tools, and insights is an essential form of capacity building (Driscoll 2015; Brandt and Dimmitt 2015; Donahue 2019). For instance, one tutor may be particularly skilled at using metaphors to explain complex writing concepts, while another may excel in decoding assignment prompts. These strengths become communal resources when tutors collaborate, observe one another, or engage in informal conversations about their sessions. This horizontal exchange not only enhances individual capabilities but also creates a culture of mutual respect and collective growth.

Senior Writing Centre practitioners play a pivotal role in supporting tutor development through feedback and supervision. Writing Centres at both DUT and MUT incorporate systems where Writing Centre coordinators and practitioners observe tutoring sessions and provide constructive critique, helping tutors refine their communication, questioning, and facilitation skills. This focused observation, according to Parr and Hawe (2017), helps identify specific strengths and areas for improvement in tutors' approaches. After observations, feedback sessions are held where observers provide targeted, actionable suggestions. Over time, the specificity and usefulness of this feedback tend to increase, leading to meaningful changes in tutoring practice (Caffarella and Barnett 2000; Parr and Hawe 2017).

This feedback loop is complemented by reflective practices, such as maintaining journals, writing session reports, or participating in debriefing conversations. Influenced by Donald Schön's (1983) concept of the 'reflective practitioner,' these activities allow tutors to process their experiences, evaluate their choices, and shape their tutoring identities. Furthermore, regular staff meetings serve as collaborative

spaces where tutors collectively analyse challenges, share pedagogical insights, and co-construct knowledge. In line with Wenger's (1998) notion of communities of practice, these gatherings nurture a shared sense of purpose and continual professional learning within the Writing Centre team.

3.3.3 Ongoing Professional Development

Writing Centre tutors often require more than just initial orientation; they benefit from ongoing, structured training that combines theory and practice. This approach helps tutors develop the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support students and adapt to diverse writing needs (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). While the goal of training new staff members is to help them develop into effective tutors (Knorr and Edlich 2024), the goal of ongoing professional development programmes can be narrowed to promoting the continuing professional growth of competent, accomplished Writing Centre professionals (Sherwood 2021).

Continuous professional development is encouraged through structured, ongoing training sessions that is built on adapting to new challenges and student needs (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Furthermore, ongoing professional development aims to foster the continued growth of already competent Writing Centre professionals, moving beyond initial training to deepen expertise, encourage reflective practice, and support innovation in tutoring approaches (Ven 2017). An important objective of tutor training is to promote the importance of continuous professional development (DeFeo and Caparas 2014). Writing Centre training programmes should not be static but instead focus on ongoing growth and skills enhancement for tutors (Knorr and Edlich 2024). This objective involves providing resources and opportunities for further training and professional development, encouraging tutors to engage in peer mentoring and reflective practices that contribute to both their personal growth and the overall efficacy of the Writing Centre. This ongoing development is essential to maintain high-quality writing support and adapt to changing educational demands.

Training in Writing Centres offers significant professional development benefits, especially for tutors who aspire to work in academia. Such training not only enhances writing and teaching skills but also fosters reflective practice, academic identity, and

research abilities - key assets for academic careers. Writing Centre training programmes often embed both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, equipping tutors with a deep understanding of writing pedagogy and academic literacies. This foundation supports tutors in transforming their own thinking, teaching, and learning - skills directly relevant to academic roles (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024). The Writing Centre serves as a mentoring environment where tutors, especially postgraduates, can explore and shape their academic identities. This transitional space supports the move from student to academic professional (Archer and Parker 2016). Tutors gain experience in teaching, curriculum development, and academic collaboration, all of which are valuable for future academic positions (Archer and Parker 2016; Knorr and Edlich 2024).

The Writing Centre must be cognisant of and keep up to date with the nature of the students it assists, as well as the evolving learning theories applicable to Writing Centre praxis, if it is to remain relevant and sufficiently meet the needs of the student population it serves (Mackiewicz and Thompson 2018). Tutors, therefore, need to be prepared to approach students with the most relevant strategies that are engaging, developmental, and encourage deep thinking (Bruce 2021).

Tutor training can take place in multiple formats, including weekly staff meetings, in-service training workshops, and one-on-one peer mentoring (Denny *et al.* 2018). After initial staff training, all staff, both new and returning, are required to attend regular tutor training workshops. Writing Centres often host hands-on workshops, discussions, and collaborative activities for both tutors and faculty. These sessions provide opportunities to share best practices, develop new strategies, and build a supportive professional community (Galtung *et al.* 2020). This enhances tutor practice, increases the tutor's confidence, and reduces tutor turnover, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of Writing Centres (Perdue and Driscoll 2017).

Collaborations made by the Writing Centre with libraries and other academic units also help to expand the scope of professional development, offering joint training, resource creation, and outreach activities that benefit both staff and students (Galtung *et al.* 2020; Stone 2024). Many institutions such as DUT, co-locate Writing Centres within libraries, creating one-stop shops where students can access both writing and

research support. This physical proximity encourages collaboration and makes it easier for students to seek help with multiple aspects of their academic work (Ferer 2012; Escobar and Gauder 2015; Bolin 2022). Writing Centres and libraries often co-host workshops, classes, and training sessions that address both writing and research skills. These programmes reinforce the interconnectedness of writing and information literacy and can be tailored to specific student populations or academic needs (Ferer 2012; Bernstein *et al.* 2020; Stone 2024). Librarians often train Writing Centre staff in information literacy, while Writing Centre tutors share expertise in composition instruction. This cross-training enhances the professional development of both groups and improves the quality of student support (Graves *et al.* 2017). Moreover, Smith *et al.* (2011) state that some Writing Centres provide discipline-specific writing instruction, especially in fields like health sciences, to help staff and students develop relevant competencies without requiring major curricular changes. Collaborations with academic departments, such as nursing, enable tailored support for discipline-specific writing and research needs, further expanding professional development opportunities for staff and students (Bernstein *et al.* 2020; Khumalo *et al.* 2024).

In addition, ongoing training often includes training for working with English Second Language (ESL) writers, ensuring that tutors are equipped to meet a wide range of student needs (Williams and Severino 2004; Okuda and Anderson 2018). The growing number of multilingual and international students using Writing Centres has highlighted the need for tutors to be equipped with skills specific to supporting ESL writers. Traditional Writing Centre approaches, often designed for native speakers, may not fully address the challenges faced by second language writers, such as sentence-level language issues and unfamiliar rhetorical conventions (Kennell 2014; Hyslop 2015; Eckstein 2023; Landry *et al.* 2023).

The shift to virtual and hybrid learning and training that became prevalent during the Covid-19 era required new strategies and resources but also offers opportunities for broader participation, innovation, and ongoing training (Stone 2024). This shift enabled continued peer tutoring and collaborative learning, while also fostering critical thinking and academic resilience in students (Govender 2023). Some institutions adopted hybrid models, combining virtual and in-person support when possible. These models aimed to balance the benefits of traditional face-to-face tutoring with the accessibility

and flexibility of online resources (Okoye *et al.* 2021; Xing and Saghaian 2022). Recognising the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of students, Writing Centres had to prioritise creating inclusive, flexible, and supportive virtual environments. Humanistic and community-based approaches were used to help students cope with the uncertainties and challenges of remote learning (Govender 2023). Tutors received training to effectively use digital tools and adapt their pedagogical approaches for online environments, ensuring continued high-quality support (Govender 2023; Okoye *et al.* 2021). The Covid-19 era prompted Writing Centres to innovate rapidly, adopting digital tools and inclusive practices to support students in virtual and hybrid learning environments. These adaptations not only addressed immediate challenges but also expanded the scope and accessibility of writing support for the future, where technologies like Artificial Intelligence require a rethinking of writing assistance.

Furthermore, the training of peer writing tutors in a disciplinary setting can be informed by Writing Centre scholarship. Appleby-Ostroff (2017) offers a set of theory-supported criteria for designing effective programs working in discipline-specific centres. The criteria are derived from theories about pedagogy, process, and tutors. This approach ensures that tutors are equipped with the knowledge and skills to address the specific writing challenges within a particular discipline. Appleby-Ostroff (2017) highlights three statements on Best Instructional Practices in Writing Centres: (1) tutors need to be educated and mentored; (2) support is best attended to in context; and (3) professionals use and apply research studies. By incorporating these principles into training programs, Writing Centres can ensure that tutors are well-prepared and effective in their roles.

Writing Centre work necessitates comprehensive and ongoing training to equip tutors with the skills and knowledge to effectively support student writers. Many researchers suggest that tutor training should be theoretically grounded (Carstens 2021), responsive to the needs of both tutors and students (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023), and adaptable to the evolving landscape of higher education (Govender 2023). This is further discussed in the following section.

3.4 TRAINING AND WRITING CENTRE PEDAGOGY

Training plays a crucial role in developing well-rounded and efficient Writing Centre tutors. Structured, ongoing programmes that integrate theory and practice are essential for equipping tutors with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to work with students (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). In the view of Clarence (2021), these programmes need to emphasise an academic literacies approach, fostering critical thinking and disciplinary writing. Writing Centres in South Africa hire postgraduate students as tutors and these tutors experience their own writing challenges. Training is therefore important as it serves as the foundation for enhancing tutor competence in Writing Centre practice. According to Wrenn and Wrenn (2009), tutors need a solid understanding of writing theory, academic conventions, and genre-specific expectations. Cintron and McClure (2018) further add that training provides tutors with the knowledge and skills necessary to assess and provide constructive feedback on student writing. It equips them with the ability to identify common writing challenges and tailor their support to address individual student needs. According to Carstens and Rambiritch (2020), a well-trained tutor can effectively guide students in areas such as grammar, organisation, argumentation, and citation, contributing to improved writing proficiency.

Writing Centres become effective instructional spaces when they adopt sound pedagogical practices. Training is often, if not always, informed and shaped by Writing Centre pedagogy. In Writing Centres, pedagogy - principles and practices related to effective composition instruction represents the conceptual foundation, or why, of the work of tutors. If pedagogy addresses not “what we do” but “why we do it,” then the outcomes from training should logically demonstrate evidence of pedagogical application (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). A working knowledge of the pedagogical principles underlying the practice of tutors serves as a foundation for the training they undergo.

The objectives of tutor training in Writing Centres are fundamentally aligned with enhancing the writing support provided to students, particularly within the unique socio-economic and educational context of South Africa. This training seeks to equip tutors with essential skills and knowledge necessary for effective writing consultations. One

of the main objectives of tutor training is to improve pedagogical skills specifically oriented towards writing instruction. Tutors must acquire a deep understanding of writing processes, including planning, brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Training programmes often include workshops focused on instructional strategies that tutors can employ in consultations, such as the use of metacognition to help students reflect on their writing practices, as highlighted by Govender and Ndadziyira (2023). These workshops aim to shift the tutor's role from merely correcting grammar and providing surface-level feedback to facilitating students' deeper engagement with their writing, thus fostering critical thinking (Aldayel *et al.* 2019). Another objective is to enhance interpersonal communication among tutors. Effective writing instruction requires not only technical knowledge but also the ability to relate to students empathetically and supportively. Training programmes often focus on developing emotional intelligence in tutors, teaching them to navigate students' anxiety and promote a positive learning environment. The goal is for tutors to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable discussing their writing challenges and seeking assistance, thereby increasing the overall engagement with Writing Centre services.

Cultural competence is increasingly recognised as a vital component of tutor training, aligning with the diverse backgrounds of students in South African universities. Training objectives include equipping tutors to understand and appreciate cultural differences that influence writing styles and conventions. This understanding is crucial in addressing the needs of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and those for whom English is an additional language. By fostering cultural sensitivity, tutors can provide support that is respectful and relevant to students' unique experiences, ultimately enhancing the learning experience and promoting inclusivity.

Furthermore, an objective of tutor training is to ensure discipline-specific knowledge among tutors. Writing support is most effective when tutors are familiar with the unique conventions, formats, and expectations of different disciplines. This enables tutors to provide targeted guidance that aligns with students' academic and professional goals (Appleby-Ostroff 2017). Writing conventions vary widely across different academic disciplines, and training programmes often incorporate opportunities for tutors to collaborate with faculty members from various departments. This enables tutors to gain direct insights into the writing requirements and expectations of specific fields, making

their support more relevant and effective (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Li and Yeh 2024). By focusing on the disciplinary expectations, Writing Centres can develop students' writing in alignment with their academic goals.

Additionally, the training objectives often include methods for providing constructive feedback and assessment strategies. Tutors learn effective techniques for evaluating student writing that emphasise specific, actionable suggestions rather than vague criticisms. Training in feedback mechanisms can help tutors support students more effectively, fostering a growth mindset around writing abilities and encouraging improvement. Research indicates that structured feedback positively impacts students' learning outcomes and motivation towards writing (Landry *et al.* 2023).

Lastly, a fundamental objective of Writing Centre tutor training is to build a community of practice (CoP) among tutors. Writing Centres act as vibrant CoPs, where students, tutors, and staff engage in collaborative learning and mutual support. This community aspect is especially important during times of uncertainty, such as the shift to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, where Writing Centres maintained inclusive, flexible, and supportive environments that promoted resilience and critical thinking among students (Govender 2023; Namakula 2024). The sense of belonging and emotional support found in Writing Centres helps students, particularly first-years, feel safe and empowered in unfamiliar academic spaces, enhancing both their academic and personal growth (Namakula 2024; Govender 2023).

Training programmes aim to cultivate a collaborative environment where tutors can share experiences, strategies, and challenges. Peer learning and mentoring among tutors not only enhance their skills but also contribute to a cohesive Writing Centre ethos that prioritises student development and support. Writing Centres facilitate the sharing of best practices through structured, purposeful, and writing-intensive approaches that bridge gaps between students and academic staff, supporting institutional goals of access and success (Drennan 2017; Stone 2024). Collaborative efforts, such as partnerships with libraries and the creation of online resources, further extend the reach and effectiveness of Writing Centres in supporting diverse student needs (Stone 2024; Zuma *et al.* 2016). These roles collectively enhance student

academic success, encourage inclusive and supportive environments, and contribute to broader institutional goals such as social justice and decolonisation.

3.4.1 Tutor training strategies and techniques

Training should equip tutors with a repertoire of practical techniques, approaches and strategies for working with students. Writing Centres utilise a variety of tutoring strategies and techniques to provide effective support for students' writing development. In South Africa, where diverse student populations and varying levels of academic writing proficiency exist, it is essential for tutors to be equipped with adaptable and evidence-based strategies (Archer 2023; Govender 2023).

Scaffolding is a foundational strategy in Writing Centre tutoring, which involves breaking down the writing process into manageable chunks. This method allows tutors to guide students step-by-step through brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing phases. For instance, tutors can use graphic organisers to help students structure their ideas before drafting (Alamri 2024). This strategy not only promotes a clear writing structure but also fosters independence by allowing students to take ownership of their writing process. Additionally, training in metacognitive strategies is increasingly being used as it enables students to become aware of their writing processes and to regulate their own learning. Tutors can encourage metacognitive strategies through advocating self-reflection where students evaluate their drafts critically and articulate their writing choices (Xu 2021). Techniques such as think-aloud or read aloud protocols, where students verbalise their thought processes while writing, can also help tutors identify areas where students need further assistance. This reflective practice empowers students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

Tutors are trained in effective feedback strategies that promote students' growth and development. Providing constructive feedback is crucial in writing consultations. Skills in offering both positive reinforcement and specific, actionable suggestions for improvement are covered extensively in training (Liu and Harwood 2022). For example, tutors are trained to use praise and positive feedback as a core part of their sessions. According to Whittier (2019), praise energises students, helps build a supportive and welcoming environment, and encourages further discussion about their writing (Whittier 2019). Tutors learn how to balance feedback on surface-level writing

issues (like grammar) with higher-order concerns (like argument structure and clarity). Positive reinforcement is especially emphasised when addressing higher-order writing concerns, such as organisation and argumentation, helping students feel recognised for their strengths while motivating them to improve (Rambiritch and Carstens 2021).

Peer feedback is another effective strategy and is a technique that is often explored during tutor training. By encouraging collaborative discussions about writing, tutors can help students learn to provide and receive constructive criticism, which is vital for improving writing (Landry *et al.* 2023). Tutors are advised to facilitate peer review sessions where students critique each other's work in a structured manner, focusing on specific criteria, such as coherence, argumentation, and grammatical accuracy. This social component not only enhances writing ability but also builds a sense of community among students. This is further valued in group consultations where students come in groups to consult on written tasks.

In the postgraduate context peer feedback can be valuable in providing students with a new perspective on their writing. In the South African context, culturally responsive tutoring is essential due to the diverse backgrounds of students. Tutors are trained to recognise and respect cultural differences that influence writing styles and conventions. For example, understanding students' previous educational experiences can inform how tutors approach writing consultations. This adaptability helps foster an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and understood (Harrington *et al.* 2024). This is particularly relevant in this study where a large number of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and require support while on their academic journeys. Given South Africa's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, an essential component of tutor training focuses on cultural competence. It is imperative for tutors to recognise and appreciate the varied cultural backgrounds of students and develop a more inclusive approach, ensuring that they can promote an equitable learning environment (Alamri 2024).

An important consideration for Writing Centre tutor training is the integration of technology. As advances in technology and online and remote teaching and learning becomes more prevalent, Writing Centre tutors are increasingly trained to integrate technology into their teaching practices. This includes using digital tools for drafting

and feedback, such as Google Docs for collaborative writing and peer editing. As artificial intelligence (AI) tools become increasingly integrated into academic writing, Writing Centre tutors play a crucial role in guiding students to use these technologies responsibly and effectively. Students use AI tools such as ChatGPT for a range of writing tasks, including grammar checking, idea generation, and feedback on drafts and they view AI as a writing assistant, virtual tutor, and digital peer, which can enhance their writing process, performance, and confidence (Kim *et al.* 2024; Syarifah and Fakhruddin 2024). Tutors need to be aware of both the opportunities and challenges AI presents, and be prepared to support students in ethical, critical, and productive engagement with AI writing tools. Therefore, training should include helping students interpret and act on AI feedback, integrate AI suggestions thoughtfully, and develop digital literacy skills to navigate evolving technologies (Alharbi 2023; Celik *et al.* 2024). In addition, tutors can model ethical AI use and facilitate discussions about the boundaries and best practices for integrating AI into academic work (Alharbi 2023; Kim *et al.* 2024).

Additionally, tutors may utilise online platforms for virtual consultations, ensuring that students can access support regardless of their location (Papell *et al.* 2019). By employing these technological tools, tutors can enhance the accessibility and flexibility of writing support. This includes familiarising tutors with digital communication platforms, online feedback tools, and resources for students that can enhance the online tutoring experience. The ability to provide support in both virtual and in-person contexts is increasingly important, especially in contexts shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic as discussed earlier in this chapter (Abraham and Singaram 2019; Miguel *et al.* 2024).

Another key strategy for training is to focus on genre conventions and discipline-specific writing expectations. Effective Writing Centres tailor their support to accommodate the unique writing requirements of different fields such as social sciences, humanities and natural sciences (Morrison 2016; Zhang and Liu 2023). Tutors who are familiar with these nuances can provide students with targeted support that aligns with academic standards in their specific disciplines (Connor *et al.* 2024). This specialised knowledge not only supports student engagement but also improves the quality of their writing. Writing conventions can vary across academic disciplines;

hence, training often includes exposure to discipline-specific writing styles and conventions (Pandey 2024). Tutors collaborate with academics from various fields to understand the unique expectations and challenges faced by students in their respective disciplines (Segovia 2024). Such training prepares tutors to provide more tailored support, improving students' academic writing within specific contexts.

Training programmes also emphasise the development of emotional intelligence and effective communication skills. Tutors learn how to foster a supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing their writing anxieties and challenges. This aspect of training is particularly important, as many students may experience fear or shame regarding their writing abilities. Tutors trained in emotional intelligence can better facilitate productive consultations that build students' confidence and self-efficacy (Connor *et al.* 2024). Given the anxiety and stress often associated with writing, tutors need to be trained to provide emotional support during sessions. This includes developing skills in active listening and providing reassurance to students facing writing challenges. Tutors can use techniques such as motivational interviewing, which encourages students to articulate their goals and aspirations related to writing. This empathetic approach helps in building students' confidence and encourages them to take risks in their writing (Carrió and Bastida 2023).

Tutor training is not a one-time event but includes opportunities for continuous professional development. The continuous professional development of tutors is a key focus of both DUT and MUT Writing Centres. Generally, Writing Centres focus on capacitating tutors with key skills and attributes that will contribute to their work as tutors and for when they enter the workplace. Ongoing workshops, training sessions, and peer mentoring initiatives enable tutors to share experiences and strategies, fostering a culture of learning and improvement (Orosco and Reed 2024). This commitment to self-improvement not only enhances the knowledge and capabilities of individual tutors but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of Writing Centre programs. Writing Centres implement regular workshops, seminars, and peer evaluations to ensure that tutors remain current with pedagogical trends and best practices. Research indicates that ongoing training helps sustain high-quality writing support and encourages tutors to reflect on and refine their practices continuously (Pihlainen *et al.* 2021).

Tutors need to develop strong active listening skills to understand students' concerns, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and tailor their feedback accordingly. Active listening is a crucial component in Writing Centre tutoring consultations, facilitating effective communication and enhancing the learning experience for students. This practice involves various techniques that help tutors understand and respond to the needs of their tutees, ultimately empowering them in their writing tasks. Active listening in Writing Centre consultations involves both verbal and nonverbal behaviours that signal emotional awareness and support. Techniques such as asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing content, reflecting feelings, and using assumption checking are essential. These behaviours promote emotional improvement and are more significant in predicting positive outcomes than nonverbal behaviours alone (Bodie *et al.* 2015). Additionally, active listening serves as a mediator between student participation and tutor guidance, helping to validate student concerns and provide appropriate feedback (Fielding 2019).

Rhetorical listening, as proposed by Krista Ratcliffe, provides a framework for tutors to become aware of the complex experiences students bring to sessions. This approach encourages tutors to focus on student needs rather than institutional concerns, thereby expanding tutoring praxis (Anderson 2016). In virtual settings, gestural listening, which includes eye contact, posture, and nonverbal backchanneling, becomes crucial. These embodied listening behaviours help overcome the fragmentation caused by video conferencing technologies, ensuring effective communication (Feibush 2018).

Building rapport through active listening involves strategies such as greetings, small talk, and expressions of empathy. These techniques foster a harmonious relationship, encouraging students to take a more active role in their learning (Lee 2015). Furthermore, writing tutors often engage in emotional labour, which involves managing emotions to create a welcoming and supportive environment. Recognising and valuing this emotional labour is essential for creating inclusive Writing Centres and preventing tutor burnout (Mannon 2021). Despite its importance, listening is not well-defined in Writing Centre scholarship (Anderson 2016; Valentine 2017). The absence of a robust definition means that listening is often treated as an assumed skill rather than a practice with specific techniques or theoretical grounding. There is therefore a need for

more attention to rhetorical listening to broaden the understanding of effective listening practices in tutoring (Valentine 2017). Additionally, while praise is a common politeness strategy used by tutors, there is limited research on its specific role in Writing Centre consultations. As proposed by Rambiritch and Carstens (2021), there is a need for further studies could provide insights into how praise and other politeness strategies can be effectively utilised.

Effective questioning helps tutors guide students to discover their own solutions and develop their critical thinking. The use of critical questioning in writing tutorials is essential for creating student-centred learning environments. According to Munje *et al.* (2018), tutors who effectively employ questioning techniques can engage students more deeply, enhancing the learning process and outcomes. Additionally, Li (2023) asserts that critical self-reflection by tutors on their practices can reveal tensions and negotiations that occur during tutoring sessions, contributing to a more collaborative and cooperative tutoring environment. Questioning techniques in Writing Centre tutoring consultations play a crucial role in enhancing student learning and engagement. These techniques are designed to make tutorial sessions more student-centred and productive, helping students to better understand and improve their writing.

Questioning is a central component of Writing Centre consultations, serving multiple instructional and conversational functions. Tutors use questions to fill knowledge gaps, check understanding, and facilitate dialogue, which helps students clarify their thoughts and identify issues in their writing (Mackiewicz 2014; Munje *et al.* 2018). Questions also encourage students to engage actively in the learning process, enhancing their motivation and curiosity (Mackiewicz 2014). Different types of questions serve various purposes in Writing Centre consultations. Open-ended questions, reader response, and suggestions are commonly used strategies that help address both higher-order and later-order concerns in student writing (Brown, 2008). These questions guide students in constructing and reconstructing knowledge, promoting deeper understanding and self-explanation (Mackiewicz 2014). Effective questioning techniques are crucial for maintaining a student-centred focus in Writing Centre consultations. By using questions, tutors can resist the role of a teacher-surrogate and instead act as helpful peers or collaborators. This approach encourages

students to do most of the talking, fostering a more engaging and interactive learning environment (Mackiewicz 2014). Tutors must therefore be trained to use questions effectively to avoid potential pitfalls and ensure that they are facilitating rather than controlling the conversation.

The content of Writing Centre tutor training programmes varies depending on the institution, the student population served, and the Writing Centre's specific mission and goals. Given the diverse needs of the student population and the complex socio-political context of the South African educational landscape, training programmes must be comprehensive and adaptable. A fundamental aspect of tutor training involves equipping tutors with pedagogical frameworks and instructional techniques that enhance the writing process. In successful training programs, tutors learn about writing as a process rather than a product. This includes emphasising strategies such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing, as highlighted by Tirado *et al.* (2019). Training also focuses on instructional strategies, such as the use of scaffolded learning, where tutors help students develop their writing progressively.

Integrating peer tutoring models within tutor training programmes can provide practical experience for tutors. Such programs help new tutors learn effective tutoring strategies while receiving real-time feedback from experienced peers. For instance, studies show that peer-tutoring programmes can substantially enhance both tutor and tutee performance in writing contexts (Lv *et al.* 2021). This hands-on experience reinforces theoretical knowledge gained during training and fosters a collaborative learning environment. Training involves instilling in tutors a clear understanding of the philosophy and mission of Writing Centres. They learn that Writing Centres are not merely places for fixing writing but are educational spaces that promote writing as a process of inquiry and learning. This perspective encourages tutors to approach their work holistically, engaging with students on a deeper academic level (Harrington *et al.* 2024; Miravet and Alegre 2020).

3.5 THEORIES APPLICABLE TO WRITING CENTRE TUTOR TRAINING

Writing Centres, as pivotal spaces for academic support, rely heavily on the effectiveness of their training programmes to ensure quality assistance to students

across disciplines (Sposetti 2018). The impact of training on Writing Centre praxis is a multifaceted issue, encompassing pedagogical approaches, tutor development, and the overall efficacy of the centre in fostering support for students' academic writing (Ferer 2012; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). To optimise writing development programmes for students from diverse backgrounds, various theoretical models should be incorporated (Wingate 2012; Khadka 2018). Understanding these theoretical frameworks and their practical applications is vital for creating comprehensive training programmes that equip tutors with the skills and knowledge to effectively support student writers (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Li *et al.* 2023).

A significant aspect of Writing Centre training lies in grounding tutors in relevant theoretical frameworks that inform their practice. One prominent approach involves training tutors to act as 'critical friends' to encourage students to think differently about their tasks (Carlse 2019). This strategy is particularly effective when working with students who may be struggling with their assignments (Leber 2018). These frameworks not only provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of writing but also guide tutors in adopting effective strategies for assisting students.

The strength of an organisation lies in the knowledge and capabilities of its employees. However, not all employees possess the same level of proficiency. To bridge this gap, organisations offer various training and development programmes. Learning can be defined as a "relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from experience" (Bass and Vaughn 1968). It encompasses a wide range of behaviours and is focused on acquiring knowledge, attitudes, values, and emotional responses. A theory refers to a comprehensive framework of concepts aimed at providing an explanation, primarily based on universal principles that are not contingent upon the specific phenomenon being elucidated (Tez 2020; Aityan 2022).

This section explores the role of learning theories in the development of effective training programmes, as organisational performance relies on the skills, knowledge, and experiences of employees. Individuals can improve organisational performance by applying their knowledge and skills, prompting organisations to invest in employee development through training programmes that help achieve desired goals. This study highlights the significance and practical applications of learning theories, particularly in

the context of training, as training programmes are only effective if they facilitate learning.

3.5.1 Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory treats people's skills, knowledge, health, and abilities as a form of capital that can be invested in (through education, training, etc.) to raise productivity, earnings, and economic growth. According to Akyıldız (2025) and Galiakberova (2019), human capital is the productive capacity embodied in individuals - skills, knowledge, health, and competencies that generate income and growth. The origins of Human Capital Theory can be traced to classical economic thought, particularly the work of Adam Smith, who acknowledged the productive value of acquired skills and education (Mayilyan and Yedigaryan 2022). However, the theory was formalised in the 1960s by Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, who modelled education and training as investments with future returns in higher wages and productivity (Gapurzhanovna, 2025). Schultz (1961) argued that investments in education and training enhance individuals' productive capacities, while Becker (1964) further conceptualised education and training as investments that yield measurable returns over time.

At its core, Human Capital Theory rests on the assumption that individuals and organisations benefit from deliberate investments in education, professional development, and skills acquisition. These investments are expected to improve performance, efficiency, and adaptability, particularly in knowledge-intensive environments such as higher education institutions. In higher education, Human Capital Theory has been applied to explain the importance of developing academic and professional staff to enhance teaching quality, student outcomes, and institutional effectiveness (Gulbakhar 2024). Higher education is treated as a key engine of national human capital; hence investments in universities are justified by expected returns in innovation, productivity, and competitiveness (Lazko 2025; Topunova and Bykovskaya 2025). Universities are viewed as sites of both human capital formation and utilisation, where staff competencies directly influence students' learning experiences and academic success (Kotov 2020). Training, mentoring, and professional development initiatives are thus positioned as essential mechanisms for strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring sustainable academic support systems.

Within academic support units such as Writing Centres, Human Capital Theory foregrounds the value of tutors and practitioners as skilled professionals whose expertise must be continuously developed. Writing Centre tutors, particularly those supporting postgraduate students, require specialised knowledge of academic writing conventions, disciplinary expectations, and pedagogical strategies. Human Capital Theory therefore provides a lens for examining how structured training and ongoing professional development enhance tutors' effectiveness and contribute to improved student support.

In this study, Human Capital Theory provides the overarching rationale for examining the training needs of Writing Centre tutors who support postgraduate students at DUT and MUT. The theory frames tutor training and professional development as strategic investments that enhance tutors' competence, confidence, and capacity to respond to the complex academic writing demands of postgraduate students. By positioning tutors as valuable institutional assets, the study emphasises the importance of systematic, ongoing training rather than ad-hoc or informal preparation.

Furthermore, Human Capital Theory underpins the study's contribution to Writing Centre practice by advocating for the formal recognition of tutor training as an essential component of postgraduate academic support. In highlighting the returns on investment associated with tutor development, the study provides evidence-based justification for strengthening training structures within Writing Centres at UoTs and across the South African higher education sector.

3.5.2 Behaviourism Theories

The behaviourist learning theory, has been a subject of interest in various educational contexts, including the field of Writing Centre practice. Behaviourism, as a learning theory, underscores the role of external stimuli in shaping behaviour (Evgeniou and Loizou 2012; Merrett and Wheldall 1984; Efgivia *et al.* 2021). Proponents of this approach, such as Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner, view the mind as a 'black box' and focus on the observable changes in an individual's behaviour as a result of specific environmental conditions (Clark 2018). This theory posits that learning is a change in behaviour resulting from specific stimuli and reinforcements (Efgivia *et al.* 2021; Shrivastava and Shrivastava 2022). According to behaviourist principles, learning is

defined as the acquisition of new behaviours through the process of conditioning. Behaviourists advocate the provision of input and the observation of output, without placing significance on the cognitive processes that occur between the stimulus and the response (Shrivastava and Shrivastava 2022). Reinforcement is considered a crucial factor in the learning process, where positive reinforcement (such as rewards or praise) can be used to encourage and strengthen desired behaviours (Shrivastava and Shrivastava 2022).

The tenets of behaviourism have implications for the practices and approaches employed in Writing Centres and tutor training. In the context of Writing Centres, the behaviourist framework accentuates the importance of breaking down the writing process into smaller, more manageable components. This can involve providing students with clear and specific feedback on their writing, reinforcing desired behaviours, and gradually shaping their writing skills through targeted practice and reinforcement. Tutors may use modelling, demonstration, and reinforcement to guide students in developing their writing competencies (Palincsar 1998; Efgivia *et al.* 2021). Similarly, in the context of tutor training, behaviourist principles can inform the design and delivery of training programmes. Tutors may be trained to employ specific techniques, such as providing immediate feedback, using positive reinforcement, and breaking down complex writing tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. Behaviourist approaches in tutor training may also involve the use of assessment methods that focus on the observation and measurement of tutors' behaviours, such as their ability to identify and address specific writing challenges, provide effective feedback, and engage students in the writing process.

Writing Centres, which aim to support students in improving their writing, have often incorporated elements of the behaviourist approach in their practices. For instance, Shrivastava and Shrivastava (2022) state that writing tutors may provide specific feedback and reinforcement to students, such as praise or additional practice opportunities, to reinforce desired writing behaviours. The application of the behaviourist learning theory in Writing Centre practice can be seen in the use of targeted feedback and reinforcement to shape student behaviour. Tutors may identify specific writing behaviours such as proper citation or effective organisation and provide feedback and positive reinforcement to encourage the student to continue those

behaviours (Efgivia *et al.* 2021). Additionally, Evgeniou and Loizou (2012) posit that Writing Centres may incorporate elements of the 'write-to-learn' approach, which suggests that the act of writing can be a tool for learning and understanding subject matter. This aligns with the behaviourist principle of using external stimuli (in this case, the writing process) to shape behaviour and promote learning.

However, the use of the behaviourist approach in Writing Centre practice and education has been the subject of some debate. Some researchers argue that a more holistic, process-oriented approach to writing instruction may be more effective, as it takes into account the complex cognitive and social factors involved in writing (Clarence 2012; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021). While behaviourism has made significant contributions to the understanding of learning, Algahtani (2017) argues that it has also been criticised for its narrow focus on observable behaviour and its lack of consideration for the cognitive processes that underlie learning. Behaviourism remains an influential framework in the context of Writing Centres and tutor training, particularly in its emphasis on providing clear and targeted feedback, reinforcing desired behaviours, and breaking down complex writing tasks into smaller, more manageable components (Newcomer *et al.* 1988). However, it is important to recognise the limitations of a solely behaviourist approach and to incorporate elements of other learning theories, such as cognitivism and constructivism, to create a more holistic and effective approach to writing instruction and tutor training. According to Lee (2015), by incorporating elements of alternative learning theories, such as cognitivism and constructivism, Writing Centres and tutor training programmes can create a more comprehensive and effective approach to writing instruction and support.

3.5.3 Cognitivist Theories

Cognitivist theories of learning focus on the mental processes involved in acquiring and processing information (Alahmad 2020). These theories, proposed by theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Gagné, emphasise the importance of understanding the underlying cognitive mechanisms that drive learning and knowledge acquisition. Traditionally, cognitivist perspectives viewed learning as the manipulation of symbols inside the individual mind, with the goal of acquiring knowledge and skills that can be applied across various contexts (Putnam and Borko 2000). Cognitivism underscores the importance of understanding the mental processes involved in

learning, while constructivism views learning as an active process of knowledge construction based on individual experiences (Horváth *et al.* 2019). Cognitive approaches, for instance, may involve the use of strategies that enhance students' metacognitive abilities, such as teaching students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own writing.

The cognitive process theory of writing, which views a student's writing as a series of iterative decision-making processes, has important implications for Writing Centre tutor training. In this model, skilled writers are able to make a wider range and more specific decisions than novice writers, suggesting that writing must be cultivated and taught based on students' individual needs, rather than simply imposed by the tutor (Woo *et al.* 2023). Tutors should be trained to understand the cognitive processes involved in writing, such as idea generation, organisation, and revision (Woo *et al.* 2023). This knowledge can inform their tutoring strategies, allowing them to provide targeted support and guidance to help students develop their writing. Additionally, tutors should be trained to recognise the differences between skilled and novice writers, and to tailor their support accordingly. As described by Woo *et al.* (2023), skilled writers can make a wider range and more specific decisions than novice writers, suggesting that writing must be cultivated and taught based on students' individual needs.

3.5.4 Constructivism Theories

Constructivist approaches, on the other hand, may highlight the role of social interaction and the incorporation of students' prior experiences and perspectives into the writing process (Benedict *et al.* 2016; Woo *et al.* 2023). Social constructivism also plays an important role in the literature on the social significance of the work and role of Writing Centre practitioners and tutors. Social constructivism posits that meaning and knowledge are constructed in social interactions and shared experiences, and supporters of this viewpoint frequently highlight the importance of dialogue and community (Thomas *et al.* 2014). In many cases, practice aligns with these values. For example, students in Writing Centres are often encouraged to think of themselves as part of 'communities of writers', and tutors may construct these values through 'tutor talk' or through community-building Writing Centre activities.

In the Writing Centre, students are encouraged to actively participate in the writing process, building their understanding through hands-on activities, reflection, and problem-solving rather than passively receiving information (Ms. and Rachmadtullah 2019; Taufik *et al.* 2020; Srour *et al.* 2021). Furthermore, Writing Centres can use constructivist approaches to help students construct meaning from their own experiences and backgrounds, making learning more relevant and personalised (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Taufik *et al.* 2020; Ms. and Rachmadtullah 2019). In addition, collaborative writing, peer review, and group discussions are central, as knowledge is seen as co-constructed through dialogue and shared experiences (Li 2019; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Guo 2024). Tutors provide structured support, gradually reducing assistance as students gain confidence and skill. This includes defining writing tasks, offering relevant topics, and encouraging students to express their own views (Li 2019; Ms. and Rachmadtullah 2019). Constructivist methods also enable students to organise and develop creative ideas, characterisations, and storylines, especially in literary writing (Taufik *et al.* 2020).

3.5.5 Social Learning Theories

Social learning theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura, suggests that individuals can learn new behaviours by observing others (Enwereuzor *et al.* 2020). This theory emphasises the importance of observational learning, where people learn from watching the actions and behaviours of others, and then modelling those behaviours themselves (Enwereuzor *et al.* 2020). The core tenet of social learning theory is that people can acquire new knowledge and skills by observing the behaviours and consequences of others (Bandura 1978). The field of Writing Centre pedagogy has long recognised the importance of social learning theories in shaping effective training and tutoring practices. These theories, which highlight the role of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process, have been instrumental in guiding the development of Writing Centre programmes that foster engaged, supportive, and student-centred learning environments.

Social learning theories, such as those proposed by Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky, have been widely adopted in Writing Centre settings (Dolejs and Grant 2000). Vygotsky's concept of the "more knowledgeable other" has been particularly influential, as it highlights the value of peer-to-peer learning and the role of the writing tutor as a

facilitator of knowledge construction rather than a mere dispenser of information (Stanley *et al.* 2020). Similarly, Bandura's social learning theory, which stresses the importance of observational learning and modelling, has informed the design of Writing Centre training programmes that encourage tutors to learn from one another's practices and strategies (Stanley *et al.* 2020).

The existing literature on the application of social learning theories in Writing Centre training is extensive and multifaceted. Several studies have explored the operationalisation of Bandura's social learning theory to guide interprofessional simulation activities, underscoring the importance of social interaction and the “more knowledgeable other” in the development of writing (Stanley *et al.* 2020). Similarly, research has highlighted the potential of collaborative writing endeavours facilitated by AI-powered tools, such as ChatGPT, in enhancing academic writing and motivation, drawing upon Vygotsky's social constructivism (Song and Song 2023). Furthermore, the benefits of using online collaborative tools, like Google Docs, in writing instruction have been well-documented, with studies demonstrating the positive impact of peer-to-peer interaction on the writing process and the development of writing fluency (Phạm 2021; Nasri *et al.* 2022; Song and Song 2023).

Social learning theory posits that individuals can learn new behaviours, including tutoring strategies, by observing others. In the context of Writing Centre tutoring, this means that tutors can learn effective tutoring techniques by observing more experienced tutors in action. Observational learning involves four key processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura 1978; Enwereuzor *et al.* 2020). Tutors must first pay attention to the behaviours and techniques used by experienced tutors, then retain that information through cognitive organisation and rehearsal. They must then be able to physically reproduce those behaviours, which requires the necessary physical capabilities. Lastly, tutors must be motivated to implement the observed behaviours in their own tutoring sessions (Bandura 1978).

Modelling is a key component of social learning theory, and it has important implications for Writing Centre tutor training. Experienced tutors can serve as role models, demonstrating effective tutoring strategies that trainees can then observe and emulate (Macpherson 2016; Tiruchittampalam *et al.* 2018). For example, a tutor trainee

might observe an experienced tutor gently guiding a student through the writing process, asking probing questions to help the student identify areas for improvement, and providing constructive feedback. The trainee can then practice implementing these same strategies in their own tutoring sessions, gradually building their skills and confidence (Lee 2015). Social learning theory also suggests that the more salient and prestigious the role model, the more likely the observer is to attend to and imitate the model's behaviour (Abdullahi and Ransom 2014). This means that Writing Centre directors or senior tutors who are respected and admired by their colleagues may be particularly effective role models for trainees.

Writing Centre tutor training programmes can leverage social learning theory in several ways. Observational learning and modelling can be incorporated into tutor training programmes, where trainees can observe experienced tutors in action and then practice implementing similar techniques in their own tutoring sessions. Roleplay and scenario-based training activities can provide trainees with opportunities to practice tutoring strategies and receive feedback from peers and trainers. Tutor training can also emphasise the development of self-efficacy, which is a key component of social learning theory (Abdoola *et al.* 2017). By providing trainees with opportunities to successfully implement tutoring strategies and receive positive feedback, Writing Centre training programmes can help build tutors' confidence and belief in their abilities.

3.5.6 Humanistic Theories

In the realm of Writing Centre pedagogy, the influence of humanistic theories has been profound, shaping the approaches and practices adopted by writing tutors in their interactions with students. The humanistic approach underscores the inherent potential of individuals to grow and develop, placing the responsibility for change and self-actualisation directly on the individual (Joseph 2018). This philosophical underpinning is particularly relevant in the context of Writing Centre tutoring, where the aim is to empower students to become more autonomous and self-directed in their writing process. Humanistic theories, such as those proposed by Carl Rogers (1957) and Abraham Maslow (1943), underscore the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the client, or in the case of Writing Centres, the tutor and the student. These theories prioritise empathy, respect, and the creation of a

supportive, inclusive environment where students can develop both academically and personally. This relationship is characterised by unconditional positive regard, empathy, and a focus on the individual's unique lived experiences. When applied to Writing Centre tutoring, this approach encourages tutors to adopt a non-directive, collaborative stance, guiding students to discover their own solutions and fostering a sense of self-agency.

The humanistic theory emphasises that the individual's capacity for growth and self-determination is particularly relevant in the context of Writing Centre tutoring, where students often struggle with issues of confidence, self-efficacy, and the ability to navigate the complexities of academic writing (Huang 2020). By creating a supportive and empowering environment, Writing Centre tutors can help students develop a stronger sense of their own writing abilities, bolstering their confidence and fostering a more intrinsically motivated approach to the writing process (Joseph 2018; Renger and Macaskill 2021). This holistic and student-centred approach can have a profound impact on the development of students' writing and their overall academic success. Moreover, the humanistic perspective on learning aligns well with the goals of Writing Centre pedagogy, which seeks to empower students to become more reflective, self-aware, and responsible for their own learning. As such, incorporating humanistic principles into the training and development of Writing Centre tutors can help cultivate a learner-centred approach that is responsive to the unique needs and strengths of each individual student.

Effective Writing Centre tutoring requires a nuanced understanding of the student's individual needs, learning preferences, and personal development goals (Renger and Macaskill 2021). Humanistic learning theories can provide a valuable framework for Writing Centre tutor training, emphasising the importance of establishing caring relationships, promoting a climate of mutual respect, and empowering students to become independent and reflective writers (Renger and Macaskill 2021). To this end, it is vital for Writing Centre tutor training programmes to incorporate humanistic approaches that focus on developing the interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence necessary for effective tutoring. This might include modules on active listening, empathetic responding, and creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Tutors could also be trained in methods that encourage students to take ownership of

their writing process, set their own goals, and reflect on their progress, in line with humanistic principles of self-determination and personal growth.

The literature reviewed demonstrates a multifaceted understanding of how various theories – human capital, behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, humanistic, and social learning theories - can significantly inform tutor training in university Writing Centres. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing the effectiveness of tutoring practices, emphasising the importance of context, collaboration, and the transfer of knowledge.

3.6 WRITING CENTRE TUTOR TRAINING AND ACADEMIC LITERACIES

The exploration of Writing Centre training through an academic literacies lens has gained traction in recent years, as evidenced by a series of pivotal studies (Clarence 2012; Page 2020; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023) that highlight the complexities and transformative potential of writing support in higher education. Archer (2008) underscores the critical role of writing as a primary mode of assessment within tertiary institutions, arguing that effective Writing Centre interventions can significantly enhance students' academic performance and retention rates. By employing a context-embedded methodology that aligns with the academic literacies approach, Archer's (2008) study reveals the multifaceted nature of student writing and the importance of understanding students' perceptions and experiences in relation to writing support. This holistic view not only highlights the necessity of Writing Centres in fostering equity in academic discourse but also positions them as essential players in the broader educational landscape.

Building on these foundations, Lillis *et al.* (2015) further investigated the practical implications of adopting an academic literacies approach in writing and language within higher education contexts. Their work addresses the gap between research and practice, posing critical questions about the application of academic literacies in real-world settings. They advocate for a transformative approach that recognises the significance of disciplinary contexts and collaborative efforts between writing specialists and disciplinary experts. This discourse is vital for making writing visible and meaningful across various academic domains, thus enhancing the overall

effectiveness of writing support services. Clarence (2017) contributes to this dialogue by offering a conceptual and practical analysis of peer writing tutorials, emphasising the need for writing tutors to engage in reflective practices that inform their pedagogical approaches. Together, these considerations illuminate the evolving discourse surrounding Writing Centre training through an academic literacies' framework, highlighting the importance of context, collaboration, and reflection in fostering effective writing support. As the literature reveals, the integration of academic literacies into Writing Centre practices not only enhances student learning outcomes but also challenges traditional perceptions of writing within higher education.

Academic literacies are the main knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are demanded of students in higher education for active reading and more effective writing, especially in their respective academic discipline contexts. Since reading and writing are the two major language skills that higher education students need for academic excellence, it only follows that literacies are essential in the higher education context. Writing Centres play a crucial role in supporting academic literacies by providing a space for students to develop their writing and adapt to academic conventions. They serve as a bridge between students and the academic community, offering tailored support that addresses diverse literacy needs. Writing Centres often collaborate with faculty to integrate academic literacy instruction into the classroom, moving beyond supplemental support to embedded, discipline-specific instruction (Clarence 2012; Page 2020). They cater to a wide range of academic literacy needs, including grammar, public speaking, and pronunciation, and are particularly beneficial for students who speak English as an additional language (Zuma *et al.* 2016; Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza 2022). Furthermore, Writing Centres provide a supportive, non-judgemental environment that promotes emotional well-being and a sense of belonging, which is especially important for first-year students (Namakula 2024) as well as postgraduate students in the case of this study.

By working with various disciplines, Writing Centres help students acculturate academically, providing the necessary skills to write within and across disciplines (Khumalo and Reddy 2021; Van Rensburg and Nel 2022). Moreover, Writing Centres also serve as mentoring spaces for young academics, helping them transition from students to professionals and develop their teaching practices (Archer and Parker

2016). Writing Centres are pivotal in fostering academic literacies by offering tailored, discipline-specific support and creating inclusive, supportive environments. They enhance students' academic success and emotional well-being while also serving as collaborative spaces for faculty and young academics.

According to Wilmot and Lotz-Sisitka (2016), writing support within the academic literacies perspective recognises the writing process as a social practice that involves power dynamics. It acknowledges the different dispositions of scholars and the subjective nature of constructing knowledge through writing. Consequently, writing support is provided in a comprehensive manner, considering the norms and conventions of the respective discipline, and integrating scholars into the socio-cultural aspects of their fields. This perspective is particularly relevant to postgraduate students, who often navigate complex disciplinary expectations and power structures as they develop their academic identities and contribute to their fields. Writing Centres, therefore, play a crucial role in supporting postgraduate writers by addressing not only the technical aspects of writing but also the socio-cultural and disciplinary contexts that shape their work.

For postgraduate students, writing is not merely a skill to be mastered but a means of participating in academic discourse and asserting their place within their disciplines. Wilmot and Lotz-Sisitka's (2016) emphasis on the social and power-laden nature of writing highlights the need for Writing Centres to adopt a holistic approach to support. This includes helping postgraduate students understand the implicit norms and conventions of their disciplines, such as argumentation styles, and genre-specific expectations. For example, a postgraduate student in the sciences may need guidance on how to structure a research article according to the conventions of their field, while a humanities student may require support in developing a theoretical framework or engaging with complex texts. By addressing these disciplinary-specific needs, Writing Centres can help postgraduate students produce writing that is not only technically sound but also contextually appropriate and persuasive.

Furthermore, Wilmot and Lotz-Sisitka's (2016) focus on the socio-cultural aspects of writing underscores the importance of integrating postgraduate students into the broader academic community. Writing Centres can facilitate this process by creating spaces where students can engage in dialogue with tutors and peers, share their

writing challenges, and reflect on their experiences as emerging scholars. This aligns with the collaborative and dialogic nature of Writing Centre pedagogy, which emphasises learning through interaction and mutual support (Bruffee 1984). For postgraduate students, who often work in isolation, these interactions can be invaluable for building confidence, gaining new perspectives, and developing a sense of belonging within their academic communities.

Situated learning, a concept pioneered by theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, posits that learning is inherently a social and contextual process, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills not through passive absorption, but through active participation within a community of practice (Danzig *et al.* 2007). This framework holds particular relevance for the field of Writing Centre pedagogy, where the interactions between tutors and student writers are deeply embedded within the specific cultural, historical, and institutional contexts of the Writing Centre.

The situated nature of writing and learning poses a challenge to the enterprise of university writing instruction, as it suggests that the skills and knowledge acquired by students in composition courses may not transfer seamlessly to other writing tasks and contexts. This insight is echoed in the work of educational researchers Rossner-Merrill *et al.* (1998: 282) who argue that "much of what is learned is specific to the context in which it is learned" and that "the construction of learning takes place in social settings." In the Writing Centre, this situated perspective on learning is particularly salient, as tutors and student writers engage in a collaborative process of negotiating and constructing knowledge within the unique ecology of the Writing Centre. By recognising the situated nature of writing and learning, Writing Centre practitioners can develop pedagogical approaches that are responsive to the specific needs and contexts of the student writers they serve.

By recognising the situated nature of writing and learning, Writing Centre practitioners can develop pedagogical approaches that are responsive to the specific needs and contexts of the student writers they serve. This involves acknowledging that writing and learning do not occur in a vacuum, but are deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and institutional environments in which they take place. Through active engagement and collaboration within the unique ecology of the Writing Centre, tutors and student

writers can work together to negotiate and construct knowledge that is tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of the student. In this way, Writing Centre pedagogy can move beyond traditional approaches and instead embrace the diversity of writing experiences and learning styles represented by the students it serves.

3.7 CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN TRAINING WRITING CENTRE TUTORS FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENT CONSULTATIONS

The challenges facing Writing Centres in South Africa are deeply intertwined with both the changing educational landscape and the historical context of the country. One significant challenge is navigating the delicate act of providing constructive feedback and advice. Tutors must be careful not to threaten the self-image or autonomy of the postgraduate student, while still offering guidance and support. Establishing and maintaining rapport between the tutor and student is essential for addressing this challenge and facilitating effective learning (Lee 2015).

A significant challenge is that of the legacy of apartheid. While physical access to higher education has improved for students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, Writing Centres still struggle to provide equitable support. The legacy of apartheid created vast inequalities in educational access and quality, resulting in many students entering higher education without adequate preparation for the demands of academic writing. Writing Centres often find themselves at the frontline in addressing these disparities, yet they may lack sufficient resources to provide tailored support to students from diverse backgrounds (Landa *et al.* 2021). Additionally, students from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds may inherently feel apprehensive about utilising such services, fearing stigma or believing that support is unnecessary for their academic journeys (Nanima 2019). This perception can discourage engagement with Writing Centre resources and can further limit access for those who need it most (Archer 2010; Nyar 2019; Nkala and Sobantu 2021). Understanding these challenges is critical to improving the effectiveness of Writing Centres and enhancing the academic success of their users.

Moreover, the integration of digital technologies into higher education has introduced new dynamics to the functioning of Writing Centres. The transition to remote learning

during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, as many students faced challenges related to internet access and digital literacy (Landa *et al.* 2021). Writing Centres that may have operated effectively in face-to-face modes were required to pivot quickly to online platforms, which necessitated not only technological adaptations but also training for staff and students in effective online communication and collaborative writing processes (Ravhuhali *et al.* 2024). This transition revealed disparities in digital literacy and access to resources that further marginalise certain student populations, complicating the efforts of Writing Centres to serve all students equally (Archer 2023).

In addition to technological challenges, the expectations placed on Writing Centres can often be unrealistic and may originate from a misunderstanding of their roles and capabilities (Sithole 2024). Staff members may encounter pressure to function as quick-fix solutions to complex writing problems, leading to a narrow focus on surface-level issues such as grammar and punctuation rather than fostering deeper, critical engagement with writing as a process (Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni 2019). This deficit model of student writing overlooks the varying degrees of prior experiences and potential within the student body, presenting a significant barrier to the effective promotion of academic literacies (Arbee 2020).

Another critical issue confronting Writing Centres in South Africa is the necessity of decolonising academic discourse. The ongoing calls for decolonising university curricula highlight discontent among students regarding Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that dominate educational practices (Sibanda 2021). Writing Centres are tasked with creating spaces that promote inclusive and diverse perspectives while also aligning with the institution's broader aims of equity and transformation (Mhlongo *et al.* 2023). However, the challenge lies in integrating indigenous knowledge and alternative epistemologies into writing practices, ensuring that students from various backgrounds feel valued and engaged (Church 2023).

Furthermore, there is a notable challenge of insufficient funding and human resources, which severely restricts the capacity of Writing Centres to expand their reach and improve their services. Many Writing Centres operate with limited budgets, which can hinder their ability to hire qualified staff, procure teaching materials, or develop

comprehensive programs tailored to specific student needs (Akintolu *et al.* 2022). Staff burnout due to increased workloads during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic has further compounded this issue, affecting the quality of writing support and mentorship provided to students (Fynn and Walt 2023).

The question of how Writing Centres will continuously adapt and respond to the evolving educational landscape also looms large. Educational institutions are increasingly recognising the need for interdisciplinary approaches to writing support, yet Writing Centres may struggle with the implementation of such integrative models, particularly when resources and institutional backing are lacking (Khumalo and Reddy 2021). Collaborations with other departments and services within the university can foster a more holistic understanding of writing as a cognitive and social skill, but without clear pathways for engagement, such interdisciplinary initiatives may not materialise fully (Chiramba and Ndofirepi 2023).

Writing Centres in South Africa are situated within a complex and challenging educational environment marked by socio-economic disparities, evolving digital landscapes, and the call for pedagogical transformation. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes increasing awareness of Writing Centre roles, securing necessary resources, fostering collaborations, and promoting inclusive practices that recognise the diverse backgrounds and needs of students. Through these means, Writing Centres can more effectively contribute to the academic success of all students in South Africa's higher education landscape.

Postgraduate students often have specialised research and writing needs that differ from those of undergraduate students. They must navigate the complexities of conducting in-depth literature reviews, developing coherent and persuasive arguments, and adhering to the specific conventions of their academic disciplines (Lavelle and Bushrow 2007; Okuda 2019). Additionally, postgraduate students often have specialised research and writing needs that may differ from undergraduate students. Tutors must possess a strong understanding of the unique demands of postgraduate-level academic writing, including understanding disciplinary conventions, managing sources and therefore tutors need to provide tailored support (AlMarwani 2020). The experience of writing at the postgraduate level can also be a significant

psychological challenge for some students. They may struggle with issues such as goal setting, time management, and building confidence in their abilities as writers. To effectively support postgraduate students, Writing Centre tutors must possess a deep understanding of these unique challenges, which makes training an important element in their work.

3.8 THE NEXUS OF WRITING CENTRE TUTOR TRAINING AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENT OUTCOMES

The training of Writing Centre tutors is crucial in enhancing the overall effectiveness of Writing Centres. As Writing Centres play a vital role in supporting students' academic writing, the competence and preparedness of tutors directly affect the quality of writing assistance available. Effective training equips tutors with pedagogical skills, interpersonal competencies, and cultural awareness that are necessary to facilitate successful writing consultations.

One significant aspect of tutor training is the emphasis on pedagogical techniques that promote student engagement and learning. Research by Landry *et al.* highlights that Writing Centre tutors who undergo structured training programmes show a marked improvement in their ability to scaffold the writing process for multilingual students Landry *et al.* (2023). Tutors taught effective strategies, such as feedback techniques and goal setting, often develop a greater understanding of how to engage students in critical thinking and metacognitive practices during consultations, leading to richer interactions where students feel encouraged to reflect on their writing processes (Pihlainen *et al.* 2021).

Moreover, interpersonal skills development is integral to the training process, as tutors often need to navigate emotional responses from students who may struggle with anxiety or low self-esteem regarding their writing abilities. This emotional intelligence training enables tutors to create supportive environments that foster open communication and ease students' fears related to writing support services (Chapman and Veras-Estévez 2024). Effective tutors develop the ability to empathise with students' challenges, helping them build confidence while also guiding them toward practical solutions for their writing concerns (Harrington *et al.* 2024).

The cultural competence that arises from comprehensive tutor training is particularly relevant in South Africa's diverse educational landscape. Tutors trained to recognise the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students are better equipped to provide tailored support that resonates with a wide range of experiences, thereby fostering inclusivity within Writing Centre practices (Alamri 2024). This adaptability not only improves student engagement but also empowers underrepresented groups in academia, aligning with broader institutional goals for equity and transformation in higher education (Liu and Harwood 2022).

Training geared toward discipline-specific knowledge also enhances tutors' effectiveness in Writing Centres. By focusing on the conventions and expectations common within various academic disciplines, tutors can better assist students in navigating the intricacies of field-specific writing styles (Hundertmark *et al.* 2019). This specialised training often leads to improved outcomes for students, as it aligns Writing Centre support with the specific requirements of academic programmes, thereby reinforcing students' learning experiences (Miguel *et al.* 2024).

As has been previously highlighted in section 3.3 continuous professional development forms another crucial component of training for Writing Centre tutors. Ongoing workshops and peer-to-peer mentorship provide tutors with opportunities to refine their skills and stay abreast of the latest developments in pedagogical practices. This consistency in professional growth not only bolsters the tutors' confidence but also enhances the quality of support they provide to students, ultimately leading to a more effective Writing Centre (Kara and Can 2019).

Research indicates that well-trained tutors exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment to their roles. For instance, when tutors are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of writing consultations successfully, they experience a sense of professionalism and fulfilment in their work, which in turn positively influences their interactions with students (Chen *et al.* 2024). This satisfaction is crucial as it fosters a positive atmosphere in the Writing Centre, thus encouraging students to seek support and improve their writing (Santos 2019).

Additionally, effective tutor training promotes collaboration among tutors and across departments. Writing Centres that prioritise interdisciplinary approaches to tutor training often see an increase in partnerships with faculty members, who recognise the value of integrating writing support within their courses. This collaborative synergy can enhance the overall quality of tutoring and the academic experience of students, leading to improved satisfaction and performance outcomes (Kumar *et al.* 2020).

The training of Writing Centre tutors in South Africa is profound and multifaceted. Writing Centres can significantly enhance their tutors' capabilities by focusing on pedagogical skills, emotional intelligence, cultural competence, discipline-specific knowledge, and continuous professional development. This investment in training not only improves the quality of writing support provided to students but also contributes to an inclusive and engaging academic environment aligned with the ideals of South Africa's transformed higher education system. The implementation of well-designed training programmes can have a significant impact on tutor effectiveness and student outcomes, such as increasing tutors' confidence in their ability to provide effective writing support and equip them with the skills they need to succeed.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the critical role of training in shaping the practices and effectiveness of Writing Centre tutors, particularly in the context of supporting postgraduate students. Through a comprehensive review of the literature, it has become evident that training is not merely a supplementary component of Writing Centre operations but a foundational element that directly influences the quality of support provided to students. The chapter has highlighted the multifaceted nature of tutor training, encompassing pedagogical strategies, disciplinary knowledge, interpersonal skills, and an understanding of the unique challenges faced by postgraduate writers. Through developing a strong pedagogical foundation, Writing Centre tutors can develop interconnectivity and collaboration in learning. As Writing Centres continue to evolve, ongoing, reflective training remains essential to fulfilling their mission of supporting postgraduate students in becoming independent, skilled writers.

The literature review chapters have underscored the importance of adopting a structured and context-specific approach to training, one that equips tutors with the competencies needed to address the diverse needs of postgraduate students. It has also emphasised the value of ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and mentorship in fostering a culture of continuous learning among Writing Centre tutors. Furthermore, the chapter has drawn attention to the gaps in existing training programmes, particularly in relation to the specialised needs of postgraduate students and has called for the development of tailored training frameworks that align with the evolving demands of higher education. This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the critical importance of training and development in Writing Centre practice. It has set the stage for the subsequent chapters, which will delve into the empirical findings of this study and propose practical recommendations for enhancing tutor training programmes. The subsequent chapter, Chapter Four, details the research methodology adopted in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of higher education, Writing Centres serve as pivotal resources for enhancing students' academic writing, particularly for postgraduate students who often face unique challenges during their academic journeys. The training needs of Writing Centre tutors, who play a crucial role in facilitating this support, are essential to ensuring effective tutoring practices. The preceding literature review chapters highlighted the necessity for Writing Centre tutors to possess a diverse skill set that enables them to address the varying needs of students, particularly postgraduate students. This chapter's goal is to provide an overview of the study's methodology, including the collection and analysis of the data. The research design of the study, data collection methods and tools, and data analysis methodology are all covered in this chapter.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is a critical component of academic research that outlines the framework for collecting, measuring, and analysing data. It serves as a blueprint that integrates various elements of a study to effectively address the research problem. Research design, according to Indu and Vidhukumar (2020), is the procedure for obtaining, assessing, interpreting, and summarising data for research. Thus, it is possible to define research design as a methodical strategy that specifies how research will be carried out, including the procedures for gathering, analysing, and interpreting data. Research design, according to Mahat *et al.* (2024), encompasses all aspects of planning and conducting a study, from identifying the issue to reporting and disseminating the results. In order for the researcher to get appropriate data that addresses the research questions, the research design must be in line with the aims and research questions of the study (Indu and Vidhukumar 2020).

The importance of the research design lies in its ability to ensure that the research is conducted systematically and rigorously, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability

of the findings (Indu and Vidhukumar 2020). In the view of Gamage (2025), a well-structured research design, not only guides the researcher in the selection of appropriate methods and tools but also facilitates the interpretation of results, ensuring that conclusions drawn are based on sound evidence.

In the context of management sciences, within which this current study is located, research designs can be categorised into several types, each serving distinct purposes and methodologies. The primary categories of research design include exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory designs, which are essential for addressing various research questions and objectives (Zakaria 2022). Exploratory research design is utilised when the research problem is not well-defined or understood. Addison (2021) opines that this type of design aims to explore new areas of inquiry, generate hypotheses, and provide insights into phenomena that have not been previously studied. It often employs qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or open-ended surveys to gather in-depth information from participants (Reddiar and Schultz 2023). For instance, exploratory research in the current study can help identify the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students, thereby allowing the research to formulate more specific research questions for future studies.

Descriptive research design focuses on providing a detailed account of the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or population (Reynolds 2024). This design aims to describe the status of variables without manipulating them, often using quantitative methods such as surveys or observational studies. Njoroge (2020) states that descriptive research provides a comprehensive overview that can inform decision-making and strategic planning within organisations. Explanatory (causal) research design seeks to establish causal relationships between variables. This design is employed when researchers aim to explain why and how certain phenomena occur, often using quantitative methods such as experiments or regression analysis (Njoroge 2020; Zakaria 2022). Explanatory research is crucial in management sciences for testing theories and hypotheses, allowing researchers to draw conclusions about the impact of specific factors on organisational outcomes (Omweri 2023).

Each design serves a specific purpose and employs different methodologies, contributing to the overall rigour and relevance of research in the field. This current study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature as it combines elements from both research designs. Zikmund and Babin (2010) state that qualitative research is mainly exploratory in nature and is used in gaining an understanding of underlying motivations, reasons and opinions. Conversely, quantitative research is more descriptive and is a formal, objective and systematic process for generating information concerning the world (Mahat *et al.* 2024). The current study is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research designs, commonly referred to as mixed-method research design.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

In addition to the primary categories of research design mentioned above, researchers may also employ mixed methods research designs, which combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues (Hermosa-Ramírez 2022; Li *et al.* 2022). This approach is suitable for enhancing the validity and reliability as well as rigour and trustworthiness of research findings. As already mentioned, this study utilised a mixed method parallel research design which combines both the qualitative and quantitative approach. One of the most fundamental decisions a researcher will probably have to make is whether to use the qualitative research method, the quantitative research method, or a mixture of the two (Pandey 2023). The mixed method research design was most relevant to this study as it allowed the researcher to utilise the advantages of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Quantitative research, according to Creswell (2019), involves using statistics to outline, analyse, and resolve various issues. To make sense and be meaningfully relevant, these figures must, nevertheless, make sense in the context of other numerical and non-numerical facts. According to Hassan (2024) and Oloko *et al.* (2025), quantitative research gathers data using time-consuming tools like organised interviews or questionnaires as well as extensive survey research. Even though this method of research involves a lot of participants, interaction with them happens much more quickly than it would with a qualitative research approach. This study used the

quantitative approach within the mixed method research design to collect data from postgraduate students using a structured closed-ended questionnaire in line with the objectives of the study.

Qualitative research is used to obtain insights into people's feelings and thoughts, which may serve as the foundation for a future stand-alone qualitative study or aid researchers in developing survey instruments for use in a quantitative study (Renjith *et al.* 2021; Luthfiandana *et al.* 2024; Lim 2024). This study was therefore well-suited for the use of a qualitative approach in the mixed-method research design to explore the perceptions and experiences of Writing Centre staff and postgraduate students.

4.4 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy refers to the underlying belief system that guides researchers in their approach to inquiry, influencing how they understand the nature of knowledge, the methods they employ, and the interpretation of their findings (Pretorius 2024). Research philosophy is therefore a crucial aspect of academic inquiry that guides methodological choices and shapes research outcomes. According to Wati (2024), understanding research philosophy is essential for researchers across all fields, as it informs the selection of research methods, data collection techniques, and analytical approaches. Research philosophy encompasses ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions, which influence how researchers approach their studies (Sun and Zuo 2024). The main philosophical approaches include positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical realism, each with distinct implications for research design and methodology (Muhaise *et al.* 2020). These are highlighted in Figure 4.1 and explained in the discussion that follows.

Figure 4.1: Principal research philosophies

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Question type
Positivism	There is a single reality	Reality can be measured	Quantitative	What works?
Interpretivism	(There is no single reality) Reality is created by individuals	Reality needs to be interpreted	Qualitative	Why do we act this way?
Socio-critical	Reality is a social constructed entity under constant internal influence	Reality and knowledge can be changed	Mixed methods	How can we change the situation?
Pragmatism	Reality is what is useful	The best method is the one that works		Will that solution improve the situation?

Source: Adapted from Badewi (2014)

Positivism is a research philosophy that assumes an objective reality exists independently of the observer and can be discovered through scientific inquiry (Shah 2021; Park *et al.* 2019). Originating from Auguste Comte's work in the 19th century, positivism aims to bridge natural and social sciences (Shah 2021). It aligns with the hypothetico-deductive model, focusing on verifying hypotheses through quantitative approaches and emphasising generalisable inferences, replication, and controlled experimentation (Park *et al.* 2019). Positivism is rooted in foundationalism and empiricism, valuing objectivity (Pretorius 2024). Positivism asserts that knowledge is derived from empirical evidence and observable phenomena. Researchers adopting a positivist approach typically utilise quantitative methods, emphasising objectivity and the ability to generalise findings across contexts. This paradigm is prevalent in the natural sciences and has influenced many social science disciplines, including management research, where it is often used to test hypotheses and establish causal relationships (Wati 2024).

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. According to Shah (2021), interpretivism, which emerged as a critique of positivism, argues that reality is socially constructed and subjective. Researchers who adopt this philosophy often employ qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnography, to gain insights into the social contexts and cultural frameworks that shape human behaviour. This approach is particularly relevant in management studies, where understanding the perspectives of employees,

customers, and stakeholders is crucial for effective decision-making (Harvey 2023). It is therefore relevant for this study as the study sought the perspectives of Writing Centre staff as well as postgraduate students in understanding the training needs of the staff in relation to the support provided to postgraduate students.

Socio-critical or critical realism philosophy combines elements of both positivism and interpretivism, positing that while there is an objective reality, our understanding of it is mediated by social constructs and human perceptions (Shrestha and Sharma 2024). It posits that reality exists independently of our knowledge and is stratified into three domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Giese and Joseph 2021). This framework emphasises causal mechanisms and provides a coherent structure for evaluation (Nugraha and Winarno 2025). Critical realism offers an alternative to positivism and interpretivism, focusing on identifying how structural entities and contextual conditions interact to generate events. Critical realism encourages researchers to explore the underlying mechanisms that shape observable phenomena, making it a valuable approach for examining complex social issues in management (Kanokanga *et al.* 2021). Although critical realism is emerging as a viable approach in some research, its application and explication in published studies have shown varying degrees of success, indicating a need for stronger future publications (Dean 2025).

Pragmatism emphasises the practical implications of research and the importance of addressing real-world problems and embraces mixed-method approaches (Dominic 2023). It focuses on the consequences of inquiry and the practical problems experienced by people, considering social, historical, and political contexts. Pragmatism is often viewed as a supportive paradigm for mixed research, combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Aguzzoli *et al.* 2024). It conceptualises reality as a cycle, knowledge as double-faced, and acknowledges necessary bias in research (niure and Sapkota 2025). As a research paradigm, pragmatism views knowledge as an objective reality that can only be realised through human experience (Dube *et al.* 2024). It stands between positivist and constructivist approaches, adopting practical strategies to address social issues (Dube *et al.* 2024). Pragmatism's philosophical basis considers human experience central to informing actions that systematically address challenges, making it particularly valuable in educational research. Researchers adopting this philosophy are often flexible in their methodological

choices, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods as needed to answer their research questions effectively. This approach is particularly useful in management research, where the focus is often on finding actionable solutions to organisational challenges (Kanokanga *et al.* 2021).

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy to guide the research, as it is particularly suited to mixed-methods research designs that integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Pragmatism prioritises the research problem and the practical consequences of inquiry, rather than adherence to a single philosophical tradition (Dube *et al.* 2024). This stance enabled the researcher to draw on the strengths of both quantitative methods, which allow for the measurement and analysis of patterns and trends, and qualitative methods, which provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. By adopting a pragmatic philosophy, the study was able to employ multiple methods of data collection and analysis in a complementary manner, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the training needs of Writing Centre staff who support the development of postgraduate students.

While the study was guided by a pragmatic research philosophy, the qualitative component was also informed by interpretivist assumptions, which emphasise understanding participants' meanings and experiences within their institutional contexts. This was important because the Writing Centre (which forms the context of this study) provides student support through strategies of teaching and learning academic writing that should be guided by the contextual realities of the students. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) explain that the interpretivism attempts to understand the experiences, which include the thinking, feelings, and behaviours of persons being examined in their natural environment. This alignment supported the in-depth exploration of Writing Centre staff (tutors and practitioners) and postgraduate students' perspectives while remaining consistent with the study's mixed-methods design.

4.5 TARGET POPULATION

In research, the term target population refers to the specific group of individuals or entities that a study aims to investigate (Willie 2024). This population is defined by

certain characteristics relevant to the research question and serves as the foundation for sampling and data collection processes. The target population can vary significantly depending on the research objectives and context. Zikmund *et al.* (2014) emphasise the importance of a well-defined population in order to produce noteworthy findings. Specifically, Struwing and Stead (2018) define the target population as the combined total of all the elements one is focusing on. DUT has six faculties (Management Sciences, Applied Sciences, Engineering and the Built Environment, Accounting and Informatics, and Health Sciences) across seven campuses (ML Sultan, Ritson, Steve Biko, City, Brickfield, Riverside and Indumiso Campuses), while MUT has three faculties (Natural Sciences, Management Sciences, and Engineering) across two campuses (Main Campus and North Campus). The DUT Writing Centre is located on only six of the university's seven campuses (namely ML Sultan, Ritson, Steve Biko, City, Riverside and Indumiso campuses) but caters for all six faculties; whereas the MUT Writing Centre is located on only one campus (the Main Campus) but caters for students from the university's three faculties.

Considering the above, for the qualitative aspect the target population comprised Writing Centre staff (senior practitioners and tutors) from both DUT and MUT. Therefore, N = 52 Writing Centre staff were identified as part of the target population, comprising four (4) permanent staff (Writing Centre practitioners) for the semi-structured interviews and 40 contract staff (Writing Centre tutors) for the focus groups at DUT, as well as two (2) permanent staff (Writing Centre practitioners) for the interviews and six (6) contract staff (Writing Centre tutors) for the focus groups at MUT. These figures were obtained from the respective Writing Centres. The study employed the same target population of 1098 postgraduate students for both the structured questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. Using the same population ensured consistency across data collection methods and enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings within the mixed-methods design, allowing for triangulation and a deeper understanding of postgraduate students' writing support needs.

For the quantitative component of this research which focuses on questionnaire responses, the target population comprised postgraduate students at both DUT and MUT who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre. Before being able to book for an appointment with the Writing Centre, students are required to register for an

account through the Writing Centre's WOnline platform. This platform requests a user to indicate their level of study, which information then serves as the basis for statistics on the number of postgraduate students who have opened an account and consulted with the Writing Centre. The WOnline platform at both DUT and MUT Writing Centres became fully operationalised from 2020 to date. Therefore, statistics generated from the DUT Writing Centre's WOnline platform show that, from 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2023, 987 postgraduate students have consulted with the DUT Writing Centre across its six locations from all the six DUT faculties. Conversely, the statistic report generated for the MUT WOnline platform within the same period gave a target population of 111 postgraduate students who have consulted with the MUT Writing Centre across MUT's three faculties. This brought the total target population of postgraduate students from the two UoTs combined to 1098. Postgraduate students are important for this study as they will assist the Writing Centres at the selected UoTs to identify areas of improvement, especially as it pertains to Writing Centre tutors, in order for them to provide a better and efficient service. In addition, the input from these students will assist in gauging how training theories and models can be utilised by the Writing Centre staff in the future.

Identifying the target population is crucial as it directly influences the validity and generalisability of the research findings (Knight *et al.* 2023). Its careful identification and characterisation are essential for ensuring the relevance and applicability of research findings. Meinck (2020) highlights that defining the target population is a critical step in the sampling process, particularly in large-scale assessments. The author notes that a well-defined target population allows researchers to compile appropriate sampling frames and apply complex sampling methods, which are essential for obtaining representative samples. This ensures that the results are reflective of the true values within the population, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research outcomes. Sampling is therefore discussed in the following section.

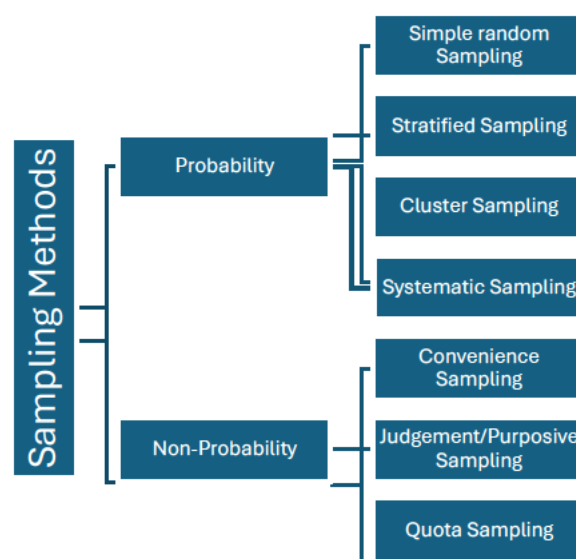
4.6 SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHODS

Once the target population is established, researchers typically employ sampling techniques to select a representative subset for data collection. This sampling process is critical to ensure that the findings can be generalised to the broader target

population. Ahmed (2024) asserts that sampling is the practice of selecting a portion of a population to study in order to make judgments about the entire population. According to Turner (2020), sampling in research involves selecting a subset of a population to study, as examining an entire population is often impractical (Turner 2020). It allows for faster and more cost-effective data collection while making inferences about the larger population. When compared to total coverage, sampling enables better testing, better monitoring, and better processing of the data. To obtain an appropriate research sample, researchers should define the target population, accessible population, and recruitment steps (Althubaiti 2022). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2021), it is important to note that understandings of sampling may vary among qualitative researchers, and inconsistencies in the literature can be problematic for those seeking coherent guidance.

Sampling is a fundamental aspect of research methodology that involves selecting a subset of individuals or observations from a larger population to draw conclusions about that population. The purpose of sampling is to enable researchers to gather data and make inferences without needing to study the entire population, which can often be impractical or impossible due to constraints such as time, cost, and accessibility (Schoot and Miočević 2020). There are two main types of sampling: probability and non-probability (Bhardwaj 2019; Ahmed 2024). These are shown in Figure 4.2 below and explained in the following discussion.

Figure 4.2: Sampling Methods



Source: Researcher Generated.

Probability sampling, according to Mukti (2025), is the process of selecting respondents based on the probability principle and comprises four methods, namely simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified random sampling, and cluster sampling. Probability sampling ensures that every member of the population has a known, non-zero chance of being selected. It is characterised by its ability to produce representative samples, which enhances the generalisability of the findings. Common techniques include:

- Simple Random Sampling: Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. This can be achieved through random number generators or lottery methods (Berndt 2020).
- Stratified Sampling: The population is divided into subgroups (strata) based on specific characteristics (e.g., age, gender), and random samples are drawn from each stratum. This method ensures representation across key variables (Kong *et al.* 2020).
- Cluster Sampling: The population is divided into clusters (often geographically), and entire clusters are randomly selected. This method is useful when populations are widespread and difficult to access (Mukti 2025).
- Systematic Sampling: Systematic sampling involves organising the population in a list, randomly selecting a starting point, and then choosing every k -th element, where k is calculated by dividing the population size (N) by the desired sample size (n) (Ahmed, 2024). For example, if a population has 300 individuals and a sample of 30 is needed, every 10th person is selected after a random start between 1 and 10 (Hossan *et al.*, 2023; Djennad and Djellouli, 2025). This method ensures a structured and evenly distributed sample across the population.

On the other hand, in non-probability sampling, not every item in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample and it includes accidental, quota, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling, among others (Neuman 2016). While non-probability sampling may not provide a representative sample, it can be useful in exploratory research. Common techniques include:

- Purposive Sampling: Researchers select individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the study. This method is often used in qualitative research to gain insights from particular subgroups (Abwamiah 2023).
- Convenience Sampling: Samples are taken from a group that is readily available, which can lead to significant biases but is often used due to its simplicity and cost-effectiveness (Kylasa *et al.* 2019).
- Snowball Sampling: In this method, existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. This method is particularly useful for populations that are hard to access, such as marginalised groups (Mukti 2025).

The mixed methods sampling approach combines elements of both probability and non-probability sampling to leverage the strengths of each method. For example, researchers might use stratified sampling to ensure representation across key demographics and then apply purposive sampling within those strata to focus on specific cases of interest (Beghi 2021). Given the mixed-methods nature of the study, different non-probability sampling strategies were employed for the quantitative and qualitative components. For the quantitative phase, convenience sampling with voluntary response was used, as the structured closed-ended questionnaire was distributed to postgraduate students who had utilised Writing Centre services and who were readily accessible via institutional email systems on the WCOOnline platform. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was employed to select participants who possessed direct experience and knowledge relevant to the study, including Writing Centre tutors, practitioners, and postgraduate students.

4.6.1 Selection of sample size

The sample size for the quantitative component (questionnaire participants) of the study was calculated using Sekaran's (2003: 294) 'Sample Size for a Given Population' Table as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Sample Size for a Given Population Size

<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Source: Sekaran (2003)

As the estimated total target population for this study was 987 postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the DUT Writing Centre, the sample size was approximately 277 respondents; whereas for the target population of 111 postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the MUT Writing Centre, the sample size was estimated at 87 respondents as recommended by Sekaran (2003: 294). Thus, the total target population of postgraduate students who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre was 1098 (i.e., 977+111) and the total sample size estimate of respondents was 364 (i.e., 277+87). According to Berndt (2020), a larger sample size helps the researcher to collect exploratory, in-depth data from a greater segment of the population while minimising response bias. Furthermore, Wang (2024) states that inferences about the population can be drawn using information gathered from a sample. The sample size for this study was drawn from postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre as they would be able to provide their experiences of consulting with Writing Centre staff.

The sample size for the qualitative component of this research was not statistically calculated; however it was determined by various factors. For the focus group discussion with Writing Centre tutors, the researcher was guided by scholarly guidelines where scholars assert that 8 to 15 participants are sufficient for focus-group discussions. The qualitative sample for the focus group discussion consisted of 14 writing centre tutors, including 10 DUT and 4 from MUT. The disparity in participant numbers between the two institutions was not the result of sampling bias but rather reflected institutional staffing realities at the time of data collection. At MUT, the Writing Centre employed only four tutors at the time of data collection of this study, all of whom participated in the study, thereby constituting total population sampling for that site. While the number of tutors differed across institutions, the study did not seek statistical comparison but rather aimed to explore context-specific training needs within each writing centre. For the Writing Centre practitioners, the qualitative sample comprised all six writing centre practitioners employed at Mangosuthu University of Technology (2) and Durban University of Technology (4) at the time of data collection. Given the small and bounded nature of the population, the study was necessarily limited by the number of practitioners in current employment. However, this approach enabled the inclusion of all information-rich participants directly involved in postgraduate writing support at the two institutions. For the individual semi-structured postgraduate student interviews, the researcher was guided by the principle of data saturation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted until no new themes related to tutor training needs emerged, which occurred after 10 interviews. This approach is consistent with qualitative research conventions that prioritise depth and richness of data over numerical adequacy.

4.6.2 Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria, namely inclusion and exclusion criteria, determine and define the characteristics and parameters of the members of the target population who will be considered eligible or ineligible to participate in a research study (Nikolopoulou 2022). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this research are outlined below:

4.6.2.1 Inclusion criteria

Writing Centre staff: Participants had to, at the time of the study, be currently employed as staff members in the Writing Centres of the selected UoTs in KZN.

Postgraduate students: only those postgraduate students (from Advanced Diploma to Doctoral level) who had utilised the services of the Writing Centre before were included in the study.

Availability and willingness to participate: Participants had to be available and willing to dedicate time to engage in the research activities, such as interviews, surveys, or training sessions, as required.

4.6.2.2 Exclusion criteria

Non-Writing Centre staff: individuals who were, at the time of the study, not directly employed as Writing Centre staff members are excluded from the study.

Postgraduate students who had not utilised the services of the Writing Centre were excluded from the study.

Inaccessibility: Individuals who were unable to or unavailable to participate in the study due to various reasons were excluded from the study.

4.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is a fundamental tool in research, essential for investigating research problems (Mirhosseini, 2020; Mazhar 2021). It involves gathering primary data through methods like observation, interviews, and questionnaires, or using secondary data from existing sources (Makbul 2021; Daruhadi and Sopiati 2024). The researcher collected data from three (3) levels:

- (i) Senior Writing Centre Practitioners,
- (ii) Writing Centre staff (tutors), and
- (iii) Postgraduate students.

Data collection was conducted face-to-face. Parallel data collection was used in this study to gather both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time.

4.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a widely used qualitative research method in various fields, including nursing, social sciences, and software engineering (Roulston 2018). They involve

researchers asking questions to collect data from participants, providing insights into experiences, perceptions, and opinions (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021). Beyond verbal communication, interviews allow researchers to observe participants' behaviour, personality, and beliefs (Buys *et al.* 2022). This method is valuable for verifying information accuracy and identifying contradictions between sources (Wong *et al.* 2023).

Interviews can be conducted in different formats such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured, with semi-structured interviews being particularly effective in producing rich data (Kakilla 2021). Structured interviews use a fixed set of predetermined questions, ensuring consistency and comparability across participants (Elhami and Khoshnevisan 2022). According to Dursun (2023), they are less flexible but facilitate easier data analysis and are often used in survey research.

Semi-structured interviews combine a set of guiding questions with flexibility for follow-up and probing, allowing researchers to explore emerging themes while maintaining some structure (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019). This is the most commonly used type in qualitative research due to its balance of depth and comparability (Elhami and Khoshnevisan, 2022). Unstructured Interviews feature open-ended, conversational formats with minimal pre-planned questions, enabling participants to guide the discussion (Dursun 2023). These are ideal for exploratory research but can be challenging to analyze systematically (Elhami and Khoshnevisan 2022).

Part of the qualitative data collection aspect of this research involved the use of semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with five (5) and two (2) Writing Centre practitioners at DUT and MUT respectively. Permission to conduct semi-structured interviews from the practitioners was sought through a formal email request inviting them to participate. This was after permission to conduct research was obtained from the two respective institutions through the relevant institutional research committees. The semi-structured interviews included questions on the Writing Centres' current training procedures and anticipated future training needs, especially as it relates to working with postgraduate students. Kakilla (2021) points out that the human interaction that happens during face-to-face interviews is the most significant advantage of interviews. This strategy enabled the

researcher to communicate with the Writing Centre practitioners to gain in-depth understanding and insight into the training needs of Writing Centre staff to contribute to the success of postgraduate students as well as the development of Writing Centre staff. Semi-structured interviews were also deemed appropriate for this study because Buitrago (2013) in a study on identifying training needs of novice online English Language Tutors, collected data via questionnaires and concluded that this led to some ambiguity in the answers thereby resulting in difficulties in the analysis of the results. Buitrago (2013) therefore believed that such a limitation could have been avoided if interviews had been conducted.

The researcher further conducted semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students from both DUT and MUT who, at the time of the study, had utilised the services of the Writing Centre. For the postgraduate student interviews, the number of participants was 10 (five for each selected UoT) due to the saturation of data occurring after the first few interviews. According to Guest *et al.* (2020) and Squire *et al.* (2023), researchers often monitor the appearance of new themes or codes as interviews progress; and when several consecutive interviews fail to produce new themes, saturation is considered achieved. Data saturation is reached when interviews stop yielding new information or themes related to the research question (Fofana *et al.* 2020). Guest *et al.* (2020) concur that in interviews, data saturation occurs when researchers repeatedly hear the same statements during interviews. It is then time to cease collecting information and start analysing what has already been acquired.

The recruitment process involved postgraduate students being drawn from the database in the WOnline platform used at both DUT and MUT Writing Centres. Client forms drawn from this database were used to collect the email addresses of postgraduate students who have consulted with the Writing Centre. Thereafter, the postgraduate students were mass emailed to request for participation in the interviews. Interviews were conducted based on the willingness and availability of participants.

The interviews with 6 Writing Centre practitioners and 10 postgraduate students from both DUT and MUT were semi-structured to allow the researcher to collect as much detailed data as possible in line with the research objectives and questions. The semi-structured interviews were approximately 30 - 45 minutes in length per interview.

These were conducted in the Writing Centre premises of both DUT and MUT Writing Centres. Permission to record the semi-structured interviews was obtained from the participants to accurately capture the data enabling the researcher to pay closer attention to the responses given and ask relevant follow-up questions. The recordings will also be used to highlight aspects that may require further inquiry and investigation in future. The researcher had a notepad in hand to take notes, as advocated for by Creswell (2013) who advises that notes serve as a useful backup in case of the recording failing. Furthermore, the interviews were transcribed using the transcribe function of Microsoft Word 2021. The researcher further analysed the transcription to ensure the accurate capturing of relevant, important and useful themes, patterns or specific information for the data analysis process for synthesis with the research questions.

4.7.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are a qualitative research method involving small group discussions on specific topics, led by a moderator (Croucher and Cronn-Mills 2021). The researcher served as the moderator for the focus groups in this study. The process typically involves selecting a location, preparing recording equipment, developing a discussion guide, and analysing results. According to Gundumogula (2020), focus groups are valuable for generating in-depth information quickly and cost-effectively compared to individual interviews. However, focus groups have limitations which include participant hesitation to speak in groups and potential over-involvement by the moderator (Croucher and Cronn-Mills 2021). The researcher conducted two (2) focus group discussions (one for tutors at the DUT Campuses and one for tutors at MUT) comprising 10 and 4 participants from DUT and MUT respectively. Writing Centre tutors were recruited by email invitations to participate in the focus groups. The emails contained the letter of information and consent which outlined the purpose of the research and the reason for the tutors being selected as respondents for the study. Those tutors who responded with expressed interest to participate in the focus groups formed part of the focus group.

According to Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee (2018), 6 to 12 participants, with a median around 10, is sufficient for a focus group and when there are more than 12 people in a focus group, it gets difficult to control and may break off into two or three

smaller groups, each with its own discussion. Therefore, this size allows for a range of opinions while still giving each person the opportunity to offer their views (Reisner *et al.* 2018). The focus group discussions were centred on understanding the training needs of Writing Centre tutors who consult with postgraduate students, as well as gaining insight into their perceptions and experiences with working with postgraduate students. These focus groups were approximately 40 minutes long. In addition, the researcher was guided by a moderator guide. According to Taylor (2020), the research instrument used for focus group discussion is typically a moderator guide or a focus group protocol. This guide outlines the key topics and questions that will be covered during the discussion and helps to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences.

4.7.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are essential research instruments used to collect data from large groups of respondents (Kurzahls 2021; Lund 2021; Ranfanathan and Caduff 2023). According to Zheng (2021), questionnaires are particularly valuable in quantitative marketing, social, and nursing research. Taherdoost (2022) posits that designing an effective questionnaire involves several steps, including defining required information, identifying survey and question types, and constructing questions. Proper questionnaire design is crucial for minimising errors and obtaining accurate, unbiased findings (Aithal and Aithal 2020; Taherdoost 2022). Pre-testing the questionnaire is recommended to ensure it captures intended information accurately (Permatasari *et al.* 2025). A structured closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre to gather their responses pertaining to the training needs of Writing Centre tutors supporting postgraduate students.

According to Holmes (2023) and Lim (2024), questionnaires are a set of open-ended or closed-ended questions to which respondents respond. Koo and Yanga (2025) further state that questionnaires have the advantage of obtaining data more efficiently in terms of researcher time, energy, and costs. The recruitment process for questionnaires also entailed the collection of the postgraduate students' email addresses from the WOnline platforms of both DUT and MUT. The researcher used these email addresses to email the postgraduate students the research questionnaire

survey together with the letter of information and consent requesting those who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre to participate in the study. Ultimately, data was collected from 336 postgraduate students who agreed participate in the study.

4.8 PILOT STUDY

To determine the feasibility of the methods used, preliminary work in the form of a pilot study was done. According to Kunselman (2024), before using a research instrument in data collecting, it is critical to analyse it. Piloting a research instrument necessitates a thorough examination of each question's intelligibility and connotation as perceived by participants. Teresi *et al.* (2021) mention that the primary goal of a pilot study is to ensure that the population sample understands the researcher's intended answer choices and questions, and that they can respond expressively. According to Mumba (2023), there is no codified way of determining the sample size for pilot research instruments. Therefore, for this research and also in consideration of data saturation as advised by Rahimi and Khatooni (2024), the sample of the semi-structured interview schedule for Writing Centre Practitioners was piloted on three academic support staff (two from DUT and one from MUT) who did not form part of the study's targeted respondents. For the postgraduate semi-structured interview schedule, the pre-test was conducted on five students (three from DUT and two from MUT) who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre but who did not form part of the study's respondents. Both pretests were used to identify any necessary modifications and make improvements to the questions in the final research instruments.

A pilot study was also conducted on the questionnaire for postgraduate students. A study conducted by Perneger *et al.* (2014) found that a sample size of 30 respondents is recommended for questionnaire pretesting. Therefore, for this study, the questionnaire was pretested on 30 randomly selected postgraduate students who did not form part of the study respondents in order to identify potential issues with the wording, flow, and clarity of the questions as well as to ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The researcher also conducted a pilot study for the focus group discussions by selecting a small number (five) respondents (three academic support tutors from DUT and two from MUT) who were similar to the intended focus group participants and invite them to participate in a trial discussion.

The pilot study revealed ambiguities and inconsistencies in the questionnaire and the two interview guides. However, no changes were made to the focus group protocol/moderator guide. Table 4.1 below summarises the key issues identified and the corresponding changes made to enhance clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Table 4.1: Summary of key issues identified and corresponding changes to research instruments

Interview schedule for semi-structured interviews with Writing Centre Practitioners		
Section/ question	Issue identified in pilot	Change made
Section A: What are your primary tasks and responsibilities?	The question is already covered in the prior question in the same section which asks: "what is your current role in the Writing Centre"	Question was removed
Section B: How often do you train your Writing Centre staff?	The question is a quantitative question.	Question was changed to What type of training do you provide? What is the frequency/duration of the training?
Do you believe that the training you provide capacitates staff in supporting the development of postgraduate students?	Inappropriate wording	Question changed to: How does the training that you provide effectively serve to capacitate staff in supporting the development of postgraduate students?
Have you made any changes to the training in the last 5 years?	Redundant question	Question removed as it was similar to the follow up question of: Which components of the training have worked well in

		supporting the development of postgraduate students?
Have you engaged with postgraduate students to identify their needs?	Redundant question	Question removed as it is covered in the question: What feedback have you received from postgraduate students who have used your Writing Centre
Two additional questions were added: - What are the current barriers to providing effective training for the development of postgraduate students? - What positive changes/revisions have been made to the training in the last 5 years?		

Interview Schedule for Postgraduate Students

Question	Issue identified in pilot	Change made
What has been your experience with consulting with Writing Centre tutors	Inappropriate wording	Describe your experience with consulting with Writing Centre tutors
Do you believe Writing Centre tutors are well-trained to support your academic journey?	Inappropriate wording	Question changed to: How well-trained are the Writing Centre tutors to support your academic journey?
What was your worst Writing Centre experience?	Inappropriate wording	What are the key challenges you have faced/experienced in consulting with the Writing Centre Tutors?

Structured Closed-Ended Questionnaire for Postgraduate Students

Question	Issue identified in pilot	Change made
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How long have you been using the Writing Centre?	The years overlap thereby creating confusion for the respondent on the correct year to tick.	The overlapping years were changed to: > 1 but ≤ 2 > 2 but ≤ 3
1-2 years?		
2-3 years?		

Following the successful implementation of the pilot study and the refinement of the research instruments, attention is directed to the procedures used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, thereby strengthening the credibility of the quantitative findings.

4.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are fundamental concepts in research, ensuring the trustworthiness and accuracy of findings for the quantitative component of this study. Validity refers to the extent to which a measurement tool accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Anglin *et al.* 2024). Reliability, on the other hand, concerns the consistency and stability of the results obtained from a measurement tool over multiple tests or applications (Karnia 2024). Both are crucial for ensuring research yields beneficial and credible results. In research, the validity and reliability of measurement instruments are essential for producing meaningful and trustworthy results.

Furthermore, researchers need to establish the validity and reliability of their assessments to ensure their data can be trusted and their conclusions are well-supported by statistical evidence (Sürücü and Maşlakçı 2020). High reliability ensures the consistency of results over multiple tests, while high validity ensures that the test measures what it is intended to measure.

4.9.1 Validity

Validity determines what an instrument measures and how well it does so (Anglin *et al.* 2024). According to Olanipekun *et al.* (2022), validity is the degree to which interpretations of test results are warranted and depends on the test's intended use.

Validity is not a property of the instrument itself but rather of the inferences made based on the instrument's results (Lim 2024). Establishing validity involves assessing whether the measurement tool accurately captures the concept it is designed to measure. In this study, multiple strategies were employed to establish and enhance validity across both qualitative and quantitative components. There are several types of validity that researchers consider:

Content Validity refers to the extent to which the content of a test or measurement tool adequately represents the domain it is supposed to cover (Karnia 2024). It is often evaluated by experts who assess the relevance and completeness of the instrument's items. Content validity for this study was ensured by consulting with an expert in research, namely the statistician, who evaluated the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire. His feedback helped refine the instrument to align better with the constructs under investigation.

Face Validity is a subjective assessment of whether the test appears to measure what it intends to measure. It is a basic and initial assessment, often based on the perceptions of test-takers or other non-experts (Paneerselvam 2021). For this study, face validity was enhanced through piloting of the questionnaire. Participants in the pilot provided feedback on clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of questions, allowing for adjustments to ensure the research instrument was perceived as accurately targeting the intended topics.

Criterion-Related Validity assesses how well a test predicts an outcome or behaviour (Olanipekun *et al.* 2022). It involves comparing the test scores with other measures or criteria that are already known to be valid. For this study, criterion validity was considered by aligning questionnaire items with measurable indicators of student engagement and satisfaction based on existing literature. While no formal external criterion was used for correlation, this alignment provided confidence in the questionnaire's predictive capacity.

Construct Validity evaluates whether a test measures the intended theoretical construct, that is, the degree to which a test measures what it claims to be measuring. It is essential for ensuring that the instrument used in the study accurately reflects the

theoretical concept being studied (Oliyanka and Abideen 2023). Construct validity involves determining if the test adequately captures the abstract concept it is designed to measure (Trafimow 2022). This can be assessed through various methods, including factor analysis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Mo 2024). For this study, construct validity was supported through the careful design of the research questionnaire grounded in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study. The questionnaire items were structured to align with key constructs related to the effectiveness, accessibility, and perception of Writing Centre services.

Statistical Conclusion Validity refers to the degree to which conclusions about the relationship among variables based on the data are correct or reasonable (Fabrigar *et al.* 2020). It is concerned with whether the statistical tests used in the study are appropriate and whether the conclusions drawn from these tests are valid (Olayinka and Abideen 2023). This was addressed in this study by consulting a quantitative statistician during the instrument piloting phase. His input informed the structuring of response options, item scaling, and the appropriateness of planned statistical tests, reducing the risk of erroneous inferences from the data.

Internal Validity examines whether the study design, conduct, and analysis answer the research questions without bias. It ensures that the observed effects are due to the independent variable and not other factors (Jiménez-Buedo and Russo 2021). In the quantitative component of this study, internal validity was bolstered through careful design of the questionnaire and piloting to ensure items measured intended constructs.

External Validity is concerned with the generalisability of the study findings to other settings, populations, and times. It assesses whether the results of a study can be applied to contexts outside of the study conditions (Chen *et al.* 2021). Ecological validity, a subtype of external validity, examines whether study findings can be generalised to real-life settings. It is particularly important for studies aiming to apply findings to everyday situations (Anglin *et al.* 2024). For this study, external validity was enhanced by drawing participants from a diverse pool of postgraduate students (n=336) who had used the Writing Centre services. Although the study was situated at two selected UoTs, the diverse sample increased the applicability of findings to similar higher education contexts.

According to Trafimow (2022), validity tells the researcher if the measurement is exact and correct and if the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. However, Maree (2017) believes that reliability pertains to the repeatability or consistency of a measure or instrument. The section that follows discusses reliability.

4.9.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of measurement (Olayinka *et al.* 2023). A reliable instrument produces similar results when repeated measurements are taken under the same conditions (Karnia 2024). Reliability is essential because it indicates the extent to which a measurement tool is free from random error. In this study, multiple methods were used to promote reliability.

Test-Retest Reliability involves administering the same test to the same group of individuals at two different times and then calculating the correlation between the two sets of scores (Chen *et al.* 2021). A high correlation indicates good test-retest reliability. This was not formally assessed in this study due to the cross-sectional design, but stability was considered through careful wording and sequencing of questions in the questionnaire to avoid ambiguity and participant misinterpretation.

Parallel-Forms Reliability involves creating two equivalent forms of the same test and administering both forms to the same group of individuals (Karnia 2024). The correlation between the scores on the two forms indicates the parallel-forms reliability (Karnia 2024). Parallel-forms reliability was not applicable in the current study's context, as only one version of each instrument was used.

Split-Half Reliability involves dividing a single test into two halves and calculating the correlation between the scores on the two halves (Sürücü and Maşlakçı 2020).). This method assesses the internal consistency of the test. Internal Consistency Reliability assesses the extent to which the items within a test measure the same construct (Steingraber 2024). Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used statistic to measure internal consistency (Ke 2023). A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable (Goodboy and Martin 2020). Both split-half and internal consistency reliability were relevant for the quantitative questionnaire. During the

pretest, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for key subscales, and values above the acceptable threshold (0.70) confirmed internal consistency.

Inter-Rater Reliability assesses the degree of agreement between different raters or observers who are using the same measurement tool (Olanipekun *et al.* 2022). It is particularly important in studies where subjective judgments are involved (Sluga 2018). Inter-Rater Reliability for this study was relevant to the qualitative component of the current study. However, due to financial constraints, the researcher only used one qualified statistician as approved by the DUT for the coding and analysis of focus group and interview transcripts. A codebook was developed, and the cross-checking of coded data ensured consistency in interpretation.

Furthermore, for the quantitative aspect of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure the reliability and validity of the research questionnaire through resolving any shortfalls in the questionnaire such as unclear questions. According to Taherdoost (2016), the validity and reliability of questionnaires are significant aspects of research methodology, affecting the accuracy and consistency of collected data. Therefore, it is incumbent upon researchers to carefully consider various forms of validity and reliability tests to ensure their questionnaire is a valid and reliable research instrument (Sürücü and Maşlakçı 2020). Additionally, the researcher sent the instruments for evaluation, feedback and commentary to a reputable statistician who provided feedback on modifications to questions to fit the needs of the study and to ensure a flawless data analysis process.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of how each aspect of the study's research design supports validity and reliability.

Table 4.2: Summary of strategies used to ensure validity and reliability in the study

Aspect	Application in this Study	Purpose / Contribution to Validity & Reliability
Quantitative Data Collection	Administered a semi-structured, closed-ended questionnaire to 336 postgraduate students who used Writing Centre services.	Standardised measurement improved construct validity ; large sample supported external validity ; structure supported internal reliability .

Pretesting of Instruments	Pretested the questionnaire.	Identified and revised unclear items, enhancing face validity , instrument clarity , and measurement reliability .
Expert Consultation	Consulted a statistician for feedback on the questionnaire.	Strengthened content validity ; ensured questionnaire was appropriate for statistical analysis (statistical conclusion validity).
Mixed-Methods Approach	Integrated quantitative and qualitative data sources.	Enabled triangulation , supporting construct validity and enhancing the trustworthiness of findings.
Data Analysis Techniques	Conducted internal consistency checks (e.g., Cronbach's alpha).	Ensured reliability of questionnaire.

Validity and reliability are mostly used for the quantitative aspects of research. The following section delves into rigour and trustworthiness for the qualitative aspects of the study.

4.10 RIGOUR AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, rigour and trustworthiness serve as the framework for ensuring that findings are robust, ethical, and credible. While quantitative research relies on statistical validity and reliability, qualitative researchers use a specific set of criteria developed primarily by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to demonstrate the quality of their work. Rather than aiming for objectivity (which qualitative research often views as impossible due to human interpretation), researchers strive for trustworthiness through four specific dimensions: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria were applied throughout the qualitative component of this study, which involved semi-structured interviews with Writing Centre practitioners and postgraduate students as well as focus group discussions with Writing Centre tutors at DUT and MUT.

4.10.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence that the findings accurately represent participants' experiences and perspectives (Ahmed 2024). In this study, credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and by adopting triangulation across

data sources. Data were collected from multiple perspectives, including 6 Writing Centre practitioners, 14 Writing Centre tutors and 10 postgraduate students, to capture diverse experiences of tutor training and academic support. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their perspectives in their own words, while follow-up questions clarified ambiguities and ensured that interpretations reflected participants' intended meanings. Additionally, member checking was employed by providing participants with summaries of key themes for verification, ensuring that the data interpretation remained faithful to their lived experiences.

4.10.2 Transferability

Transferability concerns the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts (Kakar *et al.* 2023). To facilitate transferability, this study provides a detailed description of the research context, including the institutional setting of DUT and MUT, the roles of Writing Centre tutors, and the postgraduate student population. Detailed accounts of participant demographics, tutoring practices, and institutional structures allow readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other Writing Centres or higher education contexts.

4.10.3 Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and replicability of the research process (Ahmed 2024). To enhance dependability, a detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting decisions made during data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis. The use of a systematic thematic analysis approach using NVivo version 15 software ensured that coding procedures were consistent across datasets, and regular consultations with the research supervisor provided external scrutiny of methodological decisions. These measures collectively strengthen the reliability of the qualitative findings.

4.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the findings, ensuring that they are shaped by participants' responses rather than researcher bias (Kakar 2023).

Reflexivity was central to this study, with the researcher maintaining reflective journals to document personal assumptions, decisions, and potential sources of bias throughout data collection and analysis. Audit trails and peer debriefing sessions further supported confirmability, allowing independent assessment of the interpretation of data and the derivation of themes. The researcher also used triangulation (explained in Section 4.11 below) to show the convergence between data and claims.

By integrating Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, maintaining reflexivity, and applying ethical safeguards, this study ensured that the qualitative findings on Writing Centre tutor training and postgraduate student experiences are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This rigorous approach provides confidence that the findings accurately represent participants' perspectives and can inform both practice and further research in Writing Centre contexts.

4.11 TRIANGULATION

Triangulation was employed in this study to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and to provide a fuller, more nuanced understanding of how Writing Centre staff training supports postgraduate students. In research methodology, triangulation refers to using multiple approaches (data sources, methods and theories) to investigate a question in order to increase confidence in the results (Denzin 1970). By deliberately collecting and comparing evidence from different angles, the study sought to cross-validate findings and minimise the biases inherent in any single source or method. In practice, the study incorporated three forms of triangulation: data source, methodological, and theoretical, so that converging evidence would enhance the credibility, depth, and validity of the conclusions.

Data source triangulation was achieved by gathering information from three distinct participant groups. These included:

- Senior Writing Centre Practitioners (e.g. Centre coordinators and programme managers),
- Writing Centre Tutors (front-line tutors who worked directly with students), and
- Postgraduate Students (receiving writing support).

Each group contributed unique perspectives on Writing Centre training and support. Practitioners provided an administrative and policy viewpoint, tutors shared insights from daily teaching practice, and students offered the user's perspective. By comparing accounts across these stakeholder groups, the study was able to cross-check and corroborate findings. For example, a theme emerging from tutors' interviews could be validated against practitioners' reports and students' experiences. In this way, findings were not driven by a single cohort's view. As Denzin (1970) and others note, collecting data on a variety of people and contexts increases the generalisability and credibility of results. In the present study, data source triangulation thus ensured that conclusions about staff training were supported by consistent evidence from all three participant cohorts, reducing the risk that any one group's bias would skew the interpretation.

Methodological triangulation was implemented by combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. On the qualitative side, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners and with selected postgraduate students and held focus group discussions with Writing Centre tutors. In parallel, quantitative data were obtained through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire administered to 336 postgraduate students. These instruments addressed related themes about Writing Centre training and support, but in different formats and with different strengths. By design, interview and focus-group data provided rich, contextual insights and personal experiences, while the survey captured broader trends and frequencies across a large sample. This mixed-methods approach allowed each method to compensate for the limitations of the others. For instance, in-depth interviews revealed detailed narratives that surveys could not capture, whereas the survey data quantified how prevalent certain views were among a larger student population. Combining methods in this way is a common triangulation strategy, often cited as the most prevalent form of triangulation. Importantly, triangulating methods helped avoid methodological bias: what one method might over-emphasise or miss could be balanced by the other. Thus, the study yielded a more complete and robust picture of the phenomena than any single method could alone.

The study further incorporated theory triangulation by applying multiple theories to frame and interpret the data. Specifically, six distinct theories were used concurrently: human capital, behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist, social learning and humanistic

theories of learning. Each theory offered a different lens for understanding how Writing Centre training might influence practice. For example, a behaviourist perspective emphasised observable outcomes and reinforcement of tutor behaviour, whereas a humanistic perspective focused on tutors' personal growth and student-centred support. By organising findings under all four frameworks, the analysis was not confined to one viewpoint but could reveal diverse dimensions of the same data. In practice, the data were reviewed through each theoretical lens in turn. The research questions and results were mapped onto concepts from each theory. This parallel analysis meant that, a pattern of tutor motivation could be interpreted both in cognitivist terms (e.g. internal problem-solving) and in humanistic terms (e.g. self-actualisation). Theoretical triangulation thus enriched the interpretation: different theories could corroborate or explain the same finding in complementary ways. The multi-theory approach broadened the depth of understanding and reflected a well-rounded understanding of Writing Centre training and its outcomes.

Together, these triangulation strategies greatly enhanced the study's rigor. Data source triangulation provided convergent evidence from different stakeholder groups, methodological triangulation blended breadth and depth of data, and theoretical triangulation offered multiple interpretive lenses. By cross-verifying findings across sources, methods, and frameworks, the research minimised bias and increased trustworthiness.

4.12 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a critical component of research that involves processing and interpreting collected information to draw meaningful conclusions (Thompson 2022). It encompasses both qualitative and quantitative methods, utilising various techniques such as statistics, graphs, and narrative formats to present findings (Alem 2020). According to Islam (2020), the process typically includes data cleaning, transformation, and modelling to extract useful insights for decision-making. Researchers employ diverse analytical tools and approaches, including data mining, text analytics, and data visualisation, to refine raw data into a more manageable and interpretable form (Singh and Singh 2015). Data analysis serves multiple purposes, such as structuring findings from different sources, breaking down complex problems, and providing a foundation

for critical decisions in research (Alem 2020). Ultimately, effective data analysis enables researchers to answer research questions, inform conclusions, and support further decision-making in various fields (Thompson 2022). Data was analysed for both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of this study. A convergent parallel design was used to collect and analyse data at the same time. According to Demir and Pismek (2018), a convergent parallel design requires that the researcher simultaneously conduct the quantitative and qualitative components in the same stage of the research process, weigh the approaches equally, analyse the two components independently, and interpret the findings jointly. Following the completion of both analyses, the results were compared, and conclusions drawn.

4.12.1 Qualitative data analysis

Bryman (2016) and Creswell (2019) assert that there are numerous analytical procedures that may be used to analyse qualitative data including narrative analysis, discourse analysis, framework analysis, grounded theory and theme (or content) analysis. For the qualitative aspect of this research, the data was analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA) due to the qualitative and interpretive nature of the research. Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) state that thematic analysis involves the identifying of common themes, topics and patterns of meaning that repeatedly come up from the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) concur that it is a technique for detecting, analysing, organising, characterising, and reporting on themes discovered in a data collection. The researcher adopted a pseudonym for each participant and transcribed the data verbatim from the audiotape immediately after the interview. Thereafter, the first step in the analysis was to code the data into meaningful units. From this process, 248 codes were generated. This was followed by a recursive process of finding major themes, patterns, and categories informed by the literature and the theoretical frameworks through the use of NVivo version 15 software. Three major themes were then generated.

4.12.2 Quantitative data analysis

The close-ended structured quantitative questionnaire responses were collected to produce a composite data set. Thereafter, the responses were analysed using the most recent version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28

for Windows. The use of the SPSS software also allowed for the use of suitable statistical tests for empirical analysis.

i. Reliability testing

The study used Cronbach's Alpha to examine the data's reliability and consistency.

ii. Descriptive statistics

A clear understanding of the demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as their experiences and satisfaction levels with Writing Centre services was made possible by the frequency-based descriptive statistics, which were presented in the form of graphs, cross-tabulations, and other figures and described the sample set's characteristics, including age, gender, and level of study, among other things.

iii. Inferential statistics

These aid in comprehending the collective characteristics of the components of a data sample and are necessary to comprehend the interactions between variables in a data collection (Hayes 2022). Inferential statistics use sample data to make inferences or predictions about a larger group, helping researchers move from specific observations to broader conclusions (Haghighi and Wickramasinghe 2020). The study used the following inferential statistics:

Pearson's Chi-Square: to establish correlations and "goodness of fit" between questionnaire variables and demographic or biographical parameters, as well as to ascertain whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables.

Correlations: to ascertain whether there is a direct or inverse relationship between important variables and constructs.

With the use of specialised software called the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28, all the tests mentioned above were feasible and achievable.

Table 4.3 summarises the research design and study aspects of this research.

Table 4.3: Summary of relationship between research design and study aspects

Aspect	Description	Relation to Study
Focus Group Discussions	2 focus groups with 14 Writing Centre tutors using a focus group protocol	Provided collective insights into tutor experiences; protocol ensured consistency and structure

Interviews with Postgraduate Students	10 semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule	Gathered in-depth perspectives on student engagement with Writing Centre services
Interviews with Writing Centre Practitioners	6 interviews using an interview schedule	Offered institutional and pedagogical insights into Writing Centre operations and strategies
Qualitative Data Analysis	Thematic content analysis with support from NVivo version 15 software	Enabled systematic coding and theme development across interviews and focus groups
Questionnaire	Semi-structured, closed-ended; administered to 336 postgraduate students	Quantified usage patterns and perceptions of Writing Centre support among a large student cohort
Quantitative Data Analysis	Statistical analysis using SPSS Version 28	Allowed for descriptive and inferential statistics to interpret trends and relationships in the data
Pretesting of Instruments	Piloted questionnaire, interview schedule, and focus group protocol	Enhanced clarity, reliability, and alignment with research objectives
Expert Advice	Consulted statisticians and qualitative researchers	Informed improvements to research tools and ensured methodological rigour
Mixed-Methods Approach	Integration of qualitative and quantitative components	Enabled triangulation for a holistic understanding of Writing Centre use, effectiveness, and impact

4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research encompass various aspects to protect participants and ensure study integrity. Key considerations include safeguarding confidentiality and privacy, obtaining informed consent, and addressing vulnerable populations (Shirmohammadi *et al.* 2018). Research ethics committees play a crucial role in assessing protocols and monitoring trials. DUT and MUT both have Institutional Research Ethics Committees which are responsible for ensuring that research adheres to relevant ethics best practices. According to Afshar *et al.* (2011), researchers must adhere to professional codes, guidelines, and regulations to prevent deviations. Ethical concerns extend to data collection, human subjects, report writing, and presentations (Kessio and Chang'ach 2020). The evolving landscape of research, including internet-based studies, presents new ethical challenges (Kessio and Chang'ach 2020).

Ultimately, Shirmohammadi *et al.* (2018) opines that researchers must have a thorough understanding of ethical considerations and develop context-specific strategies to manage these challenges effectively.

Gatekeepers' permission to conduct the research was sought from the relevant Institutional Research Ethics Committees of the selected UoTs. Once permission was granted, a letter of informed consent was received from the institutions giving the researcher the approval to engage in the research. The intended participants were invited to participate in the research through formal emails. The researcher provided a letter of information and consent to the respondents to make them aware of the nature, purpose and objectives of the study. The letter introduced the researcher and explained why the participants' opinions are being sought in the subject topic, so that they could feel free to express themselves. Furthermore, the letter explained the voluntary nature of participation and the participant's freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The respondents' informed consent was obtained before they took part in the research. In addition, the researcher provided the respondents with a cover letter to explain the procedural issues to be followed during the research.

Anonymity was ensured through using pseudonyms for the participants, however, the actual names of the departments from which the participants come from were used. With respect to confidentiality, participants were assured that their responses are confidential and will strictly be used for the purposes of the study. Furthermore, participants were free to ask any questions for clarity should they have any doubts. In addition, data collected for this study has been stored in a secure place only known to the supervisor and the researcher.

While the use of focus groups does not allow for complete anonymity among participants, this limitation was explicitly acknowledged and addressed ethically. Prior to participation, tutors were informed through the consent process that, although the researcher would ensure confidentiality in data handling and reporting, anonymity could not be guaranteed within the focus group setting. To mitigate this, clear ground rules were established at the outset of each focus group, requesting participants to respect the confidentiality of discussions and not to disclose shared information outside the group. Participants were assured that no names or identifying details would be

recorded, and pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting. In addition, participation was voluntary, and tutors were informed of their right to decline to respond to any question or to withdraw from the discussion at any point. These measures were intended to create a safe, collegial environment in which tutors could engage openly while minimising ethical risks associated with group-based data collection. Furthermore, given that participants were colleagues, care was taken to emphasise that the focus groups were not evaluative and that no information shared would be communicated to writing centre management or used for performance-related purposes.

For the qualitative component, digitally recorded voice files (of interviews and focus group discussions) through the use of a voice recorder app were stored in MP3 format and the transcriptions in password protected Microsoft Word documents. Physical copies such as notes taken during focus groups and interviews are stored securely in a locked file cabinet when not in use and accessible only to the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of five years before being disposed of. Physical data will be destroyed through shredding, and the researcher will delete the voice recorder app and delete the Microsoft Word file documents.

4.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the mixed-method research methodology utilised in gathering the empirical data for this study. Through the integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study has sought to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges, and opportunities associated with tutor training in the Writing Centre context. The mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, has helped ensure the reliability and validity of the findings while providing rich, in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of Writing Centre tutors and practitioners as well as postgraduate students. A detailed discussion of the target population, sampling methods and data collection techniques was provided. Furthermore, the researcher provided an overview of the ethical considerations in the research ensuring anonymity, confidentiality and as well as the reliability and validity of the research instruments utilised in collecting data. The next two chapters will therefore seek to analyse and interpret the data collected

using relevant statistical instruments. The first chapter, Chapter Five, which follows next, will focus on qualitative data findings and analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study adopted a mixed-method research design as outlined in the methodology chapter. Two chapters are dedicated to the presentation, analysis and discussion of the research findings. This current chapter presents the qualitative analysis of the data collected during this research, offering a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the variables being explored. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on understanding the complexity and richness of human experiences, provides a valuable lens through which to interpret the lived realities, perceptions, and contextual factors that shape the subject of this study. Unlike quantitative approaches, which seek to measure and generalise, qualitative analysis prioritises depth, context, and meaning, allowing for a holistic understanding of the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs.

The analysis presented in this chapter is grounded in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three as well as the study's research objectives, which guides the interpretation of the data. The qualitative research design aspect of this study aims to explore the experiences of Writing Centre practitioners, Writing Centre tutors as well as postgraduate students in relation to the support provided by the Writing Centres at the selected UoTs namely DUT and MUT. Primary data sources comprised semi-structured interviews with six (6) Writing Centre practitioners and ten (10) postgraduate students as well as focus group discussions with fourteen (14) Writing Centre tutors from the selected UoTs. The data was meticulously collected and transcribed to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The process of analysis followed a systematic and iterative approach, incorporating thematic content analysis with the aid of NVivo version 15 software to identify patterns, themes, and insights that emerged from the data.

Central to this chapter is the exploration of three (3) key themes, namely, (i) Experiences of Writing Centre Services; (ii) Techniques and Strategies Utilised; (iii) Training Practices, Perceptions and Limitations. These themes were derived through a process of coding and categorisation on NVivo version 15 software, ensuring that the findings remain firmly rooted in the participants' voices and experiences. The

chapter also highlights the interplay between individual perspectives and broader contextual factors, shedding light on how these dynamics influence the variables under study.

In the presentation and discussion of the qualitative findings, this chapter not only addresses the research questions but also contributes to the broader theoretical and practical understanding of the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN. The insights generated provide a foundation for the discussions and analysis, where the findings are interpreted in relation to existing literature and the implications for theory, policy, and practice are explored. Through this qualitative analysis, the chapter aims to offer a rich, contextually grounded understanding of the research problem, capturing the complexity and diversity of the experiences and perspectives of participants.

In presenting and analysing the findings, reference will be made to relevant supporting literature reviewed and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The literature and theoretical frameworks assisted with the interpretation and discussion of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study which are to:

- Explore the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Analyse the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Analyse postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Explore the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Develop an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students.

This chapter aims to provide a detailed analysis of the collected data, offering insights into the effectiveness of the Writing Centre services in supporting postgraduate students and highlighting areas where further improvements may be necessary.

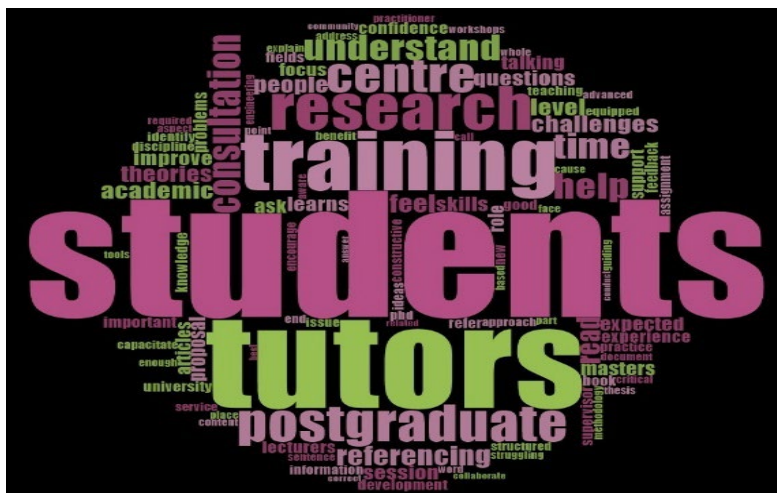
5.2 DEFINITION OF QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES USED

This section focused on defining the key qualitative techniques employed using the NVivo version 15 software to formulate themes and sub-themes.

5.2.1 Word Clouds

Word clouds demonstrate the most frequently used words in a body of text by making them appear larger and more prominent (Tafazoli *et al.* 2022). A word cloud is defined by Asfaw *et al.* (2019) as a graphic display of word frequency. The more frequently the keyword appears in the text being processed, the larger the word appears in the created graphic (Diyasa *et al.* 2021). Word clouds are increasingly being used as a simple method to identify key areas or themes. The word cloud in Figure 5.1 provides a visually engaging way to get an overview of main themes in the respondents' responses from interviews and focus groups conducted in this study.

Figure 5.1: Word Cloud Diagram for interviews and focus groups



Source: Author generated (2025)

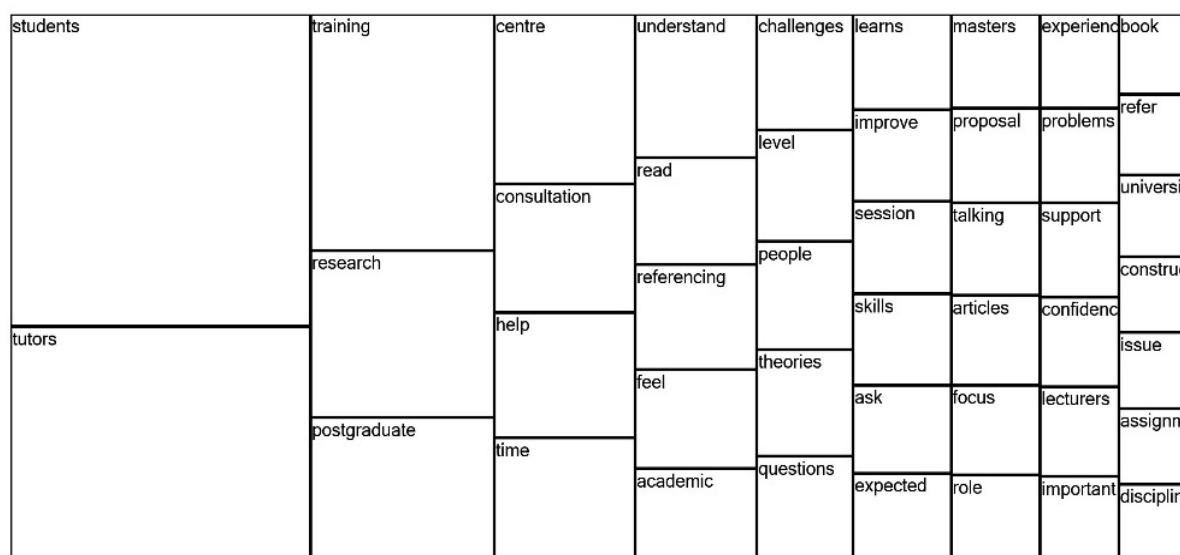
The data highlighted significant words frequently used by respondents, such as students, tutors, training, and research.

5.2.2 Tree Maps

Tree maps show the data (frequently used words) in terms of size of blocks; hence, the larger blocks reflect those words mainly used (Jadeja and Shak 2015). The entire map provides a holistic view of how data is placed in terms of size of reference. Tree

maps, in the view of Azzag *et al.* (2012), help researchers quickly understand the structure, distribution, and relationships within complex data by representing categories as nested rectangles, where the size of each rectangle reflects its value or frequency.

Figure 5.2: Tree-Map Analysis Diagram for Interviews and Focus Groups



Source: Author generated (2025)

The tree map extracted from the data identified words used by tutors, practitioners and postgraduate student respondents, including - students, tutors, training, research and postgraduate.

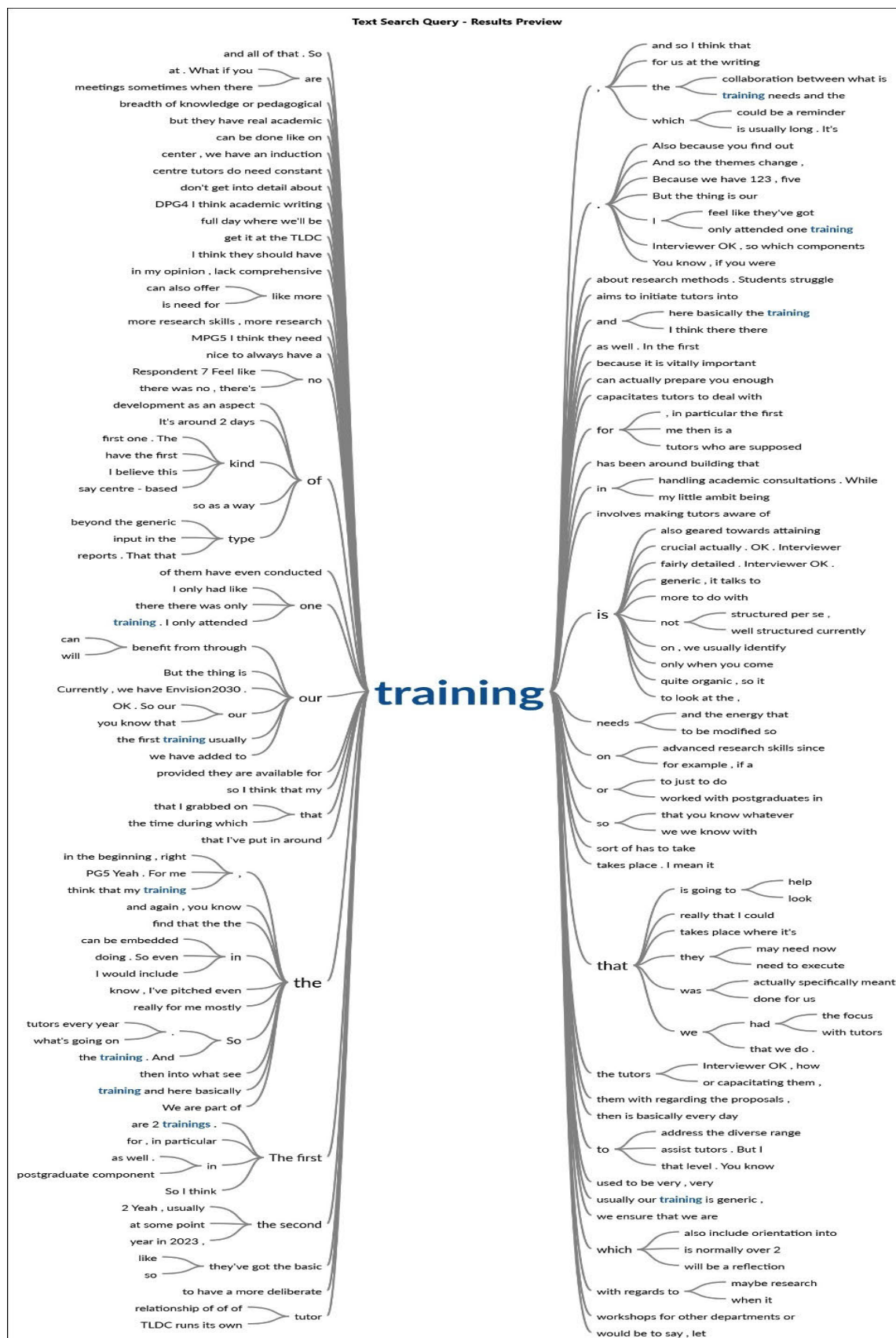
5.2.3 Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis diagrams are visual representations used to group similar data points into clusters, making complex data more understandable (Jaeger and Banks 2022). These diagrams are widely used in research to identify patterns, classify data, and reveal underlying structures in various fields (Dunn *et al.* 2018). Data (key words) were represented as 'bubbles' in cluster analysis diagrams, also called bubble diagrams. According to Jaeger and Banks (2022), the bigger the bubble, the greater the frequency of references or words. Furthermore, the closeness of the bubbles show that there was a relationship between those words.

In Figure 5.3, the large bubbles depict the central themes from the data collected, which shows that ‘students’ are the main focus; and ‘postgrad’, ‘workshops’, ‘tutors’, ‘training’, ‘research’ suggests that the content of the data heavily relates to postgraduate academic support, including structured training and guidance.

Word trees are used to show important words along with the phrases or sentences that go with them (Yang *et al.* 2012). It makes it possible to observe how these terms relate to other terms, phrases, or points of view.

Figure 5.4: Word tree of the term 'training' for all interviews



Source: Author Generated (2025)

Looking at the Word Tree for the term 'training', the tree shows how respondents describe types of training, experiences with training, training gaps, and its impact on tutoring and academic support. In terms of perceptions of the quality of training and adequacy of training, phrases like "... only attended one training"; "training is not structured per se"; and usually our training is generic" indicate a lack of sufficient or tailored training, with some respondents receiving limited training and non-specific content. Regarding training structure and frequency, phrases like "the first training"; "there are two trainings...the first...the second" show two phases of training, and respondents imply that it is infrequent and lacks depth. In addition, phrases like "capacitate tutors to deal with; build that; handling academic consultations" suggest that training is viewed as a vehicle for empowering tutors, especially for academic writing consultations and postgraduate student support.

5.3 ANALYSIS AND GENERATION OF THEMES

From the integrated analysis of all combined qualitative data comprising focus group discussions with 14 Writing Centre tutors, semi-structured interviews with 10 postgraduate students and semi-structured interviews with, three (3) overarching themes emerged, namely:

Theme 1: Experiences of Writing Centre Services

Theme 2: Techniques and strategies utilised

Theme 3: Training Practices, Perceptions, and Limitations

From these 3 main themes, 9 subthemes emerged, as presented in the table below:

Table 5.1: Summary of key themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Experiences of Writing Centre Services	• Inclusive learning spaces • Misconceptions of Writing Centre work • Feedback on Writing Centre consultations
Techniques and Strategies Utilised	• Collaborative approaches to building knowledge • Current techniques and approaches for partnering in learning • Modelling good writing practice

Training Practices, Perceptions, and Limitations	• Perceptions on tutor abilities and training gaps • Training in critical thinking, academic voice, diversity and inclusion • Reflecting on practice, role-playing and identifying areas of improvement
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Each theme presented a plethora of subthemes, which will be unpacked and discussed in the sections that follow. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were coded as follows:

- Writing Centre Practitioners (DUT and MUT): P1 to P6
- Postgraduate student interviewees: R1 to R10
- Writing Centre Tutors (DUT and MUT): T1 to T14

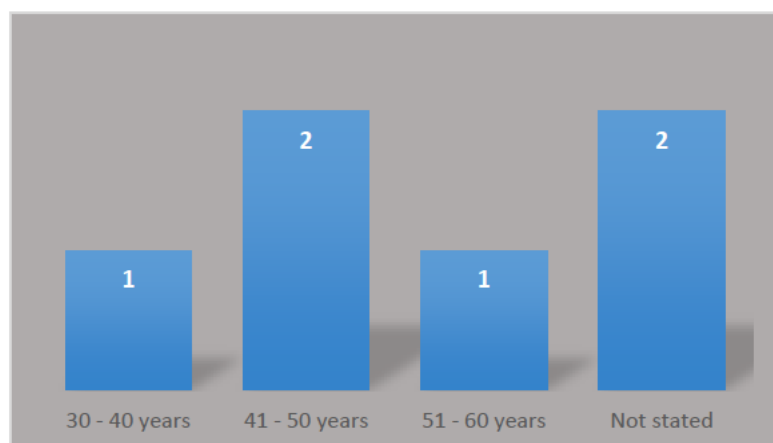
A biographical data narrative follows in the next section.

5.4 BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF INTERVIEWEES

It is important to note that some respondents were not comfortable with sharing aspects of their biographical data. As such, the researcher respected this and presents the biographical data without any link to the participant number.

5.4.1 Writing Centre practitioners

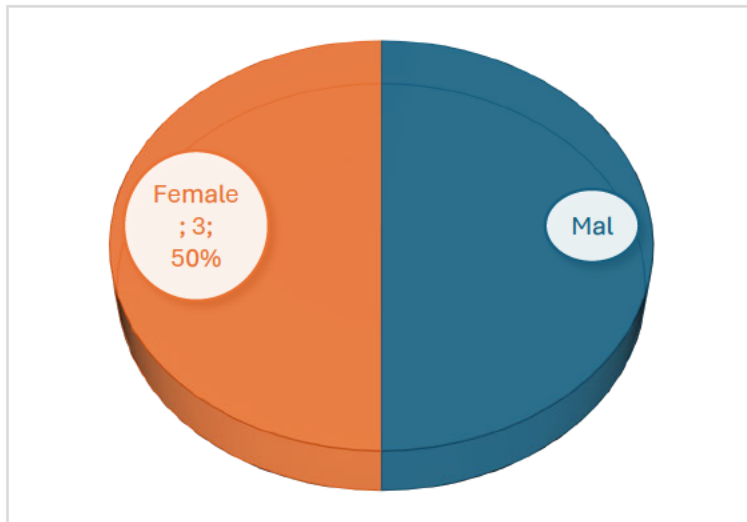
Figure 5.5: Age of Writing Centre Practitioners



Source: Author generated (2025)

Most of the practitioners were over 30, as seen in Figure 5.5 above, demonstrating maturity and expertise in their line of work. They would therefore be able to give detailed descriptions of their experiences.

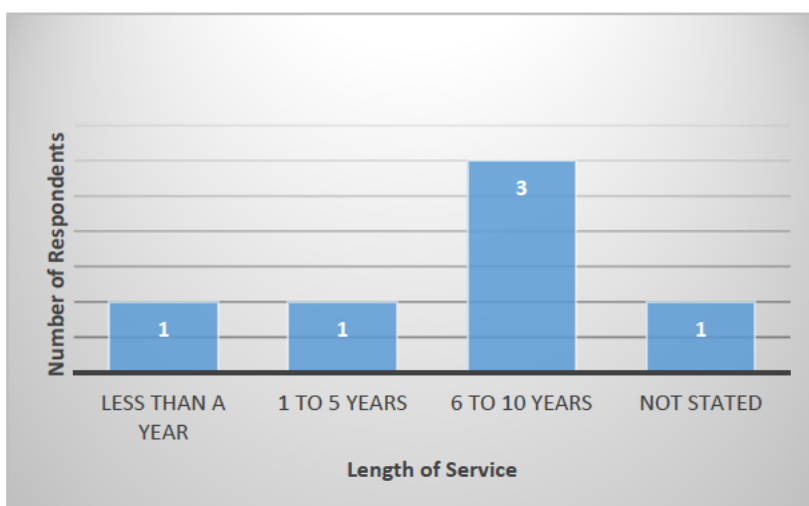
Figure 5.6: Gender of Writing Centre Practitioners



Source: Author Generated (2025)

There was a balanced number of male and female practitioners as Figure 5.6 shows that 50% of them were male and 50% of them were female. A balanced gender representation can promote a more inclusive environment in the Writing Centre space and can contribute to diverse perspectives and approaches to supporting students. However, empirical research by Resnick (2018) indicates that Writing Centres promote equality rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles.

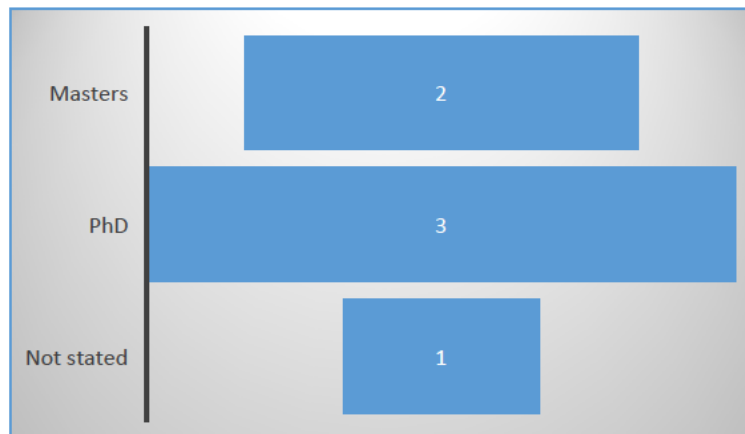
Figure 5.7: Length of Service of Writing Centre Practitioners



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The findings show that most of the practitioners (3), had worked for between 6 to 10 years at their respective Writing Centre. This is a valuable fact as it shows that experienced practitioners were part of this study.

Figure 5.8: Highest qualification of Writing Centre Practitioners



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The highest qualification of most (3) interviewed practitioners was a PhD. Of the respondents, two had a Masters' Degree as their highest qualification, while one respondent did not state their qualification level. This is an indication that knowledgeable practitioners participated in the interviews and were therefore able to provide depth and insight in their responses relating to the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students.

5.4.2 Postgraduate Students' Biographical Information

The biographical information of postgraduate students is summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Summary of biographical information of postgraduate students

	Age	Gender	Qualification	Level of Postgraduate study
R1	36	Female	Masters in Management Sciences (Human Resources Management)	2 nd year
R2	34	Female	PhD in Management Sciences (Human Resources Management)	4 th year
R3	33	Female	PhD in Marketing	4 th year
R4	35	Female	Masters in Management Sciences (Marketing)	3 rd year

R5	35	Male	PhD in Business Administration	2 nd year
R6	22	Male	Bachelor Honours Degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences	4 th year
R7	23	Male	Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resources Management	1 st
R8	27	Female	Masters' in Applied Sciences (Chemistry)	2 nd year
R9	29	Male	Postgraduate Diploma in Business Information Management	1 st year
R10	23	Female	Postgraduate Diploma in Business Information Management	1 st year

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 5.2 shows that in terms of gender, there were 6 female respondents, compared to only 4 male respondents. In terms of age, the youngest respondent R6 was 22 years old, while the oldest respondent was 36 years. Therefore, respondents were between the ages of 22 to 36 years of age. This indicates a blend of experiences and motivations for postgraduate study – ranging from the newly graduated to those seeking professional advancement. In terms of academic qualifications, PhD, Masters and Postgraduate Diploma levels has 3 respondents each respectively, while only 1 respondent was at Honours level. The diversity in the fields of study (HRM, Marketing, Chemistry, Medical Sciences, Business Information Management) reflects the interdisciplinary postgraduate engagement of Writing Centres and that the sampled respondents were not confined to one faculty. The respondents are evenly distributed across years of postgraduate study, from entry-level (1st year) to final year (4th year). This provides insights across different stages of postgraduate experience. The presence of 4th year students at Doctoral level indicates the difficulties that students face in attaining their qualifications within the stipulated timeframes, which highlights that they experience challenges while on this academic journey.

It should be noted that the focus group participants were not asked for their biographical details, as this was not included in the approved focus group protocol. The researcher recognises this as one of the limitations of the study. In addition, although the researcher conducted two focus groups, one for MUT Writing Centre tutors and another for DUT Writing Centre tutors, the results were analysed as a collective.

The following section provides a detailed discussion and analysis of the themes that emerged from the data collected.

5.5 THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF WRITING CENTRE SERVICES

It was important to evaluate the current experiences and feedback in terms of the Writing Centre support offerings. This was pertinent in understanding experiences and challenges to determine how tutor training can be adapted to meet the needs of postgraduate students. This theme was informed by three primary subthemes namely:

- Inclusive learning spaces,
- Misconceptions of Writing Centre work, and
- Feedback on Writing Centre consultations, which are examined in the following sections.

5.5.1 Inclusive learning spaces

The data revealed that student experiences reflected a variety of positive engagements, notwithstanding some challenges and suggestions for improvement. Students found Writing Centre sessions interactive which stimulated their communication, discussions and critical thinking. In academic writing, particularly within Writing Centres, the integration of conversations, dialogue and critical thinking is paramount as it can form the basis of planning for their academic writing. Students, particularly postgraduate students, are expected to critique academic texts and build clear and coherent discussions and arguments in their research. Khairuddin *et al.* (2024) report that integrating critical thinking into research writing helps students build well-formed arguments. Mumin (2022) and Almatarneh *et al.* (2018) further highlight that the ability to engage in critical discussion is especially challenging for non-native English speakers, with cultural background further influencing academic criticality. This is especially significant in the context of the two selected UoTs under study where the majority of the students constitute English Second Language speakers.

Findings from the data indicate that sessions were found to be engaging, inclusive and informative and tutors provided valuable guidance to postgraduate students. Tutors encouraged critical thinking which helped in refining students' research proposals and subsequently their research writing. Students expressed satisfaction with the inclusive and engaging interactions with tutors on their research:

“The session was really informative and also the tutor that I consulted with really gave me that platform for me to critically think on what exactly I wanted to do and that really helped me like to pursue a way for my proposal cause I had to think about like, not only the proposal, but also to even think about when I’m also doing my other chapters so I it was really helpful” (R4).

“I came there about writing the proposal, right? I had less idea of how a proposal should look like. Fortunate enough my tutor helped me, and he took time, enunciated everything very well” (R7).

“I found the sessions to be productive and valuable in helping me enhance my writing abilities and strategies to manage my writing tasks” (R6).

Postgraduate students R4, R7 and R6 highlighted that their consultation sessions were productive and valuable in improving their understanding of academic writing. Their comments suggest that Writing Centre consultations assist postgraduate students in working in a more structured, systematic way highlighting the additional ways in which students guide and mentor students. Students also explained that they were encouraged to ask questions during Writing Centre sessions which promoted interactivity, exchange of thoughts and learning that was engaging. This was highlighted by postgraduate student R1:

“You are able to ask questions as well and this allowed us to express our ideas” (R1).

According to Munje, Nanima and Clarence (2020), Writing Centre tutors apply critical questioning to facilitate student-centred and effective consultations. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2022) note that questions enable student participation and control over consultation focus. This underscores the role of communications, dialogue and questioning in creating inclusive, student-centred learning experiences. Park (2017) notes that encouraging questioning can foster critical thinking and help students evaluate writing feedback. Furthermore, questioning can help to highlight knowledge gaps and can guide tutors in adapting their approach based on student confidence and consultations goals. Munje *et al.* (2018) posit that effective questioning can create inclusive spaces valuing students’ existing knowledge and experiences. Questioning techniques are supported by cognitivist theory which focuses on internal mental

processes in learning (Piaget 1972). Tutors therefore require training that develops cognitive diagnostic skills, enabling them to identify underlying conceptual gaps and guide students towards independent problem-solving.

The findings indicate that the Writing Centre is valued for its support especially in terms guiding research writing, refining proposals and improving academic writing through detailed explanations. These sentiments were echoed by various students:

“The Writing Centre is very helpful, especially for postgraduate students, and they should be given all the support that they need because they are doing a wonderful job” (R5).

“It has been helpful throughout the process of writing my research” (R6).

Writing Centre tutors play a crucial role in supporting students and enhancing their writing through one-on-one consultations. Tutor guidance and support helps boost students' confidence in their writing abilities. Lundin *et al.* (2023) assert that support from tutors significantly boosts students' writing self-efficacy and their ability to succeed in writing tasks. The findings show that tutors go the extra mile in assisting students during Writing Centre consultations by employing various strategies that extend beyond basic tutoring practices. These efforts are aimed at empowering students, addressing their unique needs, and fostering long-term writing development and learning. Some tutors provided assistance beyond the scheduled session by answering additional questions. This was highlighted by postgraduate student R7:

“...and I even take my time to ask some other questions that was not part of the booking that I made on that day, but he was able to assist me on that” (R7).

Writing Centre tutors are expected adapt their strategies to address the individual needs of students, whether they are struggling with language barriers, academic conventions, or specific writing tasks. As expressed by Alowayid, (2020) tutors use diagnostic approaches to identify areas for improvement and provide targeted support that aligns with each student's proficiency level, goals and needs. This personalised approach ensures that students receive relevant guidance that directly impacts their academic development.

Writing Centre tutors often serve as mentors, guiding students through the complexities of academic writing while fostering their growth as confident, independent writers. Banda (2019) states that Writing Centres focus not only on improving specific assignments, but also on preparing students to think critically and develop their academic voice and confidence – capabilities that they can use while at university and even when they enter their future workplace. This strategy prioritises identity building and prepares students to address future writing challenges successfully. Therefore, Writing Centre consultations promote empowerment and enable students to see themselves as capable contributors to academic discourse by putting the writer's development ahead of the written content (Banda 2019). This mentorship role extends beyond traditional tutoring, encompassing emotional support, personalised guidance, and the development of critical thinking. Some postgraduate students, such as R10, felt empowered that the tutors who guided them on their academic writing were able to share their recent writing experiences with them.

“It was beneficial to get feedback from someone who had recently gone through similar academic experiences as I am” (R10).

By serving a mentorship role, tutors help students grow as independent writers rather than providing solutions to specific assignments. This contributes to them attaining knowledge and competencies not just for university but for when they enter industry. For example, Grinnell College's Writing Mentors Programme focuses on helping students explain ideas, develop arguments, analyse evidence, and organise drafts of their writing. The programme emphasises long-term growth in writing confidence and effectiveness, encouraging students to revise and reflect on their work before submission (Grinnell College n.d.). This approach and mentorship fosters critical thinking and self-reliance in developing ones' academic writing. Furthermore, writing centre tutors as mentors often adopt multiple roles during consultations, including acting as coaches and collaborators. As coaches, they build students' confidence by emphasising their capacity for improvement, while as collaborators, they work jointly with students to address academic writing concerns such as organisation and structure (Liu and Harwood 2022). These roles create a supportive, inclusive learning environment where students feel empowered to tackle complex writing tasks.

In their article *'Transitional and Transformational Spaces: Mentoring Young Academics through Writing Centres'*, Archer and Parker (2016) add another dimension to mentoring suggesting that Writing Centres serve as mentoring spaces for young academics (tutors), assisting them in developing their teaching practices and academic identities. This underscores Writing Centres' dual function as mentors to other postgraduate students as well as mentees to young academics (tutors) in higher education.

This study found that tutors help students at all stages of the writing process, from planning and drafting to revising and finalising their work (Nash *et al.* 2018; Epstein and Draxler 2020 Solmaz 2021). The Writing Centre offers supportive tools such as reference guides and other writing resources to assist students (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; Pandey 2024). These resources guide students with referencing, sentence construction and overall writing improvement (Archer 2023). Referencing assistance is often integrated into broader writing support services. This holistic approach ensures that referencing is not treated as an isolated task but is instead woven into the fabric of academic writing (Walter Sisulu University Writing Centre 2023). Postgraduate student R4 highlights the assistance of Writing Centre tutors with referencing tools:

"...they have some ready-made tools...they can quickly attach the reference guide and can give you a link to say this is the reference guide or in terms of writing they can tell you oh this is how you construct your sentences, so I would say they already have some tools in place that can help you" (R4).

Referencing assistance is integrated into the broader support services offered by Writing Centres, ensuring that students can effectively paraphrase, cite sources and avoid plagiarism. Tutors provide guidance on various citation styles such as Harvard, APA, Chicago, and Vancouver, helping students understand the nuances of each style and apply them correctly in their work. This is not unique to DUT and MUT Writing Centres. For example, the UCD Writing Centre in the United Kingdom offers resources and workshops on referencing and citation, ensuring students are well-equipped to manage different styles (UCD Writing Centre 2025). Similarly, the University of the

Western Cape's Writing Centre offers workshops on referencing upon request from lecturers, highlighting the importance of tailored support in academic writing (University of the Western Cape Writing Centre 2022). In offering this type of guidance to postgraduate students, tutors assist students in understanding what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it by referencing sources. This includes teaching strategies for paraphrasing, summarising, and quoting sources effectively. The Writing Place at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) values the development of academic literacy, including the mastery of referencing techniques to maintain academic integrity (The Writing Place 2025). This support is critical for students who may be struggling with new or unfamiliar with academic conventions. Tutors in this study noted that postgraduate students often lacked basic research techniques such as referencing, in-text citations and using tools such as Endnote:

"You know, ...they don't know how to intext reference... how to use Endnote and such, but then we find that we spend a lot of time trying to address these issues" (T8).

"What I can say was the challenge with me, was that most of the students are struggling with referencing. Most of the students were not giving themselves time to know how to use referencing. I don't know whether the challenge is with them, or it is that they're not getting enough support from the university with the referencing. So instead, the focus had to shift... now you have to take them back to knowing how to do referencing" (T11).

Many postgraduate students lack foundational research abilities upon entering their programmes (Sumarwati *et al.* 2021). Research by Maasdorp and Holtzhausen, (2015) indicates that these deficiencies stem from inadequate preparation at the undergraduate level, where students are not systematically introduced to advanced academic writing and referencing practices. Tools like Endnote, Zotero, and Mendeley can be valuable in managing references and citations efficiently. However, many postgraduate students are unfamiliar with these technologies due to a lack of exposure or training during their academic journeys (Afolabi *et al.* 2022). Many students understand the importance of referencing but struggle with the practical aspects, such as citing internet sources and keeping track of references. This often leads to poor

referencing practices, which are not usually intentional but rather due to a lack of abilities and confidence (Lamprey and Atta-Obeng 2013; Greenwood *et al.* 2014).

According to the postgraduate students interviewed, Writing Centre staff demonstrated professionalism to students seeking the respective services. Tutor friendliness and a welcoming demeanour are essential components of effective Writing Centre consultations. These qualities help create a supportive environment that fosters trust, reduces anxiety, and encourages meaningful collaboration between tutors and students (Rambiritch and Carstens 2021; Liu 2024). Postgraduate student R3 indicated that the Writing Centre staff are welcoming, friendly and helpful thereby creating a comfortable and inclusive learning environment:

“They were really helpful, and they were really friendly. It made me feel comfortable”
(R3).

Friendly conversation at the beginning of writing consultations can significantly enhance the student-tutor relationship. For example, a study by Thompson-Peters (2021) found that ‘friendly talk’ helps build trust and comfort, especially when students feel vulnerable about sharing their writing. The author further states that engaging in casual conversation about a student’s day or week, for example, can humanise the experience and alleviate fears of judgment (Thompson-Peters 2021). This approach also encourages students to embrace a growth mindset by focusing on improvement rather than perfection. Additionally, tutors who adopt friendly behaviours enhance emotional reassurance, which is particularly valuable for students with language barriers or low confidence levels (Liu and Harwood 2022). Beyond these interpersonal techniques, a humanising pedagogy (Freire 1970) - where relationality, empathy, and care are essential to student support - is the foundation of the affective dimension of Writing Centre work. Based on Freire's (1970) idea that education is a dialogic and liberating process, writing consultations turn into settings where students are viewed as complete, capable individuals rather than as lacking. According to Govender and Alcock (2024), a humanising approach emphasises the social and emotional aspects of learning, especially in environments characterised by linguistic diversity and inequality, while rejecting decontextualised, transactional models of academic support. In this study, practitioners emphasised creating an enabling environment for

engagement, where socialisation and collaboration played a key role in the learning process and served as development for both tutor and student:

“I believe our work is much more aligned to social learning theories that looks at writing as a social practice, that looks at creating an environment that is enabling for collaboration between the tutor and the student” (P1).

Social learning theories play a significant role in shaping Writing Centre work, particularly in fostering collaborative and interactive learning environments (Okuda and Anderson 2018; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Bankier 2022). Social learning theories, such as Bandura’s and Lave and Wenger’s Communities of Practice (CoP), highlight the role of observation, collaboration, and participation in developing students’ writing and academic identities (Mukhalalati *et al.* 2022). These theories emphasise the importance of social interaction, community, and culture in the process of learning. Socio-constructivism, heavily influenced by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is one of the most prominent frameworks applied in writing centres. This theory posits that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and mediated by cultural and social contexts (Carstens and Rambiritch 2020). Therefore, Writing Centre consultations are structured as dialogues where meaning is negotiated between the tutor and the student which helps students understand writing prompts, tutor feedback, and their own texts more deeply. In addition, Bandura’s social learning theory highlights the role of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in skill acquisition. In Writing Centres, this means tutors model effective writing strategies, such as brainstorming or structuring arguments and students learn by observing how tutors approach problem-solving during consultations (Simplilearn 2024).

Writing Centre tutors also act as ‘critical friends’ (University of the Western Cape [UWC] Writing Centre 2024); this term ‘critical friend’ refers to a trusted individual who provides constructive feedback and alternative perspectives, fostering a supportive environment for growth (Carlse 2019). Therefore, when Writing Centre tutors act as critical friends, they help students explore and empower their academic thinking and academic voice by promoting trust and encouraging self-reflection rather than merely directing tasks. This peer-to-peer relationship helps disrupt traditional hierarchical dynamics, thereby creating a more inclusive learning environment (UWC Writing

Centre 2024). According to Carstens and Rambiritch (2020) tutors collaborate with students as peers, using a 'give and take' approach to discover problems, create solutions, and improve critical thinking abilities. This strategy promotes deeper comprehension and increased students achievement and success. Furthermore, because the tutors are postgraduate students themselves, this makes them peer tutors - they are well-positioned to understand the challenges faced by students due to their similar academic experiences and age proximity (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2017). However, it must be noted that this position also brings challenges which are discussed in more details later in this chapter.

The tutors were further seen as patient and supportive in addressing numerous students' questions and clarifying unclear aspects. Postgraduate student R3 laid claim to this:

"...the tutors were very patient 'cause I had a lot of questions that I wanted to ask and also a lot of things that really needed me to work on and some of the things I wasn't really clear on them...but they were very patient, and they really assisted me" (R3).

Supportive, patient and caring approaches are important in working with and guiding postgraduate students through their learning with many researchers affirming that it is crucial for building trust and encouraging student participation (Liu and Harwood 2022; Kim and Hwang 2022). In a Writing Centre article titled 'Rethinking Patience', Azima (2016) argues that patience should not merely be seen as tolerating communication challenges but as actively working to overcome them through mutual understanding. During consultations, tutors can create an open and supportive environment by honestly admitting when they have trouble understanding something, such as an accent, and by inviting students to repeat themselves to ensure clear communication. This approach reframes patience as an active effort to foster effective communication. Azima (2016) further states that there are a number of commendable and essential aspects of patience in Writing Centre work which include exercising patience with oneself, awaiting responses to enquiries instead of hastily interjecting additional commentary, and recognising that writing and consulting are processes that require time and generally do not improve when approached with undue haste. These approaches align with North's (1984) views in his seminal writing on Writing Centres

where he argued that the goal of the Writing Centre is to produce better writers, not just better writing. Similarly, the social constructivist theory as articulated by Vygotsky (1978) views learning as a socially mediated process where knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and interaction. Embedding a focus on inclusivity and patience in tutor training can thus be beneficial to tutors development and enhancing their interactions with postgraduate students.

Tutors and practitioners in this study emphasised how their engagement and work with students is embedded in an academic literacy approach, supporting students holistically rather than viewing them from a deficit perspective. They emphasised that their role was not to edit assignments but to offer holistic support. A Writing Centre Practitioner (P6) explained how this approach sought to build students' academic writing based on their own experiences ensuring inclusivity and understanding:

“We teach them about academic literacy, and the main thing we often decide is that students should not be viewed from a deficit perspective as needing fixing, you know, but support must be more holistic. You know, we are not here to edit... We are offering you a more holistic support, but we give you your space. We don't look at you as someone who is now in need of our help. So, it's not a deficit approach that we're using here” (P6).

“You know, for me it's, you know, it's really foregrounding this whole idea of academic literacy. That, you know, writing is a social construct. When students are here, even if I'm coming from KwaNongoma see, I don't know English. I'm coming here with experience. You see, how do you build my knowledge of academic writing from my own experience of where I'm coming from... I might not understand the lingo of referencing and everything but how do you ensure that I'm not left behind?” (P4).

The academic literacies approach is widely used in Writing Centre work to address the complexities of student writing within higher education. This approach, rooted in the work of Lea and Street (1998), views writing as a social practice embedded in institutional contexts, power dynamics, and disciplinary conventions. It involves negotiating meaning, identity, and power relations rather than simply mastering technical skills (Lea and Street, 1998; Clarence 2012). The approach also views

Writing Centres as dialogic spaces where students can critically engage with texts, clarify their thoughts, and develop rhetorical strategies, encouraging deeper learning and critical thinking (Zuma *et al.* 2016).

Some participants emphasised a belief in the creation of knowledge which focused on empowering students to be actively involved in their learning and equipping them with the capabilities to engage in the construction of knowledge rather than assuming they come with little understanding (deficit model) (Sewagegn and Diale 2019; Shah and Ahluwalia 2020; Santos *et al.* 2023). Empowering students means recognising and valuing their prior knowledge, rather than focusing solely on what they lack. This shift encourages collaborative learning environments where students' contributions are central to the learning process (Shah and Ahluwalia 2020; Sansone and Hakkarainen 2017; Glessmer and Daae 2021). Co-creation and active participation encourage autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are key to intrinsic motivation and meaningful learning (Santos *et al.* 2023).

“But what I can emphasise on is that we believe in the co-construction of knowledge. So when it comes to our tutors, we always emphasise to them that they should never adopt a deficit model of assuming that a student is coming with nothing and they have to be filled in with information. So that is why we believe in our students. We equip our tutors with how best to get the most out of students?” (P2).

Writing Centres are spaces where knowledge is collaboratively constructed between tutors and tutees. This process is underpinned by dialogue, mentoring, and critical engagement, allowing both parties to co-create meaning and develop writing skills (Alamri 2023). Knowledge construction also involves critical engagement with texts and tutors help students analyse rhetorical choices, question assumptions, and consider alternative viewpoints, which empowers students to develop critical thinking that extend beyond the immediate writing task (Banda 2019; Alamri 2023).

Participants in this study explained that the Writing Centre helped improve time management by providing a structured schedule which encouraged better planning and organisation for students. This sentiment was shared by postgraduate student R8:

“I think another benefit that I obtained when I was at the Writing Centre was actually time management. In as much as it's not like they straight up teach you how to manage your time, but that schedule of knowing that I have to go to the Writing Centre at this time made me proactive with my work” (R8).

Furthermore, students were required to submit their work before consultations thereby allowing tutors time to review it and provide more informed feedback during the session.

“You have to give them your work prior to consulting with them so that they go through your work” (R5).

Many Writing Centres allow students to book appointments well in advance. For instance, the University of Adelaide Writing Centre permits bookings up to four business days ahead, ensuring students can plan around their academic commitments and deadlines (University of Adelaide Writing Centre, n.d.). This advance planning helps students integrate writing consultations into their broader academic schedules. At DUT and MUT Writing Centres, the WOnline booking system allows students to choose the time slot that most suits their schedule and availability. At both Writing Centres, students are encouraged to make at least 3 bookings for the same assignment. This allows the students and the tutors to effectively go through the writing process of brainstorming, drafting and revising the student's work. Each follow-up appointment builds on the previous appointment and therefore students must have worked on previous suggested changes before coming to their next appointment, which therefore plays a role in encouraging students to review and revise their written work.

Similarly, the WOnline booking system promoted more accountability for students by having a scheduled time for Writing Centre consultations and, as indicated by one of the student participants, this encouraged accountability from tutors by alerting them to prepare for the sessions:

“Understanding that I have to be at the Writing Centre at a certain time actually made me proactive because I can't just pitch at the writing centre, with nothing, especially

after the first day I have to come with something in order for us to have something that we'll work on" (R8).

This comment from R8 indicates that the Writing Centre booking system encourages postgraduate student to take accountability and gain independence through scheduling their appointments and consistently engaging with Writing Centre tutors through recurring appointments. This further underlines the understanding of writing as a process. A key objective of Writing Centres is to get students and academics to understand that writing is a process and the more drafts an individual work on the stronger the writing will be.

Tutors were seen to be knowledgeable and experienced by the postgraduate student respondents. Data indicated that they offered valuable guidance in academic writing construction and provided useful insights that enhanced the overall research process. This was reiterated by postgraduate student R1:

"They know how to explain things to you...the people that I have consulted with are experienced so I haven't had any issues with them so far" (R1).

"An experience that I can recall is that tutors really tried their best. Honestly, they knew what they're what they were supposed to do" (R2).

"Mostly it's consulting in terms of research, mostly the referencing part, and the construction of academic writing. And I would say the experience was quite well, I got some insight" (R4).

The tutors also offered valuable insights into research processes and how to search for information which contributed to the postgraduate students' understanding of research standards and conventions.

"My experience with Writing Centre tutors was one of the best because the level to which you are enlightened about whatever you are enquiring about quickly opens up your mind especially about how research is conducted, how you go about searching for information and formulating sentences" (R9).

Findings from this study showed that tutors possess a deep understanding of academic writing conventions, techniques, including grammar, style, and referencing. This expertise allows them to provide constructive feedback, helping students refine their written tasks and avoid common pitfalls such as plagiarism (University of Western Cape Writing Centre 2024).

The sessions with the tutors were seen to improve quality of work and productivity of the postgraduate students. Data showed that Writing Centre tutors play a crucial role in improving the quality of students' work by fostering writing skills, confidence, and self-efficacy. The findings indicate that tutors provided crucial guidance on paraphrasing, referencing, writing style, tone and structuring research papers. This enhanced students' ability to focus on research quality and structure their work effectively.

“My experience at the Writing Centre has been transformative, actually because one of the most significant benefits that I gained at the Writing Centre was actually focusing on the quality of my research, right? And also gaining the ability to structure my work so that it can be presentable and make my arguments more refined” (R8).

“They have assisted me by providing guidance on my writing style, the tone of my work and the structuring of my research paper” (R10).

According to Lundin, O'Connor, and Wynn-Perdue (2023), Writing Centre consultations create a collaborative environment where students are empowered to make informed decisions about their writing. This process reduces anxiety and enhances self-efficacy, enabling students to produce higher-quality work. Tutors employ empathy-based strategies such as listening, advising, and motivating, which are tailored to individual student needs. Furthermore, Writing Centre tutors help students develop both immediate and long-term writing skills. Savarese (2023) highlights that tutors not only assist with specific assignments but also equip students with tools and strategies for future tasks. This dual focus promotes sustained improvement in writing quality.

The findings in this subtheme underscore the critical role of inclusive learning spaces in shaping postgraduate student experiences with Writing Centre support through its interactive and productive sessions. Postgraduate students highlighted that they appreciate the critical questioning applied by tutors, which fosters deeper understanding and engagement. The adaptability of the tutors to meet individual needs further enhances the supportive environment. By offering mentorship and essential tools such as referencing guides, and incorporating social learning theories, tutors act as critical friends. This holistic approach not only aids in academic success but also nurtures a collaborative, inclusive learning community.

5.5.2 Misconceptions of Writing Centre work

A significant challenge is the misunderstanding of the Writing Centre's role, particularly among staff and students who may view it as a place for remedial work rather than a resource for all students (North 1984). Govender and Alcock (2028) affirm that there is a lack of shared understanding regarding the role of the Writing Centre in higher education with many lecturers still viewing it as a 'writing clinic' focused on fixing mechanical errors, rather than a space that supports writing holistically, involving critical thinking and rewriting. This misunderstanding extends to students, who often expect tutors to 'clean up' their work rather than engage in deeper developmental processes. Educating both students and staff on the comprehensive support Writing Centres offer could enhance their utilisation and consequently improve student success.

"What I think is probably the biggest barrier is that there is a lack of shared understanding of what the role of the Writing Centre is in facilitating student development, especially postgraduates. We still have lecturers who actually think that the writing centre is writing clinic where student writing has to be fixed. There is still that belief that we focus on the mechanic, mechanical errors, we deal with writing at a superficial level. Yet as a Writing Centre we work with writing holistically and we believe that writing is a process that involves a lot, researching, reading, writing, rewriting, proofreading and critical thinking and as we will be assisting students in writing we will be appealing to students' critical thinking faculties" (P2).

“We want to develop the postgraduates’ writing abilities, but we have this challenge of not knowing what the role of the Writing Centre is, so even in terms of our students, our tutors, we train them to assist students holistically” (P2).

“But when the students come, they think, well, you have to clean the document for me. You have to write for me” (P2).

“And I think that that stems from that sort of contestation of the space and the role comes from a broader issue within the university and I don't know if it's possibly the fact that we're the University of Technology that was a technikon. I mean, we can keep harping on that and looking back, maybe we shouldn't. We should be looking more forward-looking. But I think that there is still that sort of need...Yeah, I think there are still spaces and places where students are expected to do research, but they haven't been inducted into it early enough, so as Writing Centres now, are we going to be given the added thing of, OK, we'll go to the Writing Centre, they're going to sort out all your research problems” (P3).

Writing centres play a crucial role in supporting students' academic writing development and there is often a misconception that Writing Centre tutors are primarily there to edit or proofread students' work. This misunderstanding can impact the effectiveness of Writing Centre sessions and the development of students' writing abilities. Their primary role is to help students become better writers by focusing on the writing process rather than just correcting errors in the final product (North 1984). This approach looks at higher-order concerns such as organisation, argumentation, and the development of the writer's voice, rather than lower-order concerns like grammar and punctuation (Raymond and Quinn 2012; Alowayid 2020). Theoretically, this underscores cognitivist theory as pertinent to Writing Centre tutor training, as tutoring involves diagnosing writing problems, interpreting student thinking, and facilitating higher-order cognitive engagement. Cognitivist theory shifts the focus from observable behaviour to the internal mental processes involved in learning, including memory, problem-solving, metacognition, and schema development (Piaget, 1972).

The findings show that there is a need to better communicate the role of the Writing Centre to both lecturers and postgraduate students. Voluntary engagement with

Writing Centres has been shown to improve writing as evidenced by Saricaoglu and Bilki (2021). Handford *et al.* (2021) recommend the increase in appointment availability, offering workshops on diverse topics, and fostering interactions between students and staff as means of increasing students' usage of the Writing Centre services. In addition, Zuma *et al.* (2016), suggests tailoring strategies to raise awareness and address the specific needs of the university community can also encourage greater use of Writing Centres.

Some students were also unaware of the Writing Centre, which may contribute to fewer postgraduate students seeking support. One respondent, a Writing Centre practitioner (P5), felt that lecturers too are reluctant to partner with the Writing Centre and it is only when they see noticeable improvement that they recommended the service and encourage students to consult:

"....she [the lecturer] did say there is improvement from what she initially received. So, she did say she recommends students coming here. So, for the future, she says she will encourage them to come earlier" (P5).

P5's comment shows the unclear understanding of Writing Centre practice and the value it can offer students in terms of their academic writing. This calls for more effort in building the relationship with academics particularly lecturers who need to understand the benefits of partnering with the Writing Centre to be able to contribute to the success of their students. A key debate around Writing Centre work at universities is around not having sufficient buy-in and support from academics and the broader university community (Zuma *et al.* 2016; Burke 2020). This support and understanding of the role of Writing Centres in supporting students is vital and needs to be a focus of Writing Centres. These understandings and partnerships can lead to more beneficial and valuable relationships that can contribute to students' success at university. One Writing Centre participant explains the value of gaining greater recognition and understanding among academics and support staff:

"You know, now we really have that understanding with academics and even support staff in terms of who we are? What is the Writing Centre? What is the role of the Writing

Centre? You know, that has been really very instrumental and positive for me. Them involving us makes us part of the family now” (P4).

These understandings can foster mutually beneficial relationships that contribute to student writing development and success. Relating to awareness of the role of Writing Centres, there were also key concerns were that students expected tutors to take on a role similar to that of a supervisor. Tutors were expected to check alignment with objectives or literature, but their role was not to make such supervisory decisions. Tutors often had to remind postgraduate students to consult their supervisors especially when they brought supervisor suggestions without having made the necessary corrections themselves. Tutor T2 explains that the Writing Centre is there to help students organise their ideas and not to take on the expertise of the supervisor:

“...their expectations sometimes of us is almost playing like a sub-Supervisor/Co-supervisor role where we can't, I mean, as much as we can check like whether objectives are aligned to or the literature is aligned to objectives or whatever, but there's only so much we can do in terms of that. So their first call should be their supervisor, but I think sometimes they lean on us, sometimes there's too much expectation and we keep kind of having to tell them we still need to confirm with your supervisor” (T2).

“And also like they would come with the supervisor suggestions without them having to go through them and make the corrections and they want you to interpret those things for them and then they will even ask you if it was you, what would you do, and you're like, that's my question for you” (T8).

“At times when they refer their students to the Writing Centre, they end up thinking that the Writing Centre tutor should do the work of the supervisor, which is wrong. We are there to assist students to be able to put their ideas together, but the supervisor knows the content, knows the discipline. They shouldn't think that the Writing Centre can do everything” (P2).

Writing Centre consultations can have a significant positive impact on students, enabling growth in both their writing abilities and their confidence as writers. Lundin *et*

al. (2023) state that students often leave consultations feeling empowered to tackle their writing tasks independently, which contributes to long-term growth. In addition, Tiruchittampalam *et al.* (2018) state that students who participate in Writing Centre consultations show significant improvements in their writing abilities, particularly in task fulfilment and text organisation. This becomes evident across different student groups, including English Second Language speakers, undergraduate students and postgraduate students (Kwapisz 2014; Bielinska-Kwapisz 2015; Okuda and Anderson 2018).

Writing Centres can be a valuable resource for all students and regular usage can lead to positive outcomes for the students (Bielinska-Kwapisz 2015; Trosset, Evertz and Fitzpatrick 2019). Findings from the data collected indicate that the number of students who booked multiple sessions served as an indicator of the effectiveness and value of services. Commenting on repeat visitors to the Writing Centre, Participant P6 affirmed that students often come back after their first session as they experience valuable interactions with tutors:

“So if you go on the system and you check how many students have booked sessions, the people who have booked sessions twice right, then I think they would be a fair indication and the validation of the fact that that the service is working” (P6).

WCOOnline serves as an assessment tool by collecting detailed data on student usage, satisfaction surveys, and consultation outcomes (Eastern Michigan University Writing Centre 2025). This data helps Writing Centres evaluate their services and align them with institutional goals like academic excellence and student success. The WCOOnline booking system has proven to be a successful measure for Writing Centre consultations due to its ability to streamline scheduling, enhance accessibility, and improve service quality. WCOOnline simplifies the appointment process by allowing users to book consultations online via a user-friendly interface. Students can select their preferred date, time, format (in-person, Zoom, or written feedback), and even filter by consultant or subject area (University of Toronto 2025).

Another validation of Writing Centre services came from students who returned voluntarily, indicating that the service had genuinely benefited them. This was seen as

a form of student approval and positive feedback. Writing Centre practitioner P6 highlighted this:

“When a student comes back voluntarily, and they are not coming here because the lecturer said that they must come, it’s great. If they can see that OK this service has benefited me. You know, if the student comes back voluntarily, then that is a sign of positive feedback. In the session they might express “I came back because you benefited me so much” (P6).

Through the WCOOnline platform, students can indicate whether or not their booking of the session is a requirement of the lecturer or supervisor. From the WCOOnline statistics, the practitioners can determine which students came for consultations voluntarily and those that were advised by their lecturers or supervisors. Research by Arbee (2020) indicates that time constraints and misunderstandings on the role of Writing Centres are usually significant barriers to voluntary use. Students often fail to recognise the benefits of Writing Centres; therefore, demonstrating their usefulness may encourage greater voluntary utilisation among the student body.

A key concern was mentioned in terms of students not only misunderstanding the Writing Centre’s role but also attempting to exploit it. The data revealed that one tutor felt compelled to help students with research concepts despite the student having been taught research methodology. Other students expected tutors to proofread and edit their work for them. One student was also caught booking multiple appointments under different names. Hence, it was important to educate students about the Writing Centre's role in empowering them rather than creating dependency.

“Yeah...they come with tricks and sometimes they're trying to take advantage. So most of the time we spend trying to address that with - this is not how we work. This is how we're supposed to help you and they expect us to do their work...and then even when we're helping them to proofread their work, they don't want to do that. They want us to do that” (T8).

“I think recently we had a case of a student who was said to be very, very temperamental in the sense that when our tutors stood their ground to say we start

from here and end here, this is what you have to do as a student; the student would get emotional and they the student was expecting the tutors to edit for them and the student would want to over rely on the Writing Centre tutors to the extent of booking under different names, different tutors every day. She would be at the Writing Centre at different sites and we picked that she was cheating the system and we do not want to create a dependency syndrome. Our role is to empower students. And we had to deal with that” (P2).

Writing Centre tutors frequently encounter misconceptions about their roles, with many students viewing them primarily as proofreaders rather than as facilitators of writing development. This misunderstanding can undermine tutors' confidence and affect their ability to provide effective support (Alowayid 2020; Liu and Harwood 2022). Additionally, tutors often feel unprepared to address the specific needs of students from technical disciplines, such as engineering, due to a lack of technical background, which can further diminish their confidence (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018). This therefore highlights the need for implementing interdisciplinary training programmes which can enhance tutors' ability to provide effective feedback across various disciplines. Such training has been shown to improve both tutor confidence and student satisfaction, particularly when tutors are equipped to handle the specific writing conventions of different fields (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018).

This sub-theme underlines the various misunderstandings among students, academics and the university community on the role of Writing Centres at the two UoTs. The prevalent misconceptions surrounding the role of Writing Centres undermine their holistic approach to supporting student writers. As has been highlighted, many lecturers still perceive Writing Centres as mere ‘writing clinics’ focused solely on correcting mechanical errors, neglecting their broader mission of fostering comprehensive writing skills. This misunderstanding leads to frustration and a lack of engagement from both lecturers and students. It is crucial to better communicate the Writing Centre's role to the academic community, highlighting its purpose in nurturing students' critical thinking and academic writing skills. Furthermore, fostering stronger partnerships with academics and the broader university community is essential for enhancing the Writing Centre's impact. Through clarifying its objectives and engaging with students beyond superficial assistance, Writing Centres can

transform into invaluable resources that promote long-term academic success. Addressing these misconceptions through targeted communication and ongoing training will ensure that Writing Centres fulfil their potential as comprehensive support systems for all students.

5.5.3 Feedback on Writing Centre consultations

This subtheme identified current feedback measures in place at the Writing Centre. Results imply that overall, there was a lack of feedback measures and more could be done to garner feedback from users in order to enhance the work of the Writing Centre. Student feedback is crucial for continuous improvement of Writing Centre services as it provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of consultations and helps Writing Centres adapt to meet students' needs. Furthermore, feedback can be used to inform tutor training at the Writing Centre. According to Brookhart (2018), feedback from students offers a 'window into student thinking,' allowing tutors and Writing Centres to understand what students struggle with, and what they need to build their confidence in writing and succeed at university. Findings indicated that the consultation sessions included a feedback survey, which allowed students to provide feedback on their Writing Centre consultations to inform future sessions. Postgraduate student R6 expressed that this was valuable and likened it to an after-sales service:

“And after the session he gave me a survey to fill in, so we are to give feedback on how the assistance was. So, for me that was like good. Because in the sales business they call it after sales-service, so I liked that” (R6).

Student feedback, especially when gathered systematically after sessions, is a key tool for Writing Centres to assess the effectiveness of their consultations and make informed changes to their practices (Mandouit 2018). Moreover, Hedengren and Lockerd (2017) state that negative feedback, though less common, is particularly valuable as it can help Writing Centres recognise specific issues. Student feedback fosters open dialogue between tutors and students, giving tutors insight into the unique challenges students face and encourage reflective practice among staff (Mandouit 2018). When Writing Centres act on student feedback, both tutor effectiveness and student satisfaction improve, as seen in cases where interdisciplinary training was developed in response to student concerns (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018). However,

findings indicate that there was an evident need for more feedback mechanisms. The current evaluation tools are generic in nature and measured satisfaction and willingness to return to the centre and recommend it. However, it did not assess the depth of engagement in consultations. This was a concern raised by Practitioner P1:

“So, our tool looks at: Did it happen? Were you satisfied? Will you come back to the Writing Centre again? Would you encourage somebody to go and visit the Writing Centre? But I do not believe that we have a tool that assesses the strength and the depth of our engagement in our consultation process” (P1).

Flower and Hayes (2024) state that feedback helps Writing Centres tailor their services to address specific concerns, whether related to academic writing conventions, assignment clarity, or self-regulation in the writing process. Therefore, only allowing students to provide generic feedback is not helpful to the overall effectiveness and improvement of Writing Centre services. In addition, there was a concern that feedback might not always be honest as students might feel pressured to give positive responses. Anonymity was suggested to encourage more honest feedback:

“But I wish that it had a way of being anonymous because we really might not get honest answers. You know someone just coming in and if I'm asking did you benefit, right, the person is gonna want to answer “yes, I benefited” because they don't want to offend you, but some I've heard students saying that they didn't benefit from the service. You know, they were quite honest” (P6).

According to Bryman (2016), anonymity reduces prejudice and promotes honesty, particularly when feedback is critical of authority individuals or services. Similarly, Rowe (2017) claims that ensuring anonymity improves the trustworthiness of student feedback, especially in circumstances where power relations exist. In Writing Centres, the tutor-student interaction is frequently distinguished by unequal power, even if unintentionally (Zhang and Hyland 2021; Zhang and Zhao 2024). Students may feel pressured to validate the tutor's or practitioner's efforts, therefore anonymity is important in ensuring honest feedback. Tools that allow for in-depth responses are valuable in improving one's practice. In the view of Brookhart (2018), when students feel their feedback is valued and acted upon, they are more likely to return for

consultations and this will create a cycle of continuous improvement and foster trust between students and Writing Centres. Additionally, findings highlights that a space for open critique was needed to ensure honest feedback and self-reflection:

“But you would want a space where students can openly critique your service because you don’t want to project like you are Mother Theresa, you are delivering sweets, you now a humanitarian and stuff like that. You must be able to reflect and critique yourself in the work that you do” (P6).

Open critique of tutoring will assist in identifying areas where tutors can improve their communication strategies or focus more on higher-order concerns like content and organisation rather than lower order concerns such as spelling and grammatical issues (Sweetland Center for Writing 2024). Student feedback was seen as crucial for reflection and continuous improvement. Hence, there was a need to be more proactive in collecting student feedback consistently rather than only seeking it when writing reports.

“We need to be more proactive in getting feedback from our students, not just when we are writing a paper. We need to be more proactive with students and reflect on our work” (P6).

Practitioner P6’s sentiments suggest a deeper awareness of the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, where student feedback is not merely evaluative but essential to pedagogical growth. Rather than viewing feedback as a summative, end-of-process event (for example, only when publishing), P6 urges for a continuous, formative approach. This is consistent with Brookfield’s (1995) belief that students are the most important source of insight into educators’ teaching and encourages educators to see themselves through their students’ eyes. This also supports the constructivist view of knowledge and teaching, in which feedback loops are essential for co-constructing meaning (Vygotsky 1978).

Students generally provide positive feedback about Writing Centre consultations (Thompson *et al.* 2009; Williams and Takaku 2011) noting several key benefits such as increased confidence in writing abilities and feeling empowered to tackle their

writing tasks independently. For example, a study by Griffin *et al.* (2020) revealed that 83.3% of students provided positive comments about the feedback they received, with 33.3% specifically describing it as 'helpful'. Students appreciate the clarity, thoroughness, and speed of response from Writing Centre tutors (Griffin *et al.* 2020). The detailed nature of the feedback increases students' perception that the university cares about them, making them feel valued and a sense of belonging.

Theme 1, which focused on experiences of Writing Centre support services, has explored students' and tutors' experiences with Writing Centre services, highlighting three key subthemes. Firstly, inclusive learning spaces examined how Writing Centres foster accessibility, diversity, and a supportive environment for all students. Secondly, misconceptions of Writing Centre work addressed common misunderstandings, such as the belief that these centres only cater to weak writers or provide editing services, rather than focusing on developing writing skills. Finally, feedback on Writing Centre consultations evaluated the effectiveness of tutor-student interactions, emphasising constructive guidance, clarity, and the impact on academic confidence. Together, these subthemes reveal the complexities of Writing Centre engagement, showcasing both their value and the need for clearer communication about their role in academic development.

A visual illustration summary of Theme 1 is provided in Figure 5.9 below.

Figure 5.9: Summary of Theme 1



Source: Author Generated (2025)

5.6 THEME 2: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES UTILISED

This primary theme examined the current techniques and strategies utilised at the Writing Centre from both the tutors and students' perspectives. The theme is supported by three sub-themes, namely:

- collaborative approaches to building knowledge and literacies;
- current techniques and approaches to building knowledge; and
- literacies, and modelling good writing practice.

5.6.1 Collaborative approaches to building knowledge and literacies

The traditional Writing Centre consultation process usually involves an initial discussion where students explain their writing tasks, followed by a verbal engagement, and review of their written text with feedback and guidance. Tutors discuss key areas for improvement and students revise their work before returning to the writing centre for further consultation. This is an iterative process to support student's development and progress with their written tasks. Postgraduate students R1 and R2 affirmed this type of consultation process:

“At first you have to explain or maybe let’s say, basically, what is your research about? Then they read your document, and you have sessions. Then they highlight and guide you on how you go about your work and that will be your first consultation, and you go back. Then you come back. Then they sit down with you again, and they see if you have made any changes and yeah” (R1).

“They give me some corrections and also, we consulted via MS Teams. And they gave me hints on what to do all the way and they gave suggestions as well” (R2).

The review of postgraduate students’ work is seen as collaborative whereby tutors provide guidance and considerations in a professional and supportive manner ensuring that students are empowered and not discouraged. Tutors highlight areas for improvement and review the writing with students, offering ways to enhance sentence flow and coherence. This process enables students to refine their work with guidance from an attentive tutor. R1 comments on the professional approach of tutors:

“I think being able to correct you if you’re wrong, but in a most professional way, they don’t shut you down (R1).

“In fact, I sent the tutor the work and then they made some highlights and then we went over the work together to see the comments where it wasn’t flowing well, and they gave me hints on how to make sure that the sentences flow very well and some hints, because sometimes you know your work might need that second eye” (R2).

The consultation process often begins with an initial consultation where the tutor and student discuss the writing task, goals, and areas of concern, which then sets the stage for collaborative learning (Ryan and Zimmerelli 2016). Writing Centre tutors work alongside postgraduate students to refine ideas and improve organisation while creating a supportive environment. Lundin *et al.* (2023) states that this collaboration reassures students that they are capable of achieving success in their writing tasks. The feedback process is iterative, enabling students to revise their work based on the feedback received and then return to the Writing Centre for further consultation. This cycle of feedback and revision continues until the student feels satisfied with their work (Thompson *et al.* 2021).

The data show that tutors provided constructive feedback to support students struggling with academic writing. This approach aimed to build students' confidence and assist them in recognising and addressing their weaknesses without feeling discouraged.

“Giving constructive feedback to the student is one of the strategies that I actually apply ...the last thing you'd want to do is demotivate students or sort of not encourage the students. So, when using the constructive feedback, sitting on one-on-one kind of session and then discussing with the student, going through with the student on their assignment, have them read their assignment, have them actively participate in their research assignment as in OK can you see where you went wrong? Maybe in terms of writing, does this sound good? You know when you are just re-reading it out loud is it making logic to you?” (T11).

“I think I would agree here about giving constructive feedback. I was doing that a lot during sessions. I would read the assignment with the student, make them be able to identify where they are lacking and explain to them how to approach their writing” (T12).

Constructive feedback is designed to guide students in improving their writing while maintaining their confidence and motivation. In providing constructive feedback, tutors should identify specific aspects of the writing that is effective, such as clear arguments or engaging introductions as this helps build students' confidence and reinforces good practices (Sweetland Center for Writing 2024). Purdue OWL (2025) advocates for the addressing of issues related to content, organisation, and argumentation before moving to sentence-level concerns like grammar or punctuation because this ensures that students' focus on substantive revisions first.

Feedback is a cornerstone of effective Writing Centre consultations, and it plays a pivotal role in the development of writing abilities. Elashri (2013) states that feedback helps to foster improvement in student writing, enhances confidence, and provides actionable insights for both immediate revisions and long-term growth. For example, structured feedback can address essay-level concerns such as focus, organisation,

and content gaps, as well as paragraph- and sentence-level issues like coherence and grammar (University of Louisville Writing Center n.d.). The absence of feedback may result in writers struggling to recognise their errors which may lead to “fossilisation” of mistakes that become more difficult to correct over time (Elashri 2013). Effective feedback encourages writers to reflect on their work critically and develop strategies for future projects. Shakel (2023) posits that written feedback, in particular, allows students to process information at their own pace and fosters independence in revision. Constructive feedback not only improves technical skills but also boosts writers' confidence. Balanced commentary that highlights strengths alongside areas for improvement makes writers feel valued and supported (Brookhart 2018). Furthermore, positive reinforcement motivates writers to continue refining their craft while reducing anxiety about sharing their work. This must be foregrounded in tutor training as many postgraduates experience fear and anxiety about meeting their research goals.

During personalised and one-on-one consultations tutors encourage students to book follow up sessions to track their progress and work on their unique writing challenges. Through these progressive consultations, tutors assess improvements and provide tailored support to help students enhance their academic work:

“But my major point here is that I offer constructive feedback and ensure that I sit with a student on one-on-one session and encourage the students to book for more consultations so that the students can actually be able to improve” (T11).

“So through a one-on-one consultation we are able to pick up the unique challenges that that particular student is having, right. And then you're able to work on them through progressive consultations. So, you go, you come back, and we work on your writing challenges” (P6).

Writing Centres generally offer individualised support through one-on-one consultations with students. These one-on-one consultations provide students with personalised attention, helping them address specific writing challenges and develop their writing (Rambiritch 2022). Through one-on-one individualised sessions, Writing Centres create a unique space where students can receive individualised attention,

allowing them to gain insights into their writing which is difficult in larger, institutionalised settings (Harris 2016; Gustafsson and Ganobcsik-Williams 2016).

In summary, collaborative approaches to building knowledge and literacies are central to the work of Writing Centres, particularly when supporting postgraduate students. These students' writing is viewed not as a solitary task, but as a collaborative effort where tutors act as professional partners - guiding, instructing, and encouraging writers throughout the process. The feedback offered is not a once-off event but an ongoing, iterative process, designed to deepen students' understanding and confidence over time. Tutors provide constructive, respectful feedback that helps students identify and address their weaknesses without feeling demoralised. This careful balance of support and challenge not only enhances academic writing but also empowers students to take ownership of their development and engage more fully in scholarly discourse. As a result, tutor training needs to incorporate these collaborative approaches to effectively equip tutors in supporting postgraduate students.

5.6.2 Current techniques and approaches for partnering in learning

This theme analyses the current techniques and strategies used at the Writing Centre. Writing Centres employ a variety of techniques and strategies to support students with their written tasks. These approaches aim to enhance their writing, boost confidence, and foster a sense of belonging and academic growth. Student participants shared the techniques that they found valuable, including the read-aloud technique - a common strategy used during Writing Centre consultations to engage students and provide feedback on their writing. This method involves the student reading their draft aloud while the tutor listens and takes notes, which can help identify areas for improvement and facilitate a collaborative discussion. According to Simpkins (2017), the read-aloud technique involves either the writer or the tutor vocalising a piece of writing during a session. This practice externalises the text, allowing writers to engage with their work from a fresh perspective and enabling tutors to provide real-time feedback (Massino 2011; Simpkins 2017). This study found that the read-aloud technique was highly valued by students and tutors and seen as an effective learning strategy among participants in this study. Findings revealed that tutors and practitioners encourage students to read their work aloud during consultations, enabling them to refine their writing and grammar through self-correction. This strategy assists students in

identifying their own writing challenges and improve their understanding by verbalising their thoughts. The read-aloud technique was a popular and effective method according to T3 and postgraduate students R3, R5, and R8.

“I think for me it's that the read-aloud technique really works wonders and even the students, while they're reading, they're able to pick up their own mistakes. And I'm like, you're learning already. You can see by reading it out. You're like, OK, now this doesn't make sense, but in my head, it makes sense. So, I mean, that's the technique that really works wonders.” (T3).

“So, some of the strategies that they use that I remember enjoying was the read-aloud technique” (R3).

T3's comment underscores how through particular techniques they are able to engage students as partners in the learning process. This is supported by Galtung *et al.* (2020) and Pandey (2024) who state that tutors often co-create learning activities with students and this partnership approach helps students take ownership of their learning and writing development. Reading aloud enables students to hear their writing, making it easier to identify mechanical errors such as misspellings, omitted words, and grammatical issues that may be overlooked during silent reading (Writing Centre TAMU n.d.). This is highlighted by postgraduate student R5 who noted the ability to identify mistakes through using the simple but effective read-aloud technique:

“And during the consultation, they allow you, the student, to read your work out loud. In that way you will also be able to pick where you would have made mistakes” (R5).

“I think another one is they make you read aloud in order to understand what you're saying and to improve your ideas” (R8).

According to Scrocco (2017), the read-aloud method fosters active engagement between the student and the tutor. It enables the tutor to hear the student's voice and understand their perspective, which can lead to more personalised and effective feedback. Reading aloud helps identify surface-level grammar errors that may be ignored when reading silently (Duke University Writing Studio 2025). As the student

reads their work aloud, the tutor can immediately identify issues such as unclear transitions, misplaced thesis statements, and passive voice. This real-time feedback can be particularly beneficial in addressing specific concerns within the limited time of a consultation (Scrocco 2017).

However, R2 indicated a preference for discussion rather than the read-aloud technique:

“I remember this time the tutor wanted to do the read-aloud, but it was a technique that I thought like I didn’t need. And what we did, is we sat down and we would discuss my writing” (R2).

This indicates that, despite the benefits of the read-aloud technique, some students find other strategies more beneficial. This requires Writing Centre tutors to be open to various approaches in their work as students have diverse needs (Zuma *et al.* 2016; Landry *et al.* 2023). This underlines the diverse range of students and the importance of tutors being able to be flexible in their approaches and engagement with students. This study found that Writing Centre tutors often use brainstorming and questioning techniques to support students. Tutors encourage critical thinking by asking numerous questions to stimulate brainstorming thereby allowing students time to respond and refine their ideas.

“We also used like the brainstorming strategy” (R3).

“The main technique that I’ve observed at the Writing Centre with the tutors, they ask questions - a lot of questions. And there’s one that was in my head just now they ask questions and they give you time actually to answer certain questions and also, they concentrate on being probing and being precise” (R8).

The brainstorming technique is a valuable tool used in Writing Centre consultations to help students generate ideas, develop their writing, and overcome writer's block. Brainstorming in writing consultations primarily focuses on generating a large quantity of ideas without immediate judgment (Eckstein, Ferris and Rollins 2022). Tutors encourage students to generate ideas related to their topic and focus on quantity over

quality initially (Writing Centre TAMU n.d.). Furthermore, Writing Centre tutors may employ various brainstorming techniques depending on the student's needs and preferences, such as freewriting, listing, clustering or mapping, question brainstorming, and brain writing (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 2016; University of Nevada Writing and Speaking Center, n.d.) After generating a pool of ideas, tutors then guide students through evaluating and prioritising the most relevant or promising ideas, organising them into potential structures, and identifying areas for further research or development (Mackiewicz and Thompson 2018). Brainstorming in Writing Centre consultations has been seen to reduce writing anxiety, enhance critical thinking, improve organisation, foster creativity, and promote student autonomy (Bromley Northway and Schonberg 2016; Eckstein, Ferris and Rollins 2022). Through utilising brainstorming techniques, Writing Centres provide students with valuable tools to enhance their writing process and develop more comprehensive and well-structured written work.

The data revealed that tutors encouraged postgraduate students to elaborate on their understanding of the assignments, advising them to start by clearly stating the problem. This approach aims to help students refine their writing and better understand the requirements of the task. Students are further guided and provided with examples of how to effectively connect sentences and introduce new paragraphs.

“What I try to do is to get the student to elaborate more on what they know is required from them. So, my strategy would be what our coordinator taught all of us - to just state your problem first. The initial thing that you can start by doing is stating your problem and then we'll take it from there” (T12).

Writing Centre tutors encourage free-writing which enables students to write freely for about five to eight minutes without overthinking or stopping during the writing process thereby helping them explore their ideas and thoughts more naturally. This was mentioned by postgraduate student R3:

“The free-writing exercise of writing without stopping and without really thinking much on what I'm writing was so helpful” (R3).

Freewriting is a brainstorming technique that encourages individuals to write continuously without worrying about grammar or spelling, allowing ideas to flow freely. This method is particularly useful for overcoming mental blocks and generating creative solutions. Free writing helps individuals bypass their internal editor, enabling them to think more honestly and resourcefully which can lead to breakthrough ideas and solutions that might not emerge through conventional thinking (Levy 2010). Unlike traditional brainstorming, which can be hindered by group dynamics and the need for a skilled leader, freewriting is a solitary activity that allows for uninterrupted idea flow, making it a more personal and introspective process (Al-Samarraie and Hurmuzan 2018). However, while freewriting is a powerful tool on its own, it can be complemented with other brainstorming techniques like mind mapping and clustering to further enhance idea generation and organisation (Матмыратова 2024).

For some participants, the focus was on practical writing strategies including methods such as paraphrasing and using specific strategies, such as the 4 Ns, to improve writing:

“So, but we focus on the strategy more of strategy of writing for example - we are going to use the four Ns. This is how, to paraphrase this is how to include sources. So, we focus more on the strategy” (T5).

Tutoring strategies such as the "4Ns" (Notice, Notate, Note, New Knowledge) and paraphrasing are effective tools in Writing Centre consultations (O'Brien, Tighe-Mooney and Farrell 2017). These approaches help tutors guide students through the writing process while fostering critical thinking and independence (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2018). Paraphrasing is another critical tutoring strategy that supports comprehension and academic integrity. Tutors model effective paraphrasing techniques by demonstrating how to rephrase ideas while maintaining their original meaning (Liu and Harwood 2022). These approaches serve to empower students to become independent writers capable of navigating complex academic tasks.

Writing Centre consultations aim to enhance the quality of students' written work by addressing critical elements such as structure, coherence, clarity, and flow. These aspects are essential for effective academic communication and are often central to

consultation strategies. The findings indicate that there were strategies and techniques used to promote quality and structure of writing. Reading was essential for developing students' writing and tutors encouraged students to read widely. This approach aimed to help students improve their writing by exposing them to different styles, genres and structures.

Writing consultants work with students on the flow of their writing by helping students vary sentence lengths and structure for readability (Williams and Bizup 2017). Tutors use techniques such as lexical chains and cohesive devices to connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs; and encourage writers to read their work aloud to identify disruptions in flow (Lundin *et al.* 2023). Writing Centre tutors focus on improving students writing coherence by engaging with them on paragraph structure.

“You would find that in essays a paragraph will be full of ideas that are not clearly argued or elaborated on - their work is not coherent, it's all over the place. So we try to work with them on paraphrasing. And we highlight having one main idea per paragraph. And what is a paragraph, you know, it's supposed to have a topic sentence and then supporting evidence. Then the concluding sentence, that sort of thing” (T7).

Findings show that tutors encourage the development of one clear idea per paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting evidence and a concluding sentence. Tutors also emphasised the importance of understanding writing conventions before delving into content to enable students to express their ideas effectively and coherently.

At the postgraduate level, the relationship between reading and writing is especially significant and complex. T5 emphasises how students are encouraged to read:

“Just pick a book and read it and let's see the way the author's write. See the way it flows. Not all articles because articles can be so challenging. If you want to write, you need to read because you have to critique what you've read” (T5).

Reading and writing are deeply interconnected processes that support critical thinking, academic development, and the production of advanced scholarly work. Postgraduate success relies on strong academic literacy, which includes both advanced reading and

writing skills. These skills are mutually reinforcing - critical reading informs effective writing, and writing activities deepen understanding of what is read (Retnaningdyah and Laksono 2018; Grabe and Zhang 2016). T5's comment highlights the value of Writing Centres as a place of reading.

Reading widely and critically provides the material, vocabulary, and conceptual frameworks necessary for producing high-quality academic writing. Accumulating knowledge through extensive reading is essential for improving writing competence especially at the postgraduate level (Grabe and Zhang 2016; Sun *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, Writing Centre tutors assist students in organising their ideas logically to ensure clarity in their writing. This includes developing clear thesis statements and topic sentences that guide the reader (Williams and Bizup 2017); creating outlines to structure main points and supporting evidence effectively (Uysal and Selvi 2021); and ensuring proper paragraph structure with topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences (Lundin *et al.* 2023).

Postgraduate students often struggle with writing clarity, which is exacerbated by the use of complex language and inadequate argument quality (Lim *et al.* 2016). This can be due to a lack of familiarity with academic writing conventions and the pressure to conform to English norms (Alfehaid and Alkhatib 2024). The findings indicate that some postgraduate students often used overly complicated language in their writing, which hinders clarity. Hence, tutors in this study encourage students to simplify their sentences, focusing on conveying the message effectively rather than using complex words. This was a concern raised by tutor T2:

"A lot of times students use very complicated words which don't sometimes make sense and so often I ask the students, OK, what were you trying to kind of say with this sentence? Let's see how we can say it in a simpler way and just reiterate that there's nothing wrong with saying it in a simpler way, because the whole point is to get your message across" (T2).

To help students enhance their writing clarity and coherence, institutions should offer pedagogically driven writing support as well as informed supervisory guidance (Jeyaraj, Too, and Lasito 2020; Prihandoko, Nurkamto, and Djamika 2024). Improving

students' confidence in their writing abilities through research literacy and writing satisfaction can considerably boost writing self-efficacy, especially among non-native speakers (Prihandoko, Nurkamto, and Djamika 2024). This is particularly relevant in this study where majority of the students in this study are English Second Language (ESL) speakers. This sub-theme therefore calls for tutor training initiatives that take into account various techniques and strategies to be able to cater to the diverse learning needs of postgraduate students.

Having to work with diverse students particularly at postgraduate level brought challenges to some tutors. Tutors reported that they sometimes felt a lack of confidence and intimidation when consulting with students with complex academic needs. These challenges were compounded by various factors, including miscommunication, mismatched expectations, and the perception of tutors' roles. In such cases, tutors explained that they seek assistance from more senior tutors to ensure the student receives the necessary support. Participants expressed that this referral process helped maintain the quality of support provided by the Writing Centre. This study found that some tutors such as those with Masters degrees, felt threatened when consulting with PhD-level students. Participants expressed that tutors sometimes doubted their capabilities and would seek assistance from other tutors. Some tutors expressed that they struggled to assist postgraduate students effectively, feeling unqualified due to their lack of experience at that academic level:

“Firstly, there's discomfort, there's a decrease in terms of your confidence. I think before you could even consult with that person, you worry about a lot. What if this person comes up you know with more things that I do not know. And this person is expecting that I know these things because I am a consultant right” (T11).

Tutors often encounter stress and anxiety themselves, especially when dealing with emotionally taxing situations such as helping students navigate complex writing tasks or managing their own insecurities about their tutoring abilities (Harris 2017). A study by Bolton (2010) revealed that tutors entering sessions already stressed are prone to heightened anxiety during tutoring, which may inhibit their ability to address student writers' needs effectively. In addition, tutors may feel overwhelmed by the expectation to be experts in all aspects of writing, particularly when assisting postgraduate students

with specialised or technical writing (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; González and Del Carmen González Videgaray 2022). Therefore, Writing Centres should prioritise the emotional well-being of tutors by offering resources and strategies to manage their stress, ensuring they are better equipped to assist anxious students effectively (Harris 2017). Tutor training needs to give precedence to tutors' well-being and focus on ways in which to support them as they navigate this important role. Furthermore, tutor training that includes affective and identity-related aspects of writing can help tutors feel more equipped to more fully support postgraduate students (Clarence 2020; Liu and Harwood 2022). This will be discussed in more detail in theme three.

This study found that assisting postgraduate students was more challenging and intimidating than undergraduates as postgraduates often sought help with research rather than structured assignments. Hence, some tutors felt overwhelmed due to their lack of experience with thesis writing.

“Obviously assisting postgraduate students compared to undergraduates is more challenging, right? It can be very, for me it's usually very intimidating, firstly because half the time postgraduate students will not pitch up with an assignment question, you know, like how undergraduate students come through with an assignment question, discussing, clarifying what is required. A postgraduate student will just come through with their research topic and just tell you what they need to do, right” (T13).

“What I've, or maybe the experience that I've got or what I've seen is when the tutors, especially if maybe they're doing master's degrees only and if someone comes and they'll they want to consult for a PhD, they will tend to feel threatened and it's like maybe they'll be doubting their themselves. So I feel like yeah, some tutors really doubt their capabilities because of the level of all the qualifications that they were holding” (R2).

The sentiments by postgraduate student R2 underscore the need for developing tutor confidence in working with postgraduate students. According to Harris (2015), tutors who are well-trained in balancing directive and non-directive approaches to consultation sessions tend to feel more confident. They can adapt their methods to students' needs, whether acting as a coach, teacher, or even proofreader for lower-

proficiency students (North 1984). Tutors indicated that one of the approaches they use when they feel unsure about consulting with a postgraduate student is partnering with another more senior tutor. This approach enables them to work together and adopt strategies for working with postgraduate students for future consultations.

“So, can you see that it basically puts you in a very difficult position as a consultant, right? So yeah, I would say that it just is a discomfort kind of feeling, you know. The feeling of lack of confidence to assist that person and a bit of intimidation. But at the same time, if you could see that maybe you're not well equipped for what the student requires obviously, you just refer that person to someone you know who's experienced so that that person is assisted accordingly” (T11).

Writing Centre tutors draw on each other's varied strengths, whether in disciplinary knowledge, language assistance, or feedback methods, to create a vibrant, interconnected learning environment. In addition to improving the quality of student support, this partnership creates a sense of community among tutors as they feel more connected to one another and encourages knowledge-sharing as a reflexive activity. Such interactions are consistent with Wenger's (1998) concept of Communities of Practice (CoP), in which reciprocal participation, teamwork, and a common repertoire naturally emerge. Through sharing knowledge, tutors in this CoP fill skill gaps and work together to further the Writing Centre's objective. The academic support ecosystem is ultimately enhanced by this interdependence, which supports both professional development and a culture of shared responsibility.

To conclude this subtheme, current techniques and approaches for partnering in learning reflect Writing Centres' commitment to meaningful engagement with postgraduate students. The Read Aloud technique, for example, allows students to hear their own writing and identify issues they might otherwise miss, promoting self-awareness and reinforcing their role as active partners in the learning process. Tutors also adapt a range of strategies to meet the diverse academic, linguistic, and emotional needs of students, ensuring inclusive and responsive support. However, these efforts are not without challenges. Some tutors, especially when working with advanced research writing, may feel underprepared or lack confidence in navigating the complex expectations of postgraduate work. This highlights the importance of ongoing tutor

training and peer support to build capacity and confidence. Ultimately, these collaborative techniques aim to foster a more reflective, empowered postgraduate writer - one who grows through dialogue and shared responsibility.

5.6.3 Modelling good writing practice

This study found that tutors encouraged active participation enabling students to learn through guided practice and take responsibility for their own writing. This approach is a way to model good writing practice as expressed by Writing Centre practitioner P2:

“But our tutors, we also teach them that when you are, say when you have identified errors in a piece - you can model. You can identify the error and inform the student that you are getting this wrong and this is how you correct it. You correct the first two sentences or first two errors and then you ask or request the student to do the rest. So that's a teachable moment. You have modelled this is how it is done, and you have given the student a concrete task to do the rest, the 15 to 20 errors that are in the paper the student has to do that by themselves” (P2).

Active participation is a crucial element in Writing Centre consultations, fostering student engagement and enhancing the learning experience. This method aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of problem-posing education, which prioritises conversation and critical awareness in the educational experience. Effective tutors employ various techniques to foster active student involvement including asking leading questions, which encourages students to think critically about their work (Brooks, 1991, cited in Lundin *et al.* 2023). Other valuable strategies are instructional scaffolding, whereby tutors provide support that enables students to actively engage with and improve their writing (Bleakney and Pittock 2019, cited in Lundin *et al.* 2023); and motivational strategies, where tutors use techniques to boost student motivation, encouraging active engagement in the writing process (Mackiewicz and Thompson 2014, cited in Lundin *et al.* 2023). Some tutors emphasised a peer-to-peer approach, aiming to relate to students on an equal level thereby fostering a more collaborative and supportive learning environment:

“We do know that we are peer-to-peer. We are supposed to be peer-to-peer touring. We do have that kind of understanding and we do try in our centre to relate with the student peer-to-peer” (T5).

Adopting a peer-to-peer approach creates a non-hierarchical environment where students feel comfortable discussing their writing challenges. Peer tutors guide students through various stages of the writing process, such as brainstorming, structuring arguments, and revising drafts and this helps students become more independent and confident writers (Reimers 2022). In this study it was reported that tutors supported students without doing the work for them, as the focus is on student development, by ensuring that students leave consultations more confident and with the ability to independently engage with the feedback provided and develop their written work.

“I try to ensure that especially the developmental one. I try by all means to ensure that in our Writing Centre practice, the student is developed at the end of the day. So you're not doing the work for the students. You let the student leave the consultation and they do their own work” (T1).

Writing Centre tutors play a crucial role in promoting student independence during consultations. Graham *et al.* (1998, cited in Heki 2021) iterate the importance of helping students incorporate self-regulatory processes into their writing. Heki (2021) argues that Writing Centres should be spaces where both independence and interdependence are encouraged. This approach allows students to develop confidence in their abilities while still having access to collaborative support when needed. The findings show that tutors also often help students adopt productivity strategies such as time-blocking or the Pomodoro Technique, which breaks tasks into manageable intervals to maintain focus and avoid burnout (University of Waterloo Writing Centre 2024).

One practitioner (P3) spoke of the concept of education as freedom as discussed by Freire (1970) who believed in the importance of understanding the broader social and educational context rather than simply focusing on writing skills for personal gain. The approach aimed to encourage a more profound perspective on education and its role in the social change and public good. Paulo Freire's philosophy of education, particularly in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), emphasises

education as a tool for liberation and freedom. His ideas challenge traditional, authoritarian approaches to teaching and advocate for a dialogical, problem-posing model of education.

Technology has become an integral part of Writing Centre consultations, offering tools and resources that enhance the writing process and improve student outcomes. Writing Centres often offer both face-to-face and online consultations to accommodate diverse student needs, more so since the advent of Covid-19 (Westfall 2021). Each mode has its advantages and challenges, making the choice of format dependent on the context and preferences of both students and consultants. Face-to-face consultations involve in-person interactions between students and writing consultants. Tutors can provide real-time responses to students' questions and writing concerns and interpret students' non-verbal cues, such as gestures or facial expressions, which then allows for dynamic discussions that enhance understanding (Kwan 2023). However, Westfall (2021) argues that face-to-face consultations may pose challenges such as scheduling conflicts or accessibility issues for students who cannot visit the Writing Centre physically. Online consultations are more accessible for students with time constraints or geographical limitations. Many students find it easier to schedule appointments and interact with consultants remotely (Westfall 2021). Furthermore, online platforms save time by eliminating travel requirements and enabling students to submit drafts electronically for review (Wits Writing Centre n.d.). Tutors engage with technology and resources to supplement their support to postgraduate students. In this study, tutors utilised both face-to-face and online consultations to support students. They also utilised laptops and computers in their consultations, thereby making the learning experience more practical and useful for students.

At the Durban University of Technology, tutor reflections have been used to explore how a humanising pedagogy can underpin Writing Centre practices. Tutors become aware of the significance of Communities of Practice, which help cultivate a supportive and responsive environment for students (Govender and Alcock 2020). Practitioner P2 stated that tutor reflections indicated both positive feedback from postgraduates and areas that needed attention.

“Our tutors always receive feedback, and I've always requested my tutors to write reflections. And in those reflections, I would pick that they are receiving feedback from the postgraduates, positive feedback and even areas that require attention as well” (P2).

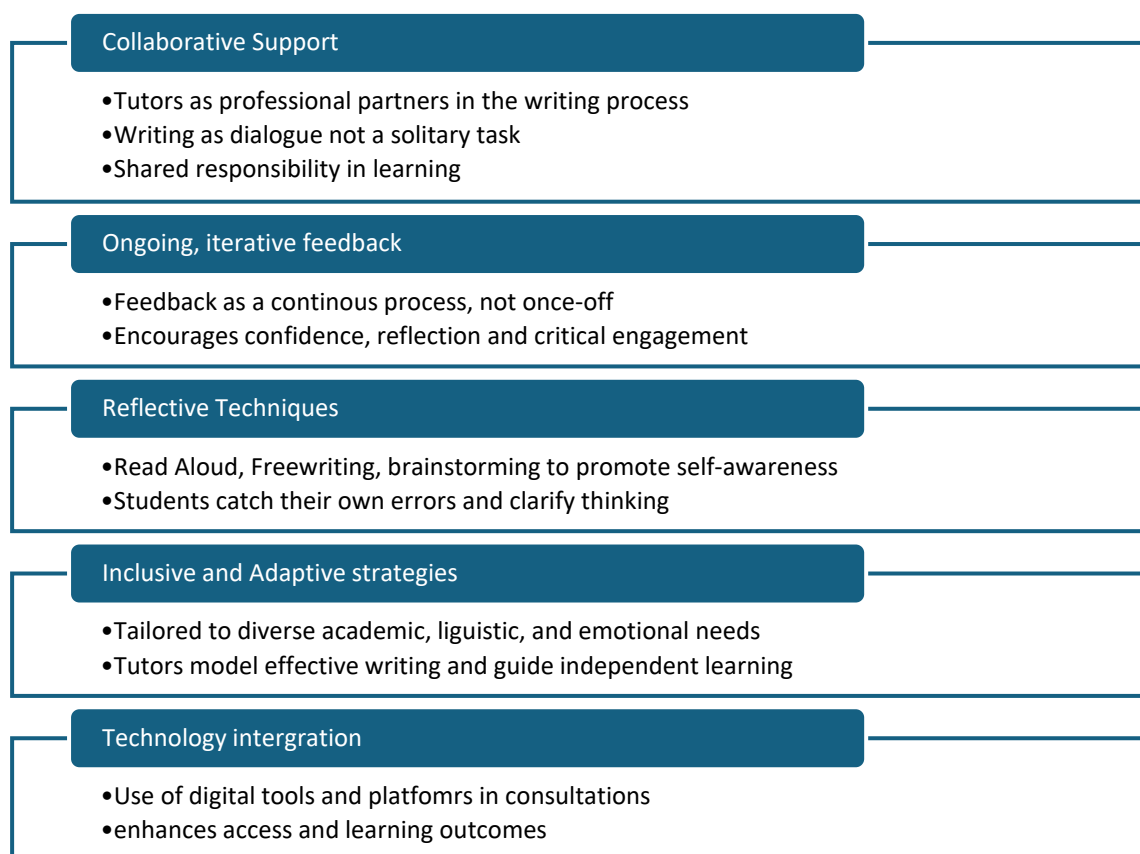
This resonates with Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, where reflection on and in action enables educators to adjust and improve their practice meaningfully. Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner maintains that professionals, including educators, improve their practice by actively reflecting both during (in-action) and after (on-action) their work. Both forms help practitioners learn from experience and adjust their actions to better address unique, unpredictable challenges (Ramage 2020; Asfeldt and Stonehouse 2021; Price and Deveci 2022; Tan *et al.* 2023). This approach values practical, intuitive knowledge and ongoing learning over rigid technical rules, enabling meaningful adaptation and growth in complex, real-world situations.

To summarise this subtheme, modelling good writing practice remains central to Writing Centre work with postgraduate students. Tutors guide students through the writing process, encouraging them to take full responsibility for their work while fostering independence and confidence. Many adopt a peer-to-peer approach, engaging students as equals to create a collaborative and supportive learning environment. This reflects the broader idea of education as freedom, as described by Freire (1970) where learning is dialogic, empowering, and grounded in mutual respect. Technology and digital resources have also become integral to these consultations, supporting access and enhancing how tutors model good writing practices. Crucially, tutors engage in constant reflection both on and in action, allowing them to adapt, grow, and refine their methods to meet students' evolving needs. Through these dynamic, reflective practice, Writing Centres can continue to promote deep, transformative learning and tutor training.

Theme 2 has analysed techniques and strategies utilised at the DUT and MUT Writing Centres. The findings indicate that Writing Centres employ collaborative, student-centred strategies to support the development of academic literacies, particularly among postgraduate students. Tutors act as professional partners in the writing

process, offering ongoing, constructive feedback that fosters confidence, independence, and deeper engagement with scholarly work. Techniques such as the read-aloud method enhance self-awareness and reflection, while adaptive strategies cater to the diverse academic, linguistic, and emotional needs of students. Tutors also model effective writing practices and integrate digital tools to support accessibility and enhance learning. Central to these approaches is a commitment to dynamic, reflective practice - encouraging continuous growth for both students and tutors. However, supporting advanced research writing can present challenges, highlighting the need for sustained tutor training and peer support to ensure meaningful, responsive engagement and writing development. Figure 5.10 below provides a summary of Theme 2.

Figure 5.10: Summary of Theme 2



Source: Author Generated (2025)

5.7 THEME 3: TRAINING PRACTICES, PERCEPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This theme examines the training practices, perceptions and limitations of training as gathered from respondents during data collection. The theme has three subthemes namely:

- Perceptions on tutor abilities and training gaps;
- Training in critical thinking, academic voice, diversity and inclusion; and
- Reflecting on practice, role-playing and identifying areas of improvement.

5.7.1 Perceptions on tutor abilities and training gaps

Writing Centre support to postgraduate students extend across the entire academic writing journey from conceptualising a research proposal to writing of the various chapters of a research dissertation. Writing Centre training sessions typically focus on identifying challenging areas of tutoring and how to provide effective support to students. In terms of postgraduate student support, practitioners expressed that proposal writing and research writing are areas that the Writing Centre focuses on to support tutors in building their capacity to work with postgraduate students:

“At some point the second training that we had with tutors was on proposal writing, how to write a research proposal at Masters level, at PhD level. I am actually the one who conducted that one but it's not always about proposal writing. It depends on that particular year” (P2).

Most student participants concurred that the tutors were able to provide clear advice on research and academic work. Some noted that tutors demonstrated a strong understanding of the university's standards and effectively addressed students' needs. Student participants felt that tutors were well-trained as they assisted with a range of academic writing needs, including referencing, reviewing academic work and providing guidance with formulating well-structured sentences and paragraphs. Participants R1, R2, R5 and R14 expressed that tutors were well-trained because they performed their duties professionally and had the foundational skills needed to guide students effectively in their writing tasks:

“They're well trained because first of all it's all about writing and guiding people on how to write, so they've got the basic training...that they need to execute their duties effectively” (R2).

“Yeah, I think they're trained well because they explain how you write your paragraphs, how you break them down and so forth” (R1).

“They are well-trained because they never struggle with questions pertaining to research... and all academic related work” (R14).

“I think they are well trained because they assist with almost everything that you require as a postgraduate student from your referencing, going through your work and assisting wherever possible” (R5).

These student comments highlight the supportive role of Writing Centre tutors in guiding and mentoring postgraduate students. Tutors act as coaches, commentators, and allies, providing tailored feedback on organisation, style, content, and the writing process. They help students understand disciplinary conventions and develop their academic voice, which is especially important for those transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate writing expectations (Liu and Harwood 2022). Many postgraduate students seek out Writing Centre tutors not just for technical help, but also for guidance, encouragement, and clarification of academic expectations. Tutors often fill a gap left by busy lecturers, offering a more caring and approachable source of support (Okuda and Anderson 2018; Okuda 2020; Solmaz 2021; Liu and Harwood 2022). Student respondents valued tutor approaches where they effectively broke down concepts making it easier for students to understand and apply the necessary elements in their work:

“They are well trained because basically they broke down everything...to make it easier for me, the way they were explaining the concepts and what is it that I need to put in” (R1).

This comment from R1 underlines the challenges faced by postgraduate students at UoTs, highlighting the need for friendly and supportive spaces to guide students as

they engaged in academic writing. Many students, especially those for whom English is a second language, struggle with sentence-level issues (grammar, vocabulary) and discourse-level challenges (organising ideas, developing arguments) (Kotamjani and Hussin 2017; Jeyaraj 2018; Lin and Morrison 2021; Muflihun and Tohamba 2021). In addition, difficulties in developing critical thinking skills, analysing and synthesising information, and understanding how to avoid plagiarism are common (Jeyaraj 2018; Muflihun and Tohamba 2021). Therefore, establishing welcoming, supportive spaces - where guidance, mentorship, and community are prioritised, is essential for helping students overcome these barriers and succeed in their academic writing journeys.

In as much as participants provided positive feedback on their experiences, some expressed opposing viewpoints indicating that tutors required additional training specific to postgraduate student support. Some participants felt that tutors lacked sufficient understanding of research, especially at the PhD level. Concerns were raised by postgraduate students R3 and R5 about some tutors being recent graduates themselves who might lack the knowledge and pedagogical skills needed to support them with their academic writing challenges:

“I feel like for some of the tutors they don't really understand research because maybe they are also still in their early stages of research and I feel like there is need for like more training with regards to research, especially when you're at PHD level cause already you have done like research in your masters and you really need someone who understands what it means to be doing research at such a level” (R3).

“As students or recent graduated themselves, they may not possess the breadth of knowledge or pedagogical training to address the diverse range of issues students face. This limitation can lead to inconsistencies, as tutors may offer solutions based on their own understanding, which may not align with the lecturers' expectations or methodologies” (R5).

The sentiments from the interviewed postgraduate students underscore the need for tutor training that is tailored to assisting postgraduate students and more focused on postgraduate academic writing challenges. This is in line with the Human Capital Theory (Becker 1964) which conceptualises education and training as investments that

enhance individuals' productive capacities and contribute to organisational and societal outcomes. Structured tutor training programmes enhance institutional capacity by professionalising tutoring roles and reducing inefficiencies associated with poorly supported postgraduate writers.

The data revealed that tutors were trained on how to prepare for consultations with students. Practitioners expressed that they encouraged tutors to get students to submit their work ahead of time via the online booking system enabling tutors to read, review and prepare for the session.

"We train tutors what to do when they have a student sitting in front of him or in front of her? We train tutors to prepare for a consultation. We encourage those that make appointment to submit the work that needs attention of a tutor ahead of the presentation to allow the tutor an opportunity to look at the work and prepare accordingly. So whether the student is postgraduate or undergraduate, if that particular part of the submission is done before the appointment, then tutors know how to handle that" (P1).

The above comment shows that the tutor is required to prepare for the session before the actual one-on-one session. This type of preparation can be valuable in terms of getting the tutor to familiarise themselves with the student's writing, to think about questions to engage in during the session and plan for the session. These aspects discussed in tutor training are meant to equip tutors with a variety of strategies and techniques to improve their engagement with students. The study found that more emphasis was needed on supporting postgraduate students. Some indicated a lack of emphasis on strategies that tutors can use in their engagements with postgraduate students:

"I'm guilty of that... it's something that I'm planning now...I started really realising that now you know the detailed support for the undergrads is there, it's solid now the foundation has been laid. So now I need to work on the postgraduate support. So I know that it's something that I need to work on" (P4).

Writing Centre tutor training typically targets undergraduate students' needs (Schiera 2018; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). There is a noted absence of training that equips tutors to handle the specific writing and academic challenges faced by postgraduate students, such as the need for a confident authorial voice and understanding of disciplinary conventions (Clarence 2020). Training with an emphasis on postgraduate support was recognised as an area needing improvement in this study. Many participants indicated that training was limited, especially training designed for assisting postgraduate students with research writing. Some tutors received only one basic training session which focused on student consultations:

“Well, unfortunately as a tutor at the Writing Centre, I think 'cause we I only had like one training. I only attended one training and I think there was only one training that was done for us so there's really nothing much that I've learned there. It was just basics on how to consult well with students” (T12).

“Training takes place quite late in the year when the academic programme has started, I think that is one barrier” (P1).

This study found that timing and frequency of tutor training at both institutions were a challenge with training often taking place late in the academic year thereby creating challenges in adequately preparing tutors before they started consulting with students.

“So, the thing is you can't tell the person in January starting a job that this is how you are expected to do it and think they will hold that until December. There must be a constant reminder equipping tutors, because also remember students come, it's different students that you find” (P1).

Tutor training is often conducted within a short timeframe, typically at the beginning of a semester. For example, at the Academic Writing Centre (AWC), new tutors receive less than an hour of training with minimal follow-up sessions throughout the academic year (Saydam 2019). This condensed training schedule leaves tutors feeling unprepared for real-world challenges during tutorial sessions, creating a “sink or swim” situation (Saydam 2019). In line with Human Capital theory (Becker 1964) this therefore underscores the necessity of systematic, ongoing tutor development, rather

than ad hoc or once-off training, positioning tutor learning as an asset that yields long-term academic returns.

This study further reports that a major challenge faced was capacity constraints thereby limiting the ability to engage in regular training workshops and subsequently support more students. Participants explained that resource shortages, staff limitations and logistical difficulties, strained Writing Centre operations:

“Ok. Number one, is capacity, right? So we would like to roll out to many, many more students, but we don’t have the capacity in terms of the numbers” (P2).

“Its resources, it comes down to resources, you know, staff capacity... that also impacts a lot on what we can do you” (P4).

Writing Centres frequently operate on restricted budgets, relying on institutional funding, external grants, or pay-for-service models. Both the DUT and MUT Writing Centres are externally funded by the UCDG. This financial limitation affects the ability to provide comprehensive training programmes that address diverse tutoring needs (Cheatle and Cotos 2020; Barron *et al.* 2023). Limited resources often mean fewer tutors are available to meet increasing demands from students. This shortage places additional pressure on existing staff and reduces the time available for thorough training and mentorship.

Participants expressed that while there were plans for regular training sessions every two weeks to enhance tutor skills, the current schedule was often disrupted due to other commitments thereby leading to infrequent training.

“So ideally what was the plan was that we would have like every single two weeks, you know something like this going to deal with upgrading the tutor skills, but because of the way that we become overwhelmed at times with other activities it ends up not materialising, so you’ll find that the training is only when you come in right here. It’s only when you come in. But during the year. So that’s something that we need to work on during the year. We don’t really build on the capacities as we should be” (P6).

Some participants highlighted that training lacked a structured format, and improvements were needed to enhance its structure.

“It's sort of difficult for us newer Writing Centres. Because you know that our training is not structured per se, you know. But I think they are various components that you can benefit from through our training. But the thing is our training is not well structured currently” (P6).

Structured training programmes in Writing Centres are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of writing tutors and improving the overall quality of support provided to students. Structured training programmes often embed both theory and practice, enabling tutors to understand and apply Writing Centre pedagogy effectively. This integration helps tutors transform their teaching and learning approaches, making them more responsive to student needs (Carstens and Rambiritch, 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Thus, Carstens and Rambiritch (2021) recommend that training should include a strong theoretical foundation, incorporating various educational theories to adapt to specific institutional contexts. Structured and theoretically embedded training programmes for tutors can enhance their understanding of Writing Centre pedagogy and improve their ability to support students' cognitive development (Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). This approach helps tutors understand their roles better and apply appropriate strategies in their tutoring practices.

The views above underscores the need for structured, well-planned and more frequent tutor training programmes. Furthermore, some participants felt that training may not fully equip tutors to address the diverse and unpredictable challenges faced by postgraduate students.

“I feel like no training can actually prepare you enough for dealing with postgraduate students because they always have different kind of problems that they come with” (T7).

Participant T7's comments highlight the complex space that Writing Centre tutors work in which at times requires them to engage in proactive self-learning to support students effectively.

"When consulting online, I had to learn some of the things on my own, so I would also support that Writing Centres need to continuously train in how to stay updated or in how to keep on performing well in terms of helping a student" (T12).

Inadequate training for Writing Centre tutors can significantly hinder their ability to support student writers effectively. This issue can manifest in several ways, including a lack of preparation for addressing emotional and mental health concerns, insufficient guidance on tutoring strategies, and challenges in adapting to diverse student needs. Many tutors feel unprepared to handle emotionally overwhelmed students. A study by Degner *et al.* (2015) found that 57% of Writing Centre tutors and administrators experience mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, which can affect their tutoring abilities. The lack of training in responding to emotional distress leaves tutors feeling inadequate and uncertain about how to provide appropriate support.

This research found that Writing Centre tutor training was often customised in relation to identified needs and gaps. The approach is student-centred, ensuring tutors are equipped to assist with various practical challenges that they experience when consulting with postgraduate students.

"What is it they need...I've even pitched the training at that level you know. ...what would it take for you to actually sit with that student? ...I focus on.... these are the needs of our students and how can we assist?" (P4).

Tutors often report a lack of detailed instructions on how to handle specific challenges during consultations (Mack 2024). This lack of detailed instructions can lead to uncertainty and difficulty in effectively supporting students. For example, they may struggle with balancing writer-centred and tutor-dominant approaches or addressing complex writing issues. This gap in practical training can lead to ineffective consultations and frustration for both tutors and students (Saydam 2019). This

illustrates the need for focused training which equips Writing Centre tutors with the tools and knowledge to effectively assist postgraduate students in their writing.

Without appropriate training, tutors may struggle to provide meaningful feedback or foster critical thinking in students, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes (Saydam 2019). A lack of training can exacerbate tutors' stress and mental health challenges, particularly when they feel unprepared to handle complex consultations (Degner *et al.* 2015). Consequently, students may perceive Writing Centre consultations as unhelpful if tutors appear uncertain or lack the skills to address their needs (Appleby-Ostroff 2017). It is therefore important for Writing Centres to develop structured training that integrates theoretical foundations, practical exercises, and reflective practices to equip tutors with the skills needed for diverse consultations (Fitzgerald and lanetta 2016). These training sessions need to meet the learning and development needs of tutors so that they can offer quality services to students that come to the Writing Centre.

Well designed and carefully planned tutor training can have significant benefits including supporting tutors and instilling confidence in their tutoring. This was raised as an important aspect of the Writing Centre tutor training initiatives. Participants highlighted how training is meant to overcome self-doubt and encourage tutors to engage in conversations to build their confidence.

"I think it capacitates people to feel confident that we are all there to learn how to communicate clearly through our writing. And it also starts to happen through our speaking as well. You know, because tutoring is a conversation, a discussion, if it's being led by open-ended questions, then, then those things are going to start emerging and if one learns through that practicing of that kind of behaviour" (P3).

"It's the ideas that you're trying to express in writing and the criticality that hopefully is growing and the problem solving that's growing and developing within that individual" (P3).

"I think for me the training has been mostly around building that confidence. You know, in terms of the academic writing, reading, research, because you know, some might be knowledgeable but lack confidence. So, when you're assisting students, whether

undergrad or postgrad, we are learning from each other, you are not there to just impart knowledge, but you are also learning from the students” (P4).

These views highlight how through open-ended conversations tutors can create a relaxed and friendly learning environment for them and their students. Through these conversations tutors build their confidence, get to know their students and their needs and in turn enable students to open up and share their writing challenges. This strategy is aligned to Writing Centre ethos of providing ‘writing companionship’ to users.

“With tutorship at the Writing Center, emphasis is on providing writing companionship to assist students to think critically about their work. Whatever they have put down or whatever is still in their heads, they have to think critically about their written work or what they intend to write” (P2).

Writing companionship is characterised by collaborative discussions, individualised feedback, and a focus on long-term writing development. This is significant particularly for postgraduate students who often face their research journey alone. Postgraduate students often experience a unique and challenging journey marked by feelings of loneliness and isolation (Ray *et al.* 2019; Kalubi *et al.* 2020; Cantor 2020; Barry and Cocoran 2024). These emotional struggles can negatively impact mental health, academic progress, and overall well-being. Tutors therefore act as mentors, coaches, commentators, counsellors, allies, and teachers, providing a range of support that includes feedback on writing mechanics and strategies for effective communication (Gustafsson and Ganobcsik-Williams 2016; Liu and Harwood 2022).

This subtheme highlighted perceptions of tutor abilities and training gaps which revealed a complex and nuanced picture of Writing Centre support. Many postgraduate student respondents acknowledged the valuable role tutors play, highlighting their ability to offer clear advice on academic writing and research, as well as their supportive, approachable manner - especially in light of the many challenges postgraduate students face. However, not all feedback was positive. Some students expressed frustration, noting that certain tutors lacked a deep understanding of research processes and methodologies, which limited the depth of support provided. While practitioners encourage the use of systems like the online booking platform to

manage time and submissions more effectively, broader structural issues remain. Training opportunities for tutors are often limited and Writing Centres themselves face constraints in both funding and staffing capacity. These challenges point to a need for stronger institutional investment in tutor development and Writing Centre resources, to ensure that all students receive the quality of support they need throughout their academic journeys.

The following theme discusses tutor training on the complexities of academic discourse and how structured training is needed to effectively support postgraduate students.

5.7.2 Training in critical thinking, academic voice, diversity and inclusion

Many students struggle with academic writing and reading, which are foundational skills for success in higher education (Elliott *et al.* 2019; Anwar and Sailuddin 2022; Nejadghanbar *et al.* 2022). According to Arbee (2020), academic discourse is often described as ‘no one’s mother tongue,’ making it difficult for students to adapt without proper guidance. Writing Centres play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by providing targeted support to help students navigate the complexities of academic discourse. As a result, tutors need structured training on ways in which to work with students in improving their academic reading and writing.

Participants in this study explained that many students struggle with understanding how to read an academic article effectively and what key information to extract, paraphrase and integrate into their writing. Hence, Writing Centre tutor training as affirmed by participants often incorporates a focus on reverse outlining and helping students with writing, specifically addressing challenges in reading and analysing academic texts.

“We often use reverse outlining, especially when we’re helping the students with their writing... because you get students who actually do not know how to read an article and what to take out of that article” (T7).

A significant part of Writing Centre tutor training focuses on paraphrasing with participants explaining that sessions incorporate activities and discussions around understanding the definition of paraphrasing and its application along other academic

writing strategies. Participants acknowledged training in this critical area of postgraduate academic writing:

“Maybe it's just revision on the techniques that we use with the students. Cause a lot of our trainings puts emphasis on [paraphrasing]... In most cases we use paraphrasing, but what is paraphrasing, you know? So, we do get training on that and other important techniques” (T7).

Tutor participants in this study reported that they engage in reading and responding to academic texts. Some participants explained that they received regular training where they are provided with journal articles to read as part of their ongoing professional development, along with monthly sessions focused on various topics relating to Writing Centre pedagogy.

“We do get trained in terms of reading academic articles... we get a lot of materials to read” (T7).

Writing Centre tutor training is further meant to stimulate thinking and promote understanding of Writing Centre pedagogy (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). The findings indicate that training approaches were aimed at promoting the concept of critical thinking for both tutors and the students they work with. Participants expressed how the training offered techniques, activities and strategies to learn to think critically and delve deeper into ideas from academic texts. One of the practitioner participants expressed the significance of critical thinking and these approaches in training so that tutors can use these techniques in their work particularly with postgraduate students who struggle with building critical arguments and showing their ability to critique information and use their academic voice.

“If one learns then to dig into ideas a little bit more deeply than just on the surface and think critically about them then then that's what I hope tutors would be doing with postgraduate students” (P3).

These activities enable tutors to engage in reading strategies that can be used in the consultations with postgraduate students. Participants further revealed that these reading and response activities encourages deep, critical thinking and equips them with useful techniques that they can use in their work with students and in their own studies as postgraduate students.

Postgraduate students often require comprehensive research writing support as they struggle with academic writing, particularly in terms of adhering to field-specific conventions. Many postgraduate students enter their programmes with limited academic writing experience, particularly in areas such as argumentation, synthesis of sources, and critical analysis. This deficiency can hinder their ability to produce deep, critical analysis in their research and high-quality research outputs (Sumarwati *et al.* 2021; Afolabi *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate writing is often marked by increased complexity, which can overwhelm students who lack foundational writing skills (Maasdorp and Holtzhausen 2015).

Aligned to the need for postgraduate students to be able to critique academic texts and paraphrase is the contentious issue of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This study found that Writing Centre tutors face challenges with students plagiarising and using AI-generated content. The findings show that postgraduates often present well-written work but struggle to provide proper references thereby leaving tutors uncertain about the sources used:

“Yeah. So, I think there's more challenges and also with the ChatGPT, how they just take everything, it just brings a lot of challenges. They would write it, it would look good and all, but where do they get the references now?” (T8).

“We try to let them know that you can see that this content is not properly credited. Therefore, you would advise them to go and try to paraphrase” (T7).

The emergence of AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT introduced new dynamics in writing support. Writing Centres now face the challenge of integrating AI into their practices while ensuring students develop critical thinking and independent writing skills. AI tools support various levels of writing assistance, from basic technical support

to advanced text transformation, which can significantly enhance writing outcomes, including critical thinking and motivation (Jin, Lin and Lai 2024). However, there are concerns about over-reliance on AI tools, which may affect the authenticity of writing. Coman and Cardon (2024) note that while AI-generated content is often seen as professional and effective, it may lack sincerity in some contexts. The advent of AI therefore means that tutors must be trained to guide students on how to use AI tools ethically and effectively without relying on them as substitutes for genuine academic effort (Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam 2023).

The Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have significantly reshaped the roles and practices of Writing Centre tutors. These developments have created both challenges and opportunities, requiring tutors to adapt their pedagogical strategies and technological competencies. The pandemic necessitated a shift from face-to-face tutoring to remote and hybrid models. Tutors had to learn new technologies, such as Zoom, MS Teams, and digital whiteboards, to facilitate online consultations effectively (Rempel and Friesen 2022; Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam 2023). This transition prompted the need for innovative strategies, such as synchronous discussions combined with written feedback, to maintain student engagement and ensure effective academic support (Khumalo and Onwuegbuchulam 2023). Despite these challenges, Writing Centre tutors demonstrated resilience by adapting their roles through innovative approaches. For example, peer tutors at the Wits School of Education Writing Centre employed strategies like anticipatory planning and flexibility to sustain academic support during increased student enrollment in online programmes (WURU Programme) (Namakula and Kadenge 2024).

This study found that tutor training programmes were centred on pedagogical approaches to Writing Centre work focusing on collaborative, inclusive interactions with students. Participants explained that tutors are trained on collaborative and dialogic approaches that underpin Writing Centre work. Writing Centre tutors are expected to engage students in discussions about their writing, fostering critical thinking and independence rather than merely correcting errors (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Hence, understanding the value of pedagogical approaches are imperative for tutors' engagements with postgraduate students.

This study further shows how Writing Centre tutor training is driven and framed by contextual aspects such as student diversity and needs at both UoTs. Findings show that in both case study UoTs the student population was predominantly African, and students were largely multilingual often coming from lower-quintile schools. This understanding shapes the approach to Writing Centre tutoring and support for students. With the increasing diversity of university populations, Writing Centres need to be able to adapt their services to meet the needs of multilingual and ESL students. This emphasises the need for tailored and specialised training programmes that focus on language acquisition and cultural differences where tutors are equipped with the skills to support students effectively. Such programmes have been shown to improve tutor confidence, increase the number of users to the Writing Centre, and the quality of support provided to multilingual students (Kennell 2014; Landry *et al.* 2023).

South African universities face unique challenges related to multilingualism and socio-economic disparities, necessitating training programmes that address these complexities (Clarence 2019). Moreover, Writing Centres in different countries must adapt to cultural norms and expectations regarding academic writing. In South Africa, for instance, Writing Centres often serve as spaces for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between students and academic discourse (Arbee and Samuel 2015). South African universities are home to students who speak a wide range of languages, often transitioning from home languages to English as the medium of instruction. Writing Centres help students navigate this shift by offering collaborative, scaffolded support that improves academic writing, especially for English Second Language (ESL) students (Archer 2010; Mgodana-Zide and Mukuna 2023).

Furthermore, Writing Centres cater to diverse student populations, including undergraduate students transitioning into higher education, postgraduate researchers, and multilingual students. Thus, training programmes must prepare tutors to address these varied needs effectively (Fogarty 2020). In multilingual contexts like South Africa, tutor training should encompass strategies for supporting students who write in English as an additional language. This includes helping students navigate linguistic challenges while respecting their linguistic identities (Clarence 2019). The Writing Centres also recognise and value students' multilingual and multicultural backgrounds, encouraging the use of diverse linguistic resources and supporting the

development of a broader academic identity (Archer 2010; McKinney 2022). Writing Centres are positioned to address historical exclusions and inequalities in South African higher education by providing access to academic literacies for all students, not just those already familiar with academic English (Archer 2010; Mdoana-Zide and Mukuna 2023).

Students' perceptions of Writing Centre tutor training are shaped by their experiences during consultations and their expectations of the services offered. Discrepancies can arise between what students expect and what tutors are trained to provide, especially when students perceive the Writing Centre as a “fix-it shop” (Winder *et al.* 2016; Buck 2023). Surveys and interviews reveal that while students appreciate the emphasis on writing development, mismatches in expectations can lead to dissatisfaction (Winder *et al.* 2016; Alowayid 2020).

In line with the concept of diversity of students, participants highlighted how some Writing Centre training sessions incorporate how to best assist a diversity of students inclusive of students with disabilities. The findings show that training sessions included ensuring inclusivity and ensuring tutors were sensitised to using the correct terminology, such as ‘persons with disabilities’ to avoid inappropriate language when working with students with disability.

“We had to revise our tutor guide to include guidelines on how best as a Writing Centre or as Writing Centre tutors, we assist persons with disabilities. And also to sensitise our tutors on the current terminology, we really have to be inclusive, so we realised it was vitally important for us to be able to teach our tutors to use the correct nomenclature...So what we train our tutors on is different every year and every year we identify a need we identify a gap ... we identified the gap that we are not fully prepared to assist persons with disabilities, so it has emerged from previous consultations. But we haven't done that in previous years to train our tutors on that, so that is a new thing that we have added to our training” (P2).

Writing Centres play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education. A study by Mhlomo *et al.* (2023) at a University of Technology in Durban, South Africa found that by using inclusive pedagogy, Writing Centres facilitated the

inclusion of disadvantaged students. Inclusive pedagogy in Writing Centres is grounded in care, humanistic values, and the recognition of each student's unique context (Govender 2023; Namakula 2024). This approach extends opportunities and support to all students, rather than differentiating only for some, and aims to transform learning environments to be accessible and welcoming for everyone. By providing care-infused support and opportunities for collaborative learning, Writing Centres empower students to succeed academically and personally (Carroll 2018; Okuda and Anderson 2018).

Writing centres often support students across multiple disciplines. The findings indicate that in as much as Writing Centre tutor training is meant to equip tutors to work with students from all disciplines there are particular aspects that require collaboration with discipline experts. Participants shared that some tutors were trained to handle different disciplinary requirements, and they were prepared for specific aspects of postgraduate work, such as assisting engineering students, through collaboration and specialised training. One of the Writing Centres in this study served different faculties but primarily engineers who use the IEEE referencing technique instead of the DUT Harvard system. The findings show that in these instances additional support may be required:

“We are unique in the sense that we service different faculties here at Steve Biko...mostly engineers. The engineering faculty use IEEE, so we had to request the engineering subject librarian to come in and capacitate our tutors with how best to assist students with this particular referencing style, which is different from what we have taught them. We collaborate with the library; we collaborate with even lecturers.” (P2).

The location of the Writing Centres, especially in the case of DUT which has several campuses, means that students from a particular faculty may become the majority visitors in that campus Writing Centre, and therefore they may have needs that differ in some ways from students in another campus. In these instances, specific training may be beneficial so that tutors are aware of the needs of students from that faculty.

Similarly, tutor training has evolved from a generic approach to a more specialised one. This study shows that Writing Centre tutor training is now tailored to disciplinary

needs with subject-specific guidance. Effective Writing Centre support requires tutors to be attuned to the disciplinary conventions and sensitive aspects of students' fields, whether technical, creative, or socially nuanced. A 'tutor as partner' approach (Gillespie and Lerner 2008) ensures that tutors guide rather than dictate, preserving students' agency and creative processes. This collaborative dynamic aligns with the idea of 'writing fellows' (Babcock and Thonus 2012), where tutors work alongside students as disciplinary allies, not authority figures. Writing fellows are typically undergraduate or peer tutors who partner with students in writing-intensive courses, offering feedback and guidance throughout the writing process. Their role is to act as collegial partners, helping students navigate disciplinary writing conventions without assuming the role of an instructor or evaluator (O'Neill 2008; Guenzel *et al.* 2014; Monty 2016). By working within the discipline, writing fellows help demystify academic expectations and foster a sense of shared inquiry, making academic writing more accessible and less intimidating for students (Guenzel *et al.* 2014; Monty 2016). Such an approach not only enhances student confidence but also upholds the Writing Centre's role as a dialogic, rather than prescriptive, space. One practitioner expressed the following:

"I think what's been helpful is I've had someone come in from Fine Arts, to talk about how to approach tutoring fine art students, so I think that my training, the training needs and the energy that I've put in around training is more to do with the disciplinary requirements of the kinds of texts that the tutors work with where I come from" (P3).

Furthermore, tutors faced a delicate challenge when working with students' creative ideas, especially in fields such as creative writing and Fine Arts. The difficulty was offering feedback without overstepping into the creative content itself. For instance, while discussing a student's conceptual artwork, innocent remarks might unintentionally be perceived as interfering with the student's original concept. This can lead to tension, particularly with Fine Art students, as they may feel their ideas are being misunderstood or altered.

"You walk a very fine line when someone comes to you with their creative ideas and you're trying to tutor them, and you've probably experienced that with working with creative writing. And you know, how do you and make someone understand how they

can improve something without kind of stepping over that line into the actual creative content...Because that's been very problematic for the tutors, especially with the fine art students" (P3).

Some participants felt that Writing Centre tutors were not sufficiently trained when it came to understanding concepts outside their field of expertise.

"They're not trained enough because sometimes you find that with your consultation, it's difficult for some of them to grasp a certain concept, because they're not in that field. So, what I'm trying to say is that the Writing Centre it's not designed for particular fields. So, I feel like Writing Centre tutors should also be trained like constantly there should be a constant thing that happens whereby they are reminded that they don't belong to a specific field, they don't need to understand the jargon in that field" (R3).

Many Writing Centres focus on generalist training, which may be insufficient for postgraduate students who need more specialised support (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; González and Del Carmen González Videgaray 2022; Welch *et al.* 2022). As has been highlighted, tutors often feel unprepared to assist students in technical or discipline-specific writing tasks, such as those required in engineering or scientific fields (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; Jones *et al.* 2020). Discipline-specific training is important, as it enables tutors to understand the unique writing conventions and expectations within different fields.

A major challenge in supporting postgraduate students was the lack of subject-specific knowledge among Writing Centre tutors. The findings from this study show that tutors often had only a general understanding of research but struggled with discipline-specific jargon and concepts. Tutor participants T1 and T13 expressed the challenges experienced in tutoring in some fields:

"Maybe I can say one of the challenges dealing with research is you don't relate to their particular subject. You only have got the basic background per say on research" (T1).

“...You know, if someone is in the accounting finance department, they come with their jargon and they try to explain to me what they're talking about. I might not be able to catch on immediately... that's what we encounter” (T13).

Writing centre practitioners further expressed their challenges in appointing Writing Centre tutors from some disciplines such as engineering and sciences:

“But there are other challenges as well in terms of not having [tutors] in the sciences hard sciences to get the right numbers in terms of balance in our tutor composition. We would love to have tutors who have a background in engineering, in chemical engineering, electrical engineering or mathematics and have such a balance, but at times it's difficult to get these tutors and if when you get them some of them, they have so many commitments and they might leave you mid-year or at times they have to attend conferences” (P2).

This study reported that a barrier faced was the difficulty in recruiting tutors from certain disciplines. While discipline-specific knowledge was not taught, having tutors and students from the same field could improve communication and understanding during Writing Centre tutoring sessions.

“One challenge is that of recruiting adequately tutors that come from various disciplines. It becomes a bit problematic. In in as much as we do not teach discipline specific knowledge, yeah, but the language and the communication or conversation would be better enhanced between tutors and a student that come from the same this field, yeah” (P1).

Practitioner P1 highlighted that it would be valuable to recruit tutors from all disciplines to ensure that students are tutored by an individual who has knowledge of their field. However, resource and capacity constraints pose a challenge in the recruitment of tutors from diverse disciplines. Writing requirements can vary significantly between disciplines, making it difficult for Writing Centre tutors who must assist students from diverse academic backgrounds. For instance, what constitutes effective communication in one discipline may not apply in another, leading to confusion among students and tutors alike (Faulkner and Rohrbacher 2013; Evans 2023). Tutors often

lack the in-depth disciplinary knowledge that professors possess, making it difficult to provide optimal support for discipline-specific writing tasks (Evans 2023). Tutors face several challenges, including miscommunication, mismatched expectations, and the need to interpret lecturer feedback accurately. These issues are particularly pronounced in contexts where English is a foreign language, as seen in Asian Writing Centers (Mack 2024) where consultations can be hampered by misunderstandings due to language barriers, cultural differences, and differing expectations about the tutor's role. Issues such as student silence, misinterpretation of teacher feedback, and confusion over error correction are common. These challenges highlight the need for tutors to be trained in cross-cultural communication and to clarify writing session goals with students. Additionally, tutors must balance helping students with general writing conventions while also addressing the specific needs of different disciplines (Archer 2010; Evans 2023).

This study found that some Writing Centres collaborate with other departments such as the library to provide postgraduate students with practical skills inclusive of formatting page numbers, creating a table of contents and referencing.

"I can give an example of how we have collaborated with the library. The library conducts workshops on Word for Thesis and they have assisted our tutors in that respect. There are certain soft skills that you require as a tutor and I think our tutors are well capacitated to assist fellow postgraduate students because they come without those soft skills" (P2).

The collaboration between Writing Centres and libraries is a strategic partnership aimed at enhancing student success through integrated academic support. Collaborations provide opportunities for information literacy interventions, helping students develop critical skills in evaluating and using information effectively. This is particularly important as students often struggle with source credibility and integration into their writing (Graves, Anders and Balester 2017). Joint efforts between libraries and Writing Centres have been shown to improve research and writing skills, contributing to overall student success and retention. This is achieved through coordinated lesson planning, workshops, and classroom techniques (Bernstein *et al.* 2020).

The above sentiments further underscore the importance of collaboration between tutors, practitioners, librarians, and discipline experts such as lecturers. Writing Centre tutors are often required to possess specialised knowledge in the disciplines they support. For instance, postgraduate students may expect tutors to have expertise in their specific fields, such as chemistry, along with high English proficiency and experience in writing scientific articles (González and Del Carmen González Videgaray 2022). Similarly, engineering students benefit from tutors who have been trained to understand technical writing, even if the tutors themselves do not have a technical background (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; Jones *et al.* 2020). Interdisciplinary training methods have been shown to improve the effectiveness of writing tutors, particularly when they lack a background in the specific discipline they are supporting. Collaborative training programmes that involve academics from the relevant disciplines can enhance tutors' ability to provide valuable feedback to students (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018; Jones *et al.* 2020). Such programmes often include elements of genre theory and knowledge transfer to bridge the gap between general writing skills and discipline-specific requirements (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018).

The Writing Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal emphasises academic literacy development in management studies, highlighting the importance of tailoring support to specific disciplinary needs (Arbee and Samuel 2015). In addition, Writing Centres are shaped by their institutional settings as Kaufhold and Yencken (2021) state that institutional emphasis on either the product (finished text) or the process (learning and development) of writing shapes the Writing Centre's approach and the kind of support it provides to students (Kaufhold and Yencken 2021). Writing Centres at both MUT and DUT are also influenced by institutional strategic plans such as the ENVISION2030 for DUT and the MUT Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and MUT Strategic Plan (2026 -2030) for MUT.

To summarise, this sub-theme on perceptions of tutor abilities and training gaps reveals both the strengths and limitations of Writing Centre support. Many postgraduate students praised tutors for offering clear, practical advice on academic writing and research, and for providing encouragement during what is often a stressful and demanding stage of their studies. The supportive role tutors play - especially in

helping students navigate challenges unique to postgraduate work - was widely acknowledged. However, this positive feedback was tempered by concerns from some students who felt that certain tutors lacked a deep understanding of research writing, particularly in areas like methodology. These mixed perceptions point to a broader issue: while tutors strive to meet student needs, they themselves often face constraints. Training opportunities are limited, and Writing Centres must operate within tight budgets and with limited capacity. Practitioners do their best to support effective processes - such as encouraging timely submissions through the online booking system - but the structural challenges remain. Ultimately, these findings highlight the importance of more comprehensive tutor training, ongoing professional development, and greater institutional support to strengthen Writing Centres' ability to serve the postgraduate community with consistency and depth.

5.7.3 Reflecting on practice, role-trying and identifying areas for improvement

Participants explained that tutor training sessions included reflective discussions and activities where tutors shared their experiences and challenges. The study found that tutors further collaborate on strategies to better support students and this highlighted how Writing Centres function as Communities of Practice (CoPs). This ongoing collaboration allows tutors to learn from each other, adapt to changing student needs, and develop innovative tutoring techniques, especially during times of transition such as the shift to online learning during the pandemic (LeCluyse *et al.* 2021; Govender 2023).

“Oh, another important aspect of our training is that we get to reflect on our experiences as Writing Centre tutors. So, we reflect on what we have experienced and then we try and help each other on how to tackle different situations with students” (T1).

Reflective practices are essential in Writing Centres, fostering critical thinking, self-awareness, and continuous learning for tutors. The process of reflecting, identifying challenges in tutoring and collaborating working on ways in which to handle such challenges builds teamwork and inculcate a strong sense of community and shared purpose among tutors. According to Vebriana and Rukmini (2021), the process of working together to address tutoring challenges encourages tutors to share strategies,

learn from each other, and develop collective problem-solving skills. This ongoing collaboration is central to building a supportive and effective team environment.

“So, we also believe in reflexive practices because we know our students are coming from diverse backgrounds and we have to meet our students at their point of need” (P2).

“And so the training for me there is a lot of reflection and talking about oneself and where one is in the tutoring process and as a tutor, you know” (P3).

Tutor training practices also incorporated tutors reflection on how their work aligns to their institutional vision. Participants explained that tutor training sessions incorporate discussions and reflections of the institutions strategies, guiding principles and values. The findings indicate that tutors were provided with a grounding in these values to ensure that these were integrated into their daily Writing Centre practice.

“Currently, we have ENVISION2030. Our training is also geared towards attaining or you know, achieving the objectives ENVISION2030, the living values are the guiding principles in the work that we are doing. So even in the training we ensure that we are imparting those living values. We are sensitising our tutors to these living values, which they should practice in their daily work” (P2).

Structured training programmes that incorporate institutional goals ensure that tutors are prepared to support diverse student populations and contribute to transformative learning environments (Govender and Alcock 2020). These findings show that Writing Centre tutor training programmes can be designed to reflect the institution's priorities, such as promoting inclusivity, fostering academic literacy, and improving retention rates. For example, an academic literacies approach allows tutors to address institutional relationships of discourse and power while helping students navigate contested writing practices (Lea and Street 1998; Govender and Alcock 2020). Writing Centres that use an academic literacies approach are better positioned to support students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, helping them acculturate to academic practices without viewing their differences as deficits (Archer 2012; Van Rensburg and Nel 2022; Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza 2022). The

approach also promotes inclusive, context-sensitive support, acknowledging the social and cultural dimensions of writing and learning (Archer 2012; Archer 2023).

Participants explained that tutor training incorporates role-playing scenarios and interactive videos, including recorded mock tutoring sessions to provide practical learning experiences for tutors.

“We often do role-plays and get tutors to look at videos of actual tutoring sessions to try and analyse that and learn from it” (P3).

“What is valuable in our training is getting tutors to record videos of mock tutoring sessions and so trying to keep it sort of practical” (P3).

These interactions enable tutors to experience real-life tutoring situations and collaborate on how best to approach the variety of scenarios and diverse students who access Writing Centre services. In the South African higher education context, marked by linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity, this experiential component of training is especially valuable for novice tutors. It offers them a safe space to navigate and reflect on their roles, particularly in multilingual and often unequal academic environments (Rambiritch, Drennan and Dison 2024). Furthermore, training workshops that involve role-playing rely on behaviourist mechanisms to instil effective tutoring practices. Behaviourist theory emphasises learning as a change in observable behaviour shaped through reinforcement, modelling, and repetition (Skinner 1953).

The creative and participatory nature of this training enables tutors to feel more relaxed and confidently participate in their learning. This is aligned to the concept of ‘learning through doing’ in Writing Centre work which is central to experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984), and foundational to Writing Centre pedagogy. McKinney (2013) affirms that tutor development is most effective when training simulates the actual tutoring experience which is dialogic, reflective, and practice based. This is further underpinned by social constructivist theory (Vygotsky 1978), which highlights the importance of learning through social interaction. As tutors engage with real or simulated consultations, they internalise the collaborative and student-centred ethos of Writing

Centre work, an approach that supports meaningful peer learning and transformation in South African academic spaces (Archer and Richards 2011).

An additional aspect of the tutor training as identified by participants was the involvement in the revision of the existing Writing Centre tutor guide. Participants explained how a tutor guide was created to provide resources and support especially for new tutors and they had the opportunity to work on revising the guide and including valuable aspects that could be used as a guide for tutors.

“And there’s a tutor guide that we’ve put together. I’m not sure how much the tutors actually interact with that guide, but it’s intended to provide sort of resources ...and I believe would give a bit of confidence, especially to a new tutor” (P3).

Writing Centre tutor training programmes rely on a variety of resources and strategies to equip tutors with the knowledge necessary to support student writers effectively. These resources are informed by Writing Centre pedagogy, disciplinary conventions, and reflective practices. Writing Centres often compile handbooks or online resources that include examples of effective tutoring practices, common challenges in academic writing, and strategies for addressing them (LibGuides: Writing Centre Tutor Resources, n.d.; McGill Writing Centre 2025). These resources and the comments from participants affirm that apart from the hands-on or practical training provided to tutors, they are also provided with valuable learning material, journal articles and other reading material to support their growth and development as tutors.

Additionally, the tutor training promoted the exchange of ideas between returning and new tutors thereby fostering collaboration and peer to peer learning.

“...and I think we also rely to a certain degree on sort of a lot of cross pollination of ideas amongst the tutors, you know, with the returning tutors interacting with the new tutors” (P3).

Cooperative tutoring, as coined by Scharold (2012), involves experienced and novice tutors working together with a student, allowing new tutors to learn different tutoring approaches and strategies from their peers. This method creates a sense of

camaraderie and mutual learning, which serves as ongoing professional development for tutors. Furthermore, the interactions offer unique dynamics and learning opportunities for the new tutors, allowing them to see effective tutoring strategies in action and understand how to adapt to different student needs (Aldohon 2020).

The findings revealed that induction and orientation training for new tutors included Writing Centre approaches, strategies, tutor roles, consultation processes, student interactions and administrative tasks. The training aims to induct and prepare tutors to support both undergraduate and postgraduate students by addressing their specific needs. Participants further indicated that returning tutors who are often referred to as senior tutors play a significant role in the tutor training through sharing their experiences and offering valuable ways for new tutors to engage with students.

“The first training which also included orientation into the Writing Centre practice takes place I would say at the beginning of the year or immediately when the new tutors are appointed and that runs over 2 full days” (P1).

“The kind of training that takes place where it's introducing the newly appointed tutors into the Writing Centre practice. What is the Writing Center? What does it do? And also looking at what is expected of them? As Writing Center, how do they interact with students, the tools and the tones? And also giving them an idea of a consultation process, what happens when consultation takes place? What do they do? Looking at also introducing them to the WC online how to handle and manage appointments and how to write reports. That that type of training is fairly detailed” (P1).

“We have the first kind of training, which is usually 2 days of training and here basically the training aims to initiate tutors into their roles as tutors at any level so that they are prepared to assist both undergraduate students and postgraduate students, because here will be teaching them how to conduct consultations, what is it that they are required to do? How can they make students comfortable? How can they meet students at their point of need? It doesn't matter if it is an undergraduate or a postgraduate. You still have to know the needs of the student. Why is the student here? Are they here to brainstorm? Are they here to discuss formulation of the topic? Are they here to discuss the area of investigation, their objectives, their aim objectives of

significance of study are maybe they are here for the methodology only or the literature review so” (P2).

Induction and orientation training programmes for Writing Centre tutors are essential for equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to support student writers effectively. Tutors are introduced to Writing Centre pedagogy, including collaborative learning, academic literacies, and socio-constructivist approaches to tutoring. This theoretical grounding helps tutors understand their role in fostering critical thinking and student independence (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Training emphasises the importance of understanding the contexts in which tutors work, such as multilingualism or disciplinary conventions, to provide tailored support (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023). Many Writing Centres begin training with orientation sessions that introduce tutors to the centre’s mission, goals, and operational procedures. For example, at the University of Ottawa’s Law School Writing Centre, orientation includes lectures on preparing for consultations, simulation exercises, and an introduction to the first-year legal research and writing programme (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Saydam 2019). Tutors are often required to read foundational texts such as “The Listening Eye” (Murray 1979) and “The Idea of a Writing Centre” (North 1984) to understand the philosophical underpinnings of Writing Centre work (Appleby-Ostroff 2017). These engagements which is evident in the tutor training initiatives in this study provides a sound theoretical and practical basis for tutors to understanding their role in student learning and development.

The interviews with practitioners revealed that some centres had a dedicated practitioner overseeing tutors and providing regular training sessions. These sessions occurred monthly or as needed, based on tutors’ challenges or areas requiring development. The structure depended on the relationship between the practitioner and tutors rather than a fixed schedule.

“So, each centre has a Writing Centre practitioner responsible for a certain number of tutors. So, there would be a regular structure. Programmes which are ongoing, it could be on a monthly basis. Or it could be as and when tutors have experienced problems or have challenges or need to be developed around a particular area of practice. So

those are quite regular and not structured but dependent on the relationship between the practitioner and the tutors in the particular sector” (P1).

Ongoing meetings and training sessions took place within individual Writing Centres. Some centres maintained an informal approach, while others ensured tutors participated in external workshops on topics related to referencing and database searches to enhance their tutoring and personal research skills.

“So, at the Writing Centre that I work at, we have ongoing meetings and my particular setting is very informal” (P3).

“...we have ongoing trainings within our own centres... We have monthly meetings sometimes when there are training workshops for other departments or the library or research, I always also request that my tutors be part of that because I know it's beneficial for their tutoring. You know it is instrumental even for their own research as postgraduate students” (P4).

Each Writing Centre identifies its own needs and gaps with practitioners focus on how best to assist both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

“Each centre identifies needs because we understand that each centre is unique, so each Writing Centre practitioner usually identifies some gaps or areas of need on how best to assist students, be they undergraduate or postgraduate students” (P2).

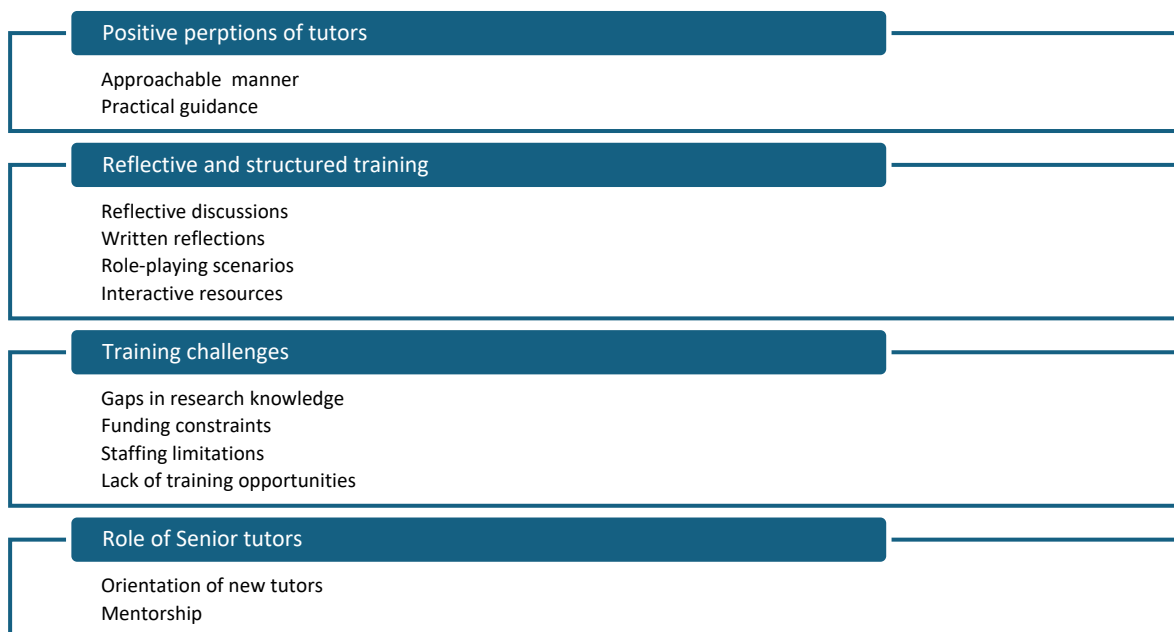
Participants further explained how training sessions enable tutors and practitioners to reflect on Writing Centre practices, challenges faced and areas for improvement. Practitioners shared how tutors provide feedback to help shape future training and support for incoming tutors.

“Tutors give us as practitioners perspective of what challenges they faced. Looking at the progress that they've made, their own development... Looking at the good and the bad and also highlighting things that we need to take into account and consider for the tutors that would come...we engage openly with tutors” (P1).

Ongoing training and development is crucial for Writing Centre tutors to refine their skills, adapt to evolving student needs, and deepen their understanding of Writing Centre pedagogy. These programmes integrate practical exercises, reflective practices, and discipline-specific approaches to ensure tutors remain effective throughout their tenure (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 2016). Successful programmes embed Writing Centre theory, writing pedagogy, and practical exercises, enabling tutors to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world tutoring scenarios. This approach fosters critical thinking and adaptability in tutors, supporting their cognitive and professional growth (Appleby-Ostroff 2017; Carstens and Rambiritch 2021; Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Furthermore, regular opportunities for tutors to reflect on their experiences, through narrative writing, feedback sessions, or guided reflection help deepen their understanding of their roles and improve their tutoring strategies (Govender and Ndadziyira 2023; Knorr and Edlich 2024). Moreover, training tailored to specific academic disciplines, such as engineering or law, enhances tutors' ability to provide relevant feedback and support. Interdisciplinary training also helps tutors without technical backgrounds become more effective in supporting students from various fields (Weissbach and Pflueger 2018).

In summary, reflective practice remains central to tutor development, and this is clearly embedded in the structure of current training sessions. Tutors actively engage in reflective discussions and written reflections, drawing from their own experiences and challenges in order to grow professionally. These moments of honest sharing create a supportive environment where both new and returning tutors learn from one another. Structured training sessions not only align with institutional goals but also include role-playing scenarios, interactive videos, and the use of a comprehensive tutor guide to support consistent practice. Orientation and induction for new tutors are thoughtfully designed, with senior tutors playing a key role in guiding and mentoring their peers. This ongoing exchange of ideas - whether through collaborative reflection or hands-on training activities - reinforces the importance of adaptability, empathy, and critical thinking in Writing Centre work. A visual summary of Theme 3 is provided in Figure 5.11 below.

Figure 5.11: Summary of Theme 3



Source: Author Generated (2025)

To conclude Theme 3, training practices within Writing Centres reflect a commitment to reflective learning, peer exchange, and structured development, yet challenges remain. Tutors engage in reflective discussions, written reflections, role-playing scenarios, and use interactive resources such as videos and tutor guides to build competence. Senior tutors play a vital role in orienting and mentoring new tutors, fostering an environment of shared learning. While many postgraduate students value tutors' approachable manner and practical guidance on academic writing, others highlight gaps in tutors' understanding of research methodologies. These mixed perceptions underscore the need for more robust and ongoing professional development. Despite practitioners' efforts to implement systems like online booking to streamline support, limitations in funding, staffing, and training opportunities persist. This highlights the pressing need for stronger institutional investment to enhance the quality and consistency of Writing Centre support.

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a qualitative interpretation and discussion of findings on the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate

students at two selected UoTs, DUT and MUT in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Findings from interviews with six Writing Centre practitioners, focus group discussions with fourteen tutors, and interviews with ten postgraduate students provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Writing Centre tutor training.

Three key themes emerged from the data collection, namely experiences of Writing Centre Services, techniques and strategies utilised, training practices, perceptions, and limitations. From these themes, nine subthemes emerged. Theme 1 highlighted how Writing Centres serve as inclusive learning spaces that promote accessibility and diversity, while also addressing common misconceptions that frame them as remedial or editing services rather than developmental support hubs. Feedback on tutor-student consultations emphasised the importance of constructive guidance in building students' confidence and academic writing. Theme 2 explored the collaborative, student-centred strategies used to support academic literacies, particularly among postgraduates, including techniques like the read aloud method and the use of digital tools to enhance reflection and engagement. However, challenges remain in supporting advanced research writing, pointing to a need for ongoing tutor development. Theme 3 focused on training practices, which centre on reflective learning, peer mentoring, role-playing, and structured resources such as tutor guides and interactive videos. Senior tutors play a key role in onboarding new tutors, yet limitations in funding, staffing, and institutional support continue to affect the consistency and depth of tutor training. In addition, the continuously evolving technologies mean that tutors also have to adapt to new realities such as artificial intelligence. Collectively, the themes underscore the value of Writing Centres while calling for stronger institutional investment to enhance their impact.

The findings revealed that tutors need specialised training in academic writing conventions, discipline-specific support and strategies for meeting the diverse needs of postgraduate students. In addition, the data highlighted the importance of techniques of emotional and psychological support in writing consultations, as well as the need for continuous professional development to keep pace with evolving academic demands.

The qualitative analysis underscored the critical role of Writing Centres in supporting postgraduate student success and highlighted the need for structured, context-sensitive training programmes. Thus, Writing Centres can become more effective in assisting postgraduate researchers and contribute to improving academic writing outcomes by addressing these needs. These findings form the basis of the development of a tutor training framework which is explored in Chapter Seven. The subsequent chapter to the current chapter, Chapter Six, provides an analysis and discussion of the quantitative findings of this study.

CHAPTER SIX: QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented the qualitative data and analysis from the data collected in this study. This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative data collected. The data was collected to gather empirical evidence on the main aim of the study which was to develop a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students. The study adopted a mixed method research design where the qualitative aspect involved the collection of data through two (2) focus group discussions with both DUT and MUT tutors; individual interviews with the Writing Centre practitioners of both institutions; as well as individual interviews with purposively selected postgraduate students. The quantitative aspect involved the collection of data through the administration of a closed-ended structured questionnaire to postgraduate students at both DUT and MUT. This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings obtained from the questionnaires distributed to postgraduate students at the two universities. The primary tool used for data collection was a structured, closed-ended questionnaire, which was meticulously designed to gather comprehensive insights into the experiences and perceptions of postgraduate students regarding the services provided by Writing Centre staff. The data collected was analysed using SPSS version 28, enabling both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

The chapter begins by detailing the descriptive statistics, including graphs, cross-tabulations, and other figures that illustrate the quantitative data collected from respondents. These visual representations provide a clear understanding of the demographic characteristics of the participants, as well as their experiences and satisfaction levels with Writing Centre services. In addition to descriptive statistics, the chapter employs inferential techniques such as correlations and chi-square tests to explore relationships between variables and assess the significance of these relationships. The interpretation of these tests is guided by p-values, with a traditional threshold of significance set at $p < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant result.

In presenting and analysing the findings, reference will be made to relevant supporting literature reviewed and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The literature and theoretical frameworks assisted with the interpretation of the findings apropos of the objectives of the study which were to:

- explore the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at a selected UoT in KZN.
- analyse the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- analyse postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff at selected UoTs in KZN.
- explore the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- develop an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a thorough analysis of the collected quantitative data, offering insights into the effectiveness of the Writing Centre services in supporting postgraduate students and highlighting areas where further improvements may be necessary.

6.2 THE SAMPLE

In total, the sample size required for the quantitative data collection was 364 as per Sekaran and Bougie's Sample Size Calculator provided in Chapter Four. The researcher used the WOnline platform to email postgraduate students a MS Forms link to the research questionnaire, together with the letter of information and consent, requesting postgraduate students who have utilised the services of the Writing Centre to participate in the study. Data collection was conducted over the defined period guided by the timeline of research activities which had been pre-determined by the researcher and supervisor. However, after repeated follow-ups, no new responses were forthcoming from the postgraduate students. As a result, data collection was concluded at 336 completed questionnaires, representing approximately 92% of the calculated sample size. Although slightly lower than the recommended target, the achieved sample size remains statistically acceptable and unlikely to compromise the

reliability of the findings. Nevertheless, this limitation is acknowledged, and the findings are interpreted with due caution regarding representativeness.

6.3 THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

There were 24 items in the research instrument, and they could be measured at either the nominal or ordinal level. Two (2) sections of the questionnaire were used to measure different themes, as shown below:

Section A	Biographical data
Section B	Usage of the Writing Centre

6.4 RELIABILITY STATISTICS

The two most important aspects of precision are reliability and validity (Ahmed and Ishtiaq 2021). Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. According to Samuels (2017), a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as “acceptable” for a newly developed construct.

Factor analysis was performed on the statements that constituted Section B (Usage of the Writing Centre). Three components (sub-themes) were identified. The Cronbach's Alpha score for each of the components that made up section B is shown in Table 6.1 below. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency, indicating how well a set of items measures a single unidimensional latent construct (Yun *et al.* 2023).

Table 6.1: Cronbach's alpha score for all items that constituted Section B

Section		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B1	Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction	4	0.946
B2	Tutor Competence	5	0.906
B3	Tutor-Student Interaction	6	0.945
All items included		15	0.948

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, revealing excellent reliability across all sections. Section B1, which focused on the

Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction with four (4) items, achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.946. Section B2, addressing Tutor Competence with five (5) items, yielded an alpha of 0.906. Section B3, concerning Tutor-Student Interaction with six (6) items, had an alpha of 0.945. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 to 0.95 is generally considered to indicate strong internal consistency, supporting the validity of the instrument (Tavakol and Dennick 2011; Wadkar *et al.* 2016). Cronbach's Alpha is widely used across different fields such as educational research, to ensure the reliability and validity of measurement instruments (Poh *et al.* 2019; Nawi *et al.* 2020; Izah *et al.* 2023). Overall, when all 15 items were combined, the questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.948, indicating strong internal consistency and supporting the validity of the instrument in capturing the key dimensions of the Writing Centre services as perceived by the postgraduate students.

6.5 FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis was conducted to explore the underlying structure of the data collected through the questionnaire. This statistical technique was employed to identify and group related variables, thereby reducing the data into a smaller set of factors that explain the observed patterns in responses. Factor analysis is a statistical technique used in quantitative research to find underlying correlations between observed variables, state Tavakol and Wetzel (2020). It reduces the number of variables in complex data sets, making them simpler and uncovering latent constructs, known as factors, that explain the observed correlations (Liebe 2021). By examining the interrelationships among the items, factor analysis helps to uncover the latent constructs that may not be directly observable but influence the responses of the participants (Sürücü *et al.* 2024). The analysis aimed to validate the theoretical constructs proposed in the study by determining whether the items within each section of the questionnaire clustered together as expected. This section details the process of conducting factor analysis, including the selection of the extraction method, rotation techniques, and criteria for determining the number of factors. The results of the factor analysis provide insights into the dimensionality of the constructs under investigation, offering a robust foundation for subsequent analyses and interpretations.

The matrix table come before a summarised table that shows the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test. Two tests that determine if data is suitable for structure detection are displayed in the KMO and Bartlett's Test table below. One statistic that shows the percentage of variance in the variables that could be attributed to underlying causes is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Shrestha 2021). In general, high scores (around 1.0) suggest that the data might benefit from a factor analysis. The factor analysis's findings are unlikely to be particularly helpful if the value is less than 0.50.

The hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix is tested using Bartlett's test of sphericity, which would suggest that the variables are unrelated and thus inappropriate for structure discovery (Wang and Shu 2021). A component analysis may be helpful with the data if the significance level has small values (less than 0.05). Only the Likert scale items are subjected to factor analysis. Some of the components separated into smaller parts. The rotated component matrix provides an explanation of this as explained below.

6.5.1 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test

As shown in Table 6.2, all requirements for factor analysis are met, namely that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity sig. value must be less than 0.05 and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value must be larger than 0.500.

Table 6.2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

	Section	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
			Approx. Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
B1	Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction	0.861	1528.154	6	< 0.001
B2	Tutor Competence	0.881	1646.731	10	< 0.001
B3	Tutor-Student Interaction	0.928	2818.911	15	< 0.001

Source: Author Generated (2025)

6.5.2 Rotated Component Matrix

Table 6.3: Rotated Component Matrix for Section B1

B1	Component
	1
I received the necessary assistance from the Writing Centre tutors	0.948
I am satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre	0.949
My academic writing has improved since I started visiting the Writing Centre	0.942
I can use what I learnt from the Writing Centre in other academic work	0.945
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 6.4: Rotated Component Matrix for Section B2

B2	Component
	1
I believe the Writing Centre tutors are well trained to carry out their work	0.923
The tutors are knowledgeable on how to conduct their work	0.955
The tutors are confident in their approach during consultations	0.946
The tutors equip me with knowledge of how to write academically	0.945
The tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations	0.484
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 6.5 Rotated Component Matrix for Section B3

B3	Component
	1
Writing Centre tutors have a good relationship with postgraduate students	0.902
The tutors listen to me during consultations	0.960
The tutors are able to explain things clearly to me during consultations	0.965
The tutors use various strategies and techniques in conducting consultations	0.937
The tutors allow me to ask questions for clarification during Writing Centre consultations	0.950
The tutors help me to understand what is required in my work	0.946
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Factor analysis is regarded as a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction (Jackman 2020). With reference to Table 6.3, Table 6.4, and Table 6.5 above, The

rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation, and the extraction method was principal component analysis. The number of variables with high loadings on each component is reduced by using this orthogonal rotation technique. It makes interpreting the elements easier. Factor analysis/loading demonstrates inter-correlations between variables, as was previously said. Measurement along a similar factor is implied by items of questions that loaded similarly. Effective measurement along the different components was achieved by looking at the content of things loading at or above 0.5 (and utilising the higher or highest loading in cases where items cross-loaded at greater than this value). Each sub-section's constituent phrases loaded flawlessly along a single component. This suggests that the statements that made up these parts accurately measured the objectives.

6.6 SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

This section presents an analysis of the biographical factors of the respondents, providing an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The biographical data collected includes variables such as gender, age, faculty affiliation, level of study, and duration of engagement with the Writing Centre. Understanding these factors is important as they offer context to the responses and can influence perceptions and experiences related to the Writing Centre services (Santos and Susin 2021; Bogner and Rosenthal 2022). Furthermore, the analysis of biographical factors not only serves to describe the sample population but also helps to identify potential patterns or trends that may emerge in relation to the study's key variables (Afanasyeva, Afanasyev and Pavlenko 2024). This section aims to highlight the diversity within the sample and to establish a foundation for understanding how these demographic factors may interact with the respondents' experiences and satisfaction levels with the Writing Centre services.

Table 6.6 describes the gender distribution.

Table 6.6: Gender distribution of respondents (n=336)

	Frequency	Percent
Male	121	36.0
Female	215	64.0

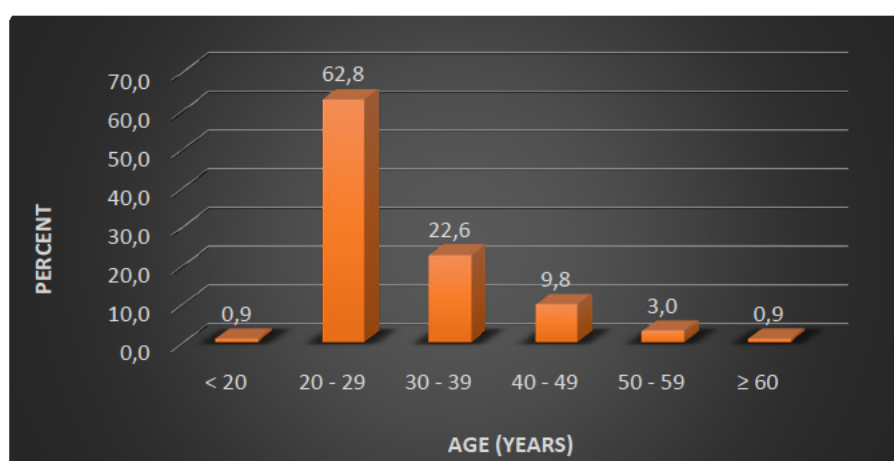
Total	336	100.0
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Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 6.6 illustrates the gender distribution of the study participants. Out of the 336 respondents, 121 (36.0%) identified as male, while 215 (64.0%) identified as female. This results in an overall male-to-female ratio of approximately 1:2, with a significant gender disparity observed ($p < 0.001$). This distribution highlights a higher representation of female respondents in the study. These findings are in line with research conducted by Broekhuizen and Spaul (2017) who found that in South Africa, females are 34% more likely to enrol in university compared to males and females are 56% more likely to complete any undergraduate qualification and 66% more likely to attain a degree than their male counterparts.

The figure below describes the age distribution of the respondents.

Figure 6.1: Age distribution of the respondents



Source: Author Generated (2025)

Figure 6.1 presents the age distribution of the study participants. The majority of respondents fall within the 20-29 age group, representing 62.8% of the sample. This is followed by the 30-39 age group, which accounts for 22.6% of participants. Smaller proportions are observed in the 40-49 (9.8%), 50-59 (3.0%), and ≥ 60 (0.9%) age brackets, with the youngest group, under 20 years, also representing 0.9% of the sample. This distribution indicates a predominantly younger population, with over 85% of respondents aged between 20 and 39 years ($p < 0.001$). According to Stats SA (2021), South Africa's university population is predominantly younger, with a significant proportion of students aged 18–29. In 2021, approximately 76.4% of enrolled students

were Black African, and the majority fell within this age group, indicating that the demographic in South African higher education is predominantly youthful (Stats SA 2021).

The table below indicates the faculties to which the respondents belong.

Table 6.7: Faculties under which the respondents belong (n=336)

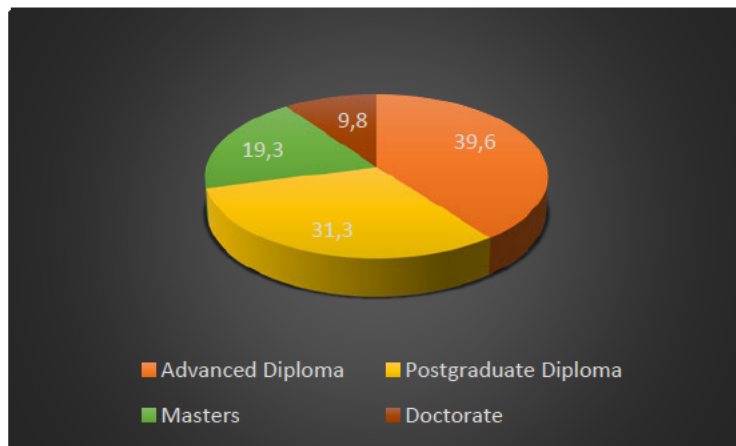
	Frequency	Percent
Accounting and Informatics	25	7.4
Applied Sciences	25	7.4
Arts and Design	8	2.4
Engineering and the Built Environment	23	6.8
Health Sciences	20	6.0
Management Sciences	235	69.9
Total	336	100.0

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 6.7 indicates that the majority of participants, 235 (69.9%), are from the Faculty of Management Sciences, reflecting a significant concentration in this area. According to UNISA (2025), management-related fields are popular areas of study in South Africa and are recognised among the notable fields of research and academic focus. Other faculties are represented as follows: Accounting and Informatics and Applied Sciences both have 25 respondents each, accounting for 7.4% each of the total sample. The Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment comprises 23 respondents (6.8%), Health Sciences includes 20 respondents (6.0%), and the Faculty of Arts and Design has the smallest representation with 8 respondents (2.4%) ($p < 0.001$).

The figure below indicates the level of study.

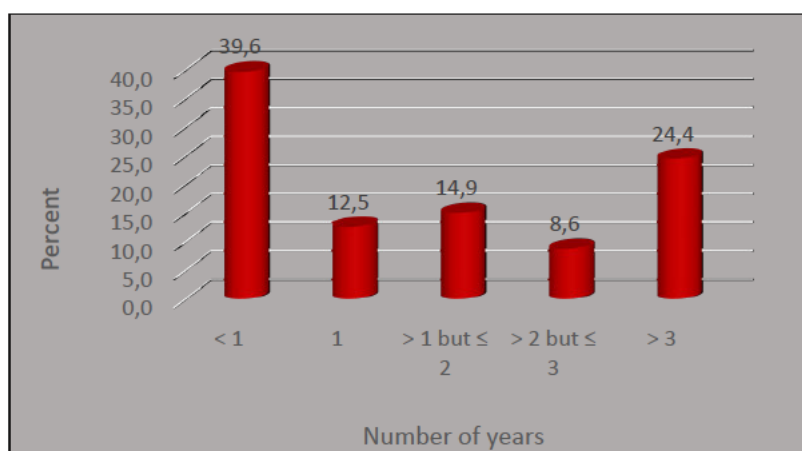
Figure 6.2: Level of study (n=336)



Source: Author Generated (2025)

As shown in Figure 6.2, the largest group, representing 39.6% (133 individuals) of the sample, are enrolled in an Advanced Diploma programme. It is important to note that as indicated in Chapter One of this study, postgraduate students will include Advanced Diploma students as they also have a research element in their studies. This is followed by those pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma, who make up 31.3% (105 individuals) of the respondents. Master's students constitute 19.3% (65 individuals), while Doctorate students account for 9.8% (33 individuals) of the total sample ($p < 0.001$). This distribution suggests that the majority of participants are engaged in Advanced Diploma-level studies, with a smaller proportion at the postgraduate and doctoral levels. Figure 6.3 below indicates the time period of use of the services of the Writing Centre (in years).

Figure 6.3: Usage of Writing Centre services in years (n=336)



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The largest group, representing 39.6% (133 individuals), has been using the services for less than one year. This is followed by those who have been using the Writing Centre for more than three years, accounting for 24.4% (82 individuals) of the respondents. Additionally, 14.9% (50 individuals) have been using the services for more than one but less than or equal to two years, while 12.5% (42 individuals) have used them for exactly one year. A smaller portion, 8.6% (29 individuals), have been engaged with the Writing Centre for more than two but less than or equal to three years ($p < 0.001$). This distribution shows a significant proportion of relatively new users, with a notable percentage also comprising long-term users of the Writing Centre. Despite their benefits, Writing Centres often report low levels of usage and in Arbee (2020) and Nakala and Sobantu's (2021) view, factors contributing to this include time constraints and misunderstanding on the role of Writing Centres (Arbee 2020; Nkala and Sobantu 2021). As such, there is a need to increase awareness about the value of Writing Centres and clarify their role to encourage more students to use these services.

Table 6.8 below represents the frequency of use of the Writing Centre.

Table 6.8: Frequency of use of the Writing Centre (n=336)

	Frequency	Percent
Rarely	125	37.2
Sometimes	139	41.4
Often	52	15.5
Always	20	6.0
Total	336	100.0

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The most common usage frequency is "Sometimes," with 41.4% (139 individuals) indicating this level of engagement. This is followed by those who use the Writing Centre "Rarely," representing 37.2% (125 individuals) of the sample. A smaller group of respondents, 15.5% (52 individuals), reported using the services "Often," while only 6.0% (20 individuals) indicated that they "Always" use the Writing Centre ($p < 0.001$).

This distribution suggests that while a substantial portion of the respondents engage with the Writing Centre on an occasional basis, a smaller number are frequent or consistent users. Writing Centre services at South African universities are used relatively infrequently by students. For example, a study conducted at the University of Cape Town (UCT), showed that 62.85% of users visited the Writing Centre only once in a six-month period, with most users being undergraduate students from the Humanities and Commerce faculties (Guattari-Stafford 2021). Similarly, other studies have noted low levels of usage due to factors such as time constraints and misunderstandings about the role of Writing Centres (Arbee 2020). Consequently, despite their potential to improve academic performance, Writing Centres often serve only a small proportion of the student population (McKay and Simpson 2013; Arbee 2020).

Table 6.9 below rates participants' views on the importance of the Writing Centre to postgraduate student success.

Table 6.9: The importance of the Writing Centre to postgraduate student success (n=336)

	Frequency	Percent
Not at all important	7	2.1
Slightly important	13	3.9
Moderately important	48	14.3
Very important	153	45.5
Extremely important	115	34.2
Total	336	100.0

Source: Author Generated (2025)

A significant majority, 45.5% (153 individuals), consider the Writing Centre to be "Very important," while 34.2% (115 individuals) rate it as "Extremely important." In contrast, 14.3% (48 individuals) believe it is "Moderately important." Only a small proportion of respondents perceive the Writing Centre as less critical, with 3.9% (13 individuals)

indicating it is "Slightly important," and 2.1% (7 individuals) stating it is "Not at all important" ($p < 0.001$). This distribution highlights the general consensus among respondents regarding the crucial role of the Writing Centre in supporting postgraduate student success. Students generally view Writing Centres as important to their academic success, as they provide crucial support in developing academic literacy, enhancing writing skills, and fostering a sense of community and confidence. Writing Centres are seen as supportive environments that help students improve their academic literacy and writing skills, which in turn boosts their confidence and engagement in their studies (Archer 2008; Handford, Dobson and Liu 2021; Namakula 2024). These centres are often described as non-judgmental spaces that offer emotional support and a sense of belonging, which is particularly for those who might feel alienated in an academic environment (Zuma *et al.* 2016; Namakula 2024).

Table 6.10 below shows how likely respondents are to recommend the services of the Writing Centre to other students.

Table 6.10: How likely the respondents are to recommend the services of the Writing Centre to other students (n=336)

	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	181	53.9
Unlikely	5	1.5
Neutral	35	10.4
Likely	115	34.2
Total	336	100.0

Source: Author Generated (2025)

A majority of respondents, 53.9% (181 individuals), indicated that they are "Very unlikely" to recommend the services. In contrast, 34.2% (115 individuals) stated that they are "Likely" to recommend the Writing Centre. A smaller portion of respondents, 10.4% (35 individuals), expressed a "Neutral" stance, while only 1.5% (5 individuals) indicated that they are "Unlikely" to recommend the services. This distribution reveals a significant reluctance among respondents to endorse the Writing Centre to their peers ($p < 0.001$).

Students are generally likely to recommend the Writing Centre to their peers based on positive experiences and outcomes. It is important to understand the reasons for these responses to know where to improve or how to more effectively meet students' needs so that they will encourage peers to make use of Writing Centre services. For example, peer tutors, and a pedagogy of care, help students feel safe and supported, which can encourage positive word-of-mouth and recommendations (Namakula 2024; Govender 2023). According to an American study of community college students, 94.7% of users reported they would return to the Writing Centre, indicating high satisfaction levels (Savarese 2022). Additionally, testimonials from students highlighted the confidence gained and the perception of the Writing Centre as a supportive environment for improving writing skills. Students, particularly those for whom English is an additional language, value the academic support and development offered by Writing Centres. Collaborative and scaffolded approaches have been shown to improve writing skills and academic performance, making students more likely to recommend these services (Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza 2022; Mdozana-Zide and Mukuna 2023; Ntando *et al.* 2024). However, it must be noted that several barriers to students recommending the services may exist. The most common reason for not using or recommending Writing Centre services is a lack of time as students often find it difficult to fit consultations into their study schedules (Arbee 2020). Furthermore, some students experience stigma from peers for using Writing Centre services, and there are misunderstandings about what the centre offers, which can deter both use and recommendations (Nkala and Sobantu 2021; Arbee 2020).

Table 6.11 below summarises respondents' ratings of the services provided by the DUT and MUT Writing Centre staff.

Table 6.11: Respondents' ratings of the services provided by the Writing Centre staff (n=336)

	Frequency	Percent
Poor	8	2.4
Fair	38	11.3
Good	90	26.8
Very Good	90	26.8
Excellent	110	32.7
Total	336	100.0

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The majority of respondents rated the services highly, with 32.7% (110 individuals) describing the services as "Excellent," and 26.8% (90 individuals) rating them as "Very Good." An equal percentage of respondents, 26.8% (90 individuals), rated the services as "Good." A smaller portion of the respondents rated the services as "Fair," accounting for 11.3% (38 individuals), while only 2.4% (8 individuals) rated the services as "Poor" ($p < 0.001$). This distribution reflects a generally positive perception of the Writing Centre's services among the respondents. This is in line with a survey conducted at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) that revealed that 91% of students regarded the Writing Centre as a conducive learning environment (Sefelane-Nkohla and Mthonjeni 2019). Furthermore, the CPUT study found that 81% of respondents expressed a willingness to recommend the Writing Centre to their peers.

The following section examines the respondents' scoring patterns for each variable in each section. First, mean values are used to illustrate the results. The significance of the statements is then used to further examine the results.

6.7 SECTION B: SECTION ANALYSIS

Section B of this study focuses on the respondents' experiences and perceptions of the DUT and MUT Writing Centre services. It delves into various aspects such as the quality of assistance provided, the competence of tutors, and the overall interaction between tutors and students. This section is designed to capture the effectiveness and impact of the Writing Centre on postgraduate students' academic progress. The analysis presented in this section is derived from a series of structured questions, allowing for a detailed examination of how the Writing Centre is perceived in terms of service quality, tutor performance, and its contribution to students' academic success. The insights gained from this section provide a deeper understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the Writing Centre, as viewed by the students who utilise its services. As has been previously highlighted, questions in section B were grouped into three subthemes, namely:

B1: Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction

B2: Tutor Competence

B3: Tutor-Student Interaction

These three subthemes are analysed in the following sections.

6.7.1 B1: Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction

This section evaluates key aspects of the support offered by the Writing Centre tutors, including the adequacy of assistance received, overall satisfaction with the services, the impact on academic writing, and the applicability of the skills learned to other academic work.

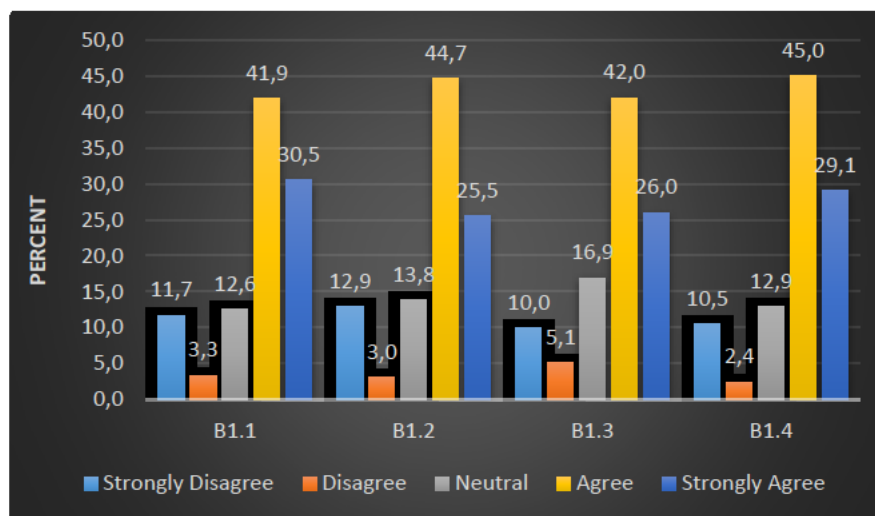
Table 6.12: Scoring patterns related to Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction

		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
I received the necessary assistance from the Writing Centre tutors	B1.1	39	11,7%	11	3,3%	42	12,6%	140	41,9%	102	30,5%
I am satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre	B1.2	43	12,9%	10	3,0%	46	13,8%	149	44,7%	85	25,5%
My academic writing has improved since I started visiting the Writing Centre	B1.3	33	10,0%	17	5,1%	56	16,9%	139	42,0%	86	26,0%
I can use what I learnt from the Writing Centre in other academic work	B1.4	35	10,5%	8	2,4%	43	12,9%	150	45,0%	97	29,1%

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The scoring patterns for Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction are summarised in Table 6.12. In addition, Figure 6.4 below shows similar statistics in a bar graph format.

Figure 6.4: Summary of scoring patterns relating to Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction



Source: Author Generated (2025)

In relation to statement B1.1 'I received the necessary assistance from Writing Centre tutors', the data collected revealed that 41.9% of respondents expressed agreement, while a further 30.5% indicated strong agreement, indicating their satisfaction with the assistance received. Conversely, 11.7% expressed a strong disagreement, while 3.3% indicated a disagreement. This finding suggests that the majority of students found the Writing Centre tutors helpful. A survey conducted by the University of Idaho Writing Centre (2024) found that many students appreciate the friendly and supportive environment, the helpfulness of tutors, and the opportunity to improve their writing. Studies in the South African context reveal that Writing Centres are seen as familial spaces where friendships and emotional support coexist with academic development, empowering students and promoting academic success (Govender 2023; Namakula 2024). Comments from the students highlighted that tutors help students think critically about their work, feel comfortable sharing their writing, and gain confidence - especially for those with learning disabilities or for whom English is not a first language. However, the presence of a proportion of respondents (approximately 15%) who expressed dissatisfaction suggests the potential for enhancement in terms of the provision of sufficient and tailored support. Regarding statement B1.2, Table 5.13 and Figure 5.4 above show that 44.7% of the respondents agreed, and 25.5% strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre. Furthermore, 12.9% strongly disagreed and 3% disagreed that they were satisfied with the services provided by the Writing Centre. This suggests that although there is a high level of

satisfaction, there is still a minority (approximately 16%) who were not satisfied. This therefore could be an indication of inconsistencies in tutor approaches, accessibility issues or unmet expectations, which need to be addressed.

From statement B1.3, 2% of respondents agreed and 26% strongly agreed that their academic writing improved since they consulted with Writing Centre tutors; 16.9% were neutral; and 10% strongly disagreed. Writing Centres are expected to contribute to improving students' writing and the data collected suggests that they are generally effective. However, the neutral and disagreeing responses suggest that some students may not have experienced tangible improvements, possibly due to sporadic use of the services or personal learning differences. Responses to statement B1.4 show that 45% of the respondents agreed and 29.1% strongly agreed that they could use Writing Centre lessons in other academic work; 10.5% strongly disagreed, while 2.4% disagreed. The ability to transfer learned skills is crucial. The strong positive response suggests that Writing Centres are helping students to develop transferable academic abilities. According to Chen (2020), many students indicate that they learn transferable writing strategies during consultations, which they continue to use independently in future assignments, and they value the credibility and expertise of Writing Centre tutors. However, a small percentage still struggled to apply what they had learned elsewhere.

Table 6.13 below summarises the mean scoring patterns for these items, providing statistical insights through various statistical metrics.

Table 6.13: Summary of mean scoring patterns for B1

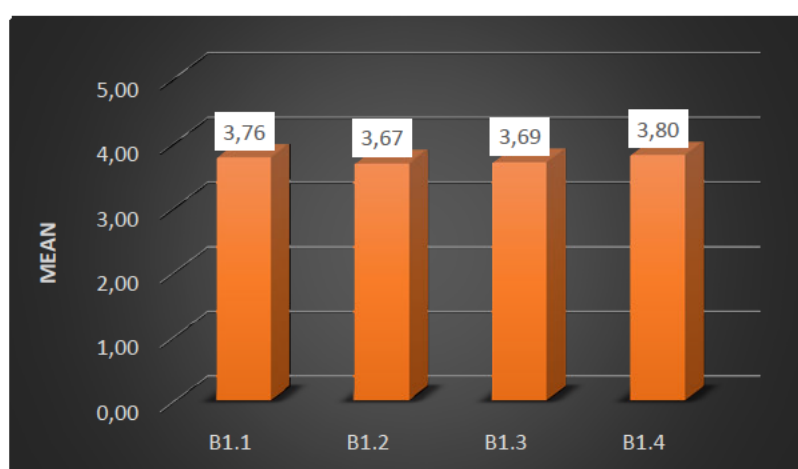
		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 75	Percentile 25	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
I received the necessary assistance from the Writing Centre tutors	B1.1	336	3.76	1.25	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
I am satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre	B1.2	336	3.67	1.25	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

My academic writing has improved since I started visiting the Writing Centre	B1.3	336	3.69	1.20	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
I can use what I learnt from the Writing Centre in other academic work	B1.4	336	3.80	1.19	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The information in Table 6.13 is further depicted in Figure 6.5 followed by a discussion.

Figure 6.5: Summary of mean scoring patterns for Section B1



Source: Author Generated (2025)

From Table 6.13 and Figure 6.5, the following patterns are observed in the results for Section B1: Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction:

- Higher Levels of Agreement:** Across all four statements in this section, respondents exhibit higher levels of agreement, with mean scores ranging from 3.67 to 3.80. This suggests a generally positive perception of the Writing Centre's effectiveness. The highest levels of agreement are observed in the statement, "I can use what I learnt from the Writing Centre in other academic work," which has a mean score of 3.80, indicating that students find the skills acquired at the Writing Centre applicable beyond the immediate context. According to Pandey (2024), Writing Centres play a crucial role in facilitating the transfer of writing skills across different academic disciplines and serve as a "contact zone" where students and tutors negotiate writing skills, which can lead to transformative learning experiences. This interdisciplinary interaction fosters the transfer of writing skills by creating opportunities for dialogue and

negotiation between students and tutors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds (Pandey 2024).

- **Consistency in Satisfaction:** The statements "I received the necessary assistance from the Writing Centre tutors" and "I am satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre" both display similar patterns of scoring, with mean scores of 3.76 and 3.67, respectively. These results reflect a consistent level of satisfaction with the support provided by the Writing Centre, where the assistance offered meets the students' needs. This is in line with data from Transylvania University which revealed that 49.3% of students found their writing centre sessions "extremely helpful" and 42.3% found them "somewhat helpful" for developing their written work. Additionally, 78.3% of students expressed interest in returning to the Writing Centre, and 88.7% said they would recommend it to their peers (Whiddon 2023). In South Africa, most students who use Writing Centres express appreciation for the usefulness of the services, noting improvements in their writing and increased confidence in academic tasks (Nakala and Sobantu 2021; Mdodana-Zide and Mukuna 2023, Namakula 2024). However, a study by Evans-Tokaryk and Shabanza (2022) suggests that some students desire more targeted support for lower-order writing concerns and suggest that Writing Centres could further adapt their approaches to better meet diverse student needs.
- **Impact on Academic Writing:** The statement "My academic writing has improved since I started visiting the Writing Centre" has a mean score of 3.69, suggesting that a significant proportion of respondents perceive an improvement in their academic writing as a direct result of the services provided by the Writing Centre. Archer (2008) states that Writing Centre interventions lead to measurable improvements in student writing, as seen in better grades, more effective revisions, and increased awareness of writing processes. Writing Centres help students adapt to the specific conventions and expectations of academic writing in their disciplines, which is crucial for success at the postgraduate level (Jeyaraj *et al.* 2020; Solmaz 2021). Studies by Archer (2016) and Handford *et al.* (2021) suggest that Writing Centres also benefit the Writing Centre tutors themselves, enhancing their own writing and instructional ability. However, some studies such as that of Bredtmann *et al.* (2011) suggest that

while students find Writing Centres helpful, there may not be a significant impact on grades, indicating the need for more comprehensive evaluation methods.

- **Statistical Significance:** The differences in scoring patterns are statistically significant, as indicated by the binomial test p-values, all of which are less than 0.001. This statistical significance confirms that the observed patterns in the responses are unlikely to be due to chance and reflect genuine differences in respondents' perceptions.

In summary, the results from Section B1 indicate high levels of agreement across all statements related to the Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction, reflecting a positive overall assessment of the Writing Centre's services. The consistency in satisfaction and the perceived impact on academic writing highlight the effectiveness of the Writing Centre in supporting postgraduate students. The statistical significance of these results further underscores the reliability of these findings.

6.7.2 B2: Tutor Competence

Section B2 examines the perceived competence of the Writing Centre tutors, focusing on their training, knowledge, confidence, and ability to impart academic writing skills to students. This section evaluates how well-equipped the tutors are to provide effective consultations and support, as well as identifying areas where additional training might be needed.

Table 6.14: Scoring patterns relating to Tutor Competence

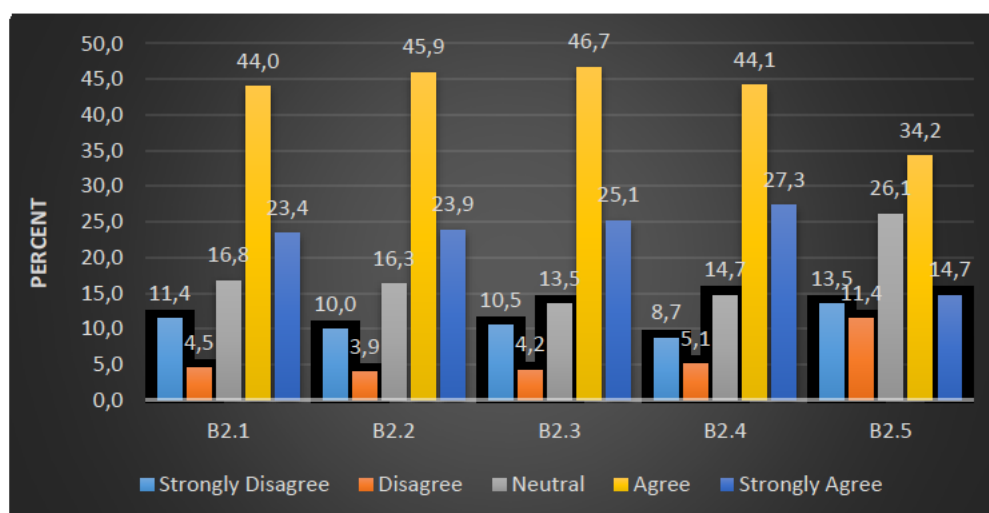
		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
I believe the Writing Centre tutors are well trained to carry out their work	B2.1	38	11,4%	15	4,5%	56	16,8%	147	44,0%	78	23,4%
The tutors are knowledgeable on how to conduct their work	B2.2	33	10,0%	13	3,9%	54	16,3%	152	45,9%	79	23,9%
The tutors are confident in their approach during consultations	B2.3	35	10,5%	14	4,2%	45	13,5%	156	46,7%	84	25,1%
The tutors equip me with knowledge of	B2.4	29	8,7%	17	5,1%	49	14,7%	147	44,1%	91	27,3%

how to write academically											
The tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations	B2.5	45	13,5%	38	11,4%	87	26,1%	114	34,2%	49	14,7%

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The scoring patterns for Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction are summarised in Table 6:14. Similar statistics are shown in Figure 6.6 below in a bar graph format.

Figure 6.6: Summary of Scoring Patterns relating to Tutor Competencies



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The statement for B2.1 shows that the majority of respondents (67.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that Writing Centre tutors are well-trained to carry out their work, while 15.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. According to Harris (2018), effective tutor training programmes must integrate both pedagogical strategies and interpersonal skills to ensure consistent quality in student support. This suggests that while most students perceive tutors as competent, the minority who express dissatisfaction may reflect gaps in training or inconsistencies in tutor performance. The statement for B2.2 reveals that 69.8% of respondents viewed tutors as knowledgeable in their roles, whereas 13.9% held negative perceptions. Thompson and Mackiewicz (2020) argue that tutor expertise is critical for building student trust and fostering productive consultations. The presence of a small but notable dissenting group of respondents to this statement may be an indication of variability in tutor preparedness, more-so in

specialised areas such as discipline-specific writing or multilingual support, as highlighted by Rafoth (2014). For statement B2.3, 71.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that tutors displayed confidence during consultations, with 14.7% expressing disagreement. Ryan (2019) connects tutor confidence to successful communication and student involvement, noting how an assured attitude can considerably improve outcomes for learning. The minority of unfavourable responses can be deduced to be the result of individual occasions in which teachers appeared unsure, emphasising the importance of continued professional development to ensure consistency.

In statement B2.4, 71.4% of respondents felt that tutors effectively equipped them with academic writing skills, compared to 13.8% who disagreed. North (1984) posits that Writing Centres aim to cultivate independent writers, and the high agreement rate aligns with this goal. However, the dissenting views may reflect mismatches between student expectations and tutor methods, suggesting a need for more tailored approaches to address diverse learning needs. Finally, statement B2.5 indicates that 48.9% of respondents believed tutors required additional training, while 24.9% disagreed. This finding aligns with contemporary discourse on the necessity of continuous professional development in tutoring, particularly to address evolving challenges such as supporting multilingual students (Rafoth 2014). The split in responses highlights differing perceptions of tutor preparedness, which could be influenced by individual experiences or varying levels of exposure to tutor support. Collectively, these findings demonstrate strong overall satisfaction with Writing Centre tutors, but they also reveal areas where targeted improvements - such as enhanced training programmes and standardised practices - could further elevate service quality.

A significant majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tutors are well-trained (67.4%), knowledgeable (69.8%), confident in their approach (71.8%), and effective in teaching academic writing (71.4%). These findings suggest that the Writing Centre is largely successful in meeting student expectations and providing valuable support. However, the results also highlight areas where improvements could be made, particularly in addressing the perceived need for further tutor training, as indicated by 48.9% of respondents. The fact that nearly half of the respondents acknowledged a need for additional tutor training suggests that there may be gaps in the current training framework. This finding resonates with Rafoth's (2014) work on

multilingual writing support, which advocates for ongoing professional development to address the diverse needs of students. The presence of negative or neutral responses across all dimensions, ranging from 13.8% to 24.9% - also indicates variability in tutor performance. Such variability could stem from differences in tutor experience, disciplinary expertise, or individual tutoring styles, pointing to the need for more standardised training and support mechanisms.

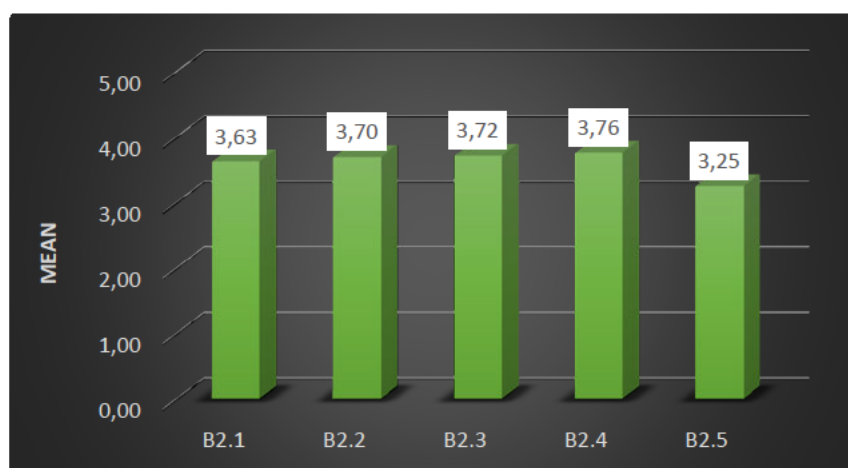
Table 6.15 summarises the respondents' ratings on tutor competence.

Table 6.15: Respondents ratings on various aspects of tutor competence

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 75	Percentile 25	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
I believe the Writing Centre tutors are well trained to carry out their work	B2.1	336	3.63	1.21	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors are knowledgeable on how to conduct their work	B2.2	336	3.70	1.17	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors are confident in their approach during consultations	B2.3	336	3.72	1.19	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors equip me with knowledge of how to write academically	B2.4	336	3.76	1.16	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations	B2.5	336	3.25	1.24	3.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	0.742

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Figure 6.7: Respondents ratings on various aspects of tutor competence



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The following patterns are observed from Table 6.15 and Figure 6.7:

- **General Agreement on Tutor Competence:** Respondents generally agree that the Writing Centre tutors are competent, as evidenced by the mean scores for most statements being above 3.6. For instance, the statement "The tutors equip me with knowledge of how to write academically" received the highest mean score of 3.76, indicating that students feel well-supported in developing their academic writing. Recent studies affirm that Writing Centres contribute significantly to students' academic development by providing structured, dialogic learning spaces that enhance writing competence (Lillis *et al.* 2020; Dison and Moore 2023). In South Africa, Writing Centres have increasingly played a transformative role in addressing academic literacies through pedagogical engagement rather than remediation (Rambiritch, Drennan and Dison 2024).
- **Confidence and Knowledge:** The statements "The tutors are knowledgeable on how to conduct their work" and "The tutors are confident in their approach during consultations" show slightly higher levels of agreement, with mean scores of 3.70 and 3.72, respectively. This suggests that students perceive the tutors as both knowledgeable and confident, essential qualities for effective consultations. Furthermore, this reflects students' recognition of tutors' confidence and subject matter knowledge, which are essential for establishing credibility in consultations. Research shows that well-trained peer tutors who demonstrate confidence are more effective in fostering student engagement and participation (Van Rensburg and Son 2022). Furthermore, Writing Centre staff who are confident and informed often serve as mediators between institutional expectations and student needs (Dison and Moore 2023).
- **Perception of Training Needs:** Interestingly, the statement "The tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations" has a mean score of 3.25, which, although lower than the other statements, still indicates a moderate level of agreement. This suggests that while students generally view the tutors as competent, there is a recognition that further training could enhance their effectiveness. Current literature supports this, underscoring

the importance of ongoing tutor training that includes reflective practice, awareness of linguistic diversity, and responsiveness to students' evolving academic contexts (Laflen and Bomer 2020; Tutoy and Mtshali 2021). Rambiritch *et al.* (2024) further note that South African Writing Centres must constantly adapt their training programmes to align with both institutional and student expectations.

- **Consistency in Responses:** The median score for most items is 4.00, with the interquartile range (between the 25th and 75th percentiles) showing that most responses are clustered around this central value. This consistency reflects a general consensus among respondents regarding the competence of the Writing Centre tutors. This kind of consistency mirrors findings from similar studies by Mashiyi and Singh (2021) where students report high and stable levels of satisfaction with Writing Centre support. According to Laflen and Looker (2019), uniformity in positive student evaluations is often correlated with clear tutor training protocols and shared pedagogical values.
- **Statistical Significance:** The binomial test p-values for most statements are less than 0.001, indicating that the levels of agreement observed are statistically significant. However, the statement regarding the need for more training has a p-value of 0.742, suggesting that opinions on this issue are more varied and less conclusive. This reflects broader debates in the field about tutor preparedness, where some students perceive adequate support while others identify gaps in advanced writing or disciplinary knowledge (Van Rensburg and Son 2022; Dison and Moore 2023).

The findings of this study, which highlight the importance of tutor competence and the need for continuous training, align with Human Capital Theory's (Becker 1964) assertion that sustained investment in individuals yields measurable returns in performance and effectiveness. In this context, Writing Centres function as sites of human capital development, where institutional investment in tutor competence contributes not only to individual tutor growth but also to broader postgraduate success, throughput, and academic development. In summary, the results indicate that students generally perceive the Writing Centre tutors as competent, knowledgeable,

and confident in their roles. While there is a recognition of the tutors' current capabilities, there is also an acknowledgment that additional training could further enhance their effectiveness. The statistical significance of most findings reinforces the reliability of these observations, while the varied responses to the need for more training highlight a potential area for development.

6.7.3 B3: Tutor-Student Interaction

Section B3 explores the dynamics of Tutor-Student Interaction at the Writing Centre, focusing on the quality of relationships between tutors and postgraduate students, the effectiveness of communication during consultations, and the strategies employed by tutors to facilitate learning. This section evaluates key aspects of how tutors engage with students, including their ability to listen, provide clear explanations, and use various techniques to enhance the consultation experience.

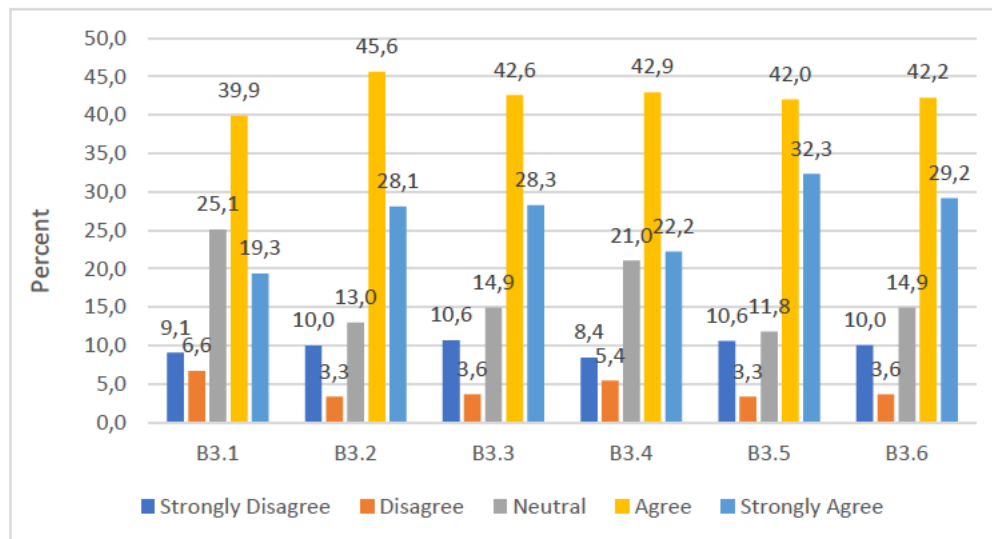
Table 6.16: Scoring patterns for Tutor-Student Interaction

		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		Coun t	Row N %	Coun t	Row N %	Coun t	Row N %	Coun t	Row N %	Coun t	Row N %
Writing Centre tutors have a good relationship with postgraduate students	B3. 1	30	9,1%	22	6,6 %	83	25,1 %	132	39,9 %	64	19,3 %
The tutors listen to me during consultations	B3. 2	33	10,0 %	11	3,3 %	43	13,0 %	151	45,6 %	93	28,1 %
The tutors are able to explain things clearly to me during consultations	B3. 3	35	10,6 %	12	3,6 %	49	14,9 %	140	42,6 %	93	28,3 %
The tutors use various strategies and techniques in conducting consultations	B3. 4	28	8,4%	18	5,4 %	70	21,0 %	143	42,9 %	74	22,2 %
The tutors allow me to ask questions for clarification during Writing Centre consultations	B3. 5	35	10,6 %	11	3,3 %	39	11,8 %	139	42,0 %	107	32,3 %
The tutors help me to understand what is required in my work	B3. 6	33	10,0 %	12	3,6 %	49	14,9 %	139	42,2 %	96	29,2 %

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The scoring patterns for Tutor-Student Interaction are summarised in Table 6.16. Similar statistics are shown in bar graph format in Figure 6.8.

Figure 6.8: Summary of Scoring Patterns for Tutor-Student Interaction



Source: Author Generated (2025)

In relation to statement B3.1 on tutor-student relationships, while a majority (59.2%) of postgraduate students perceive their relationship with tutors positively, a notable 25.1% remain neutral, and 15.7% express dissatisfaction. This suggests variability in interpersonal dynamics, which could stem from differences in tutor approachability or cultural inclusivity. According to Gillespie and Lerner (2008), effective tutor-student relationships are foundational to successful writing consultations, particularly for postgraduate students who often require specialised support. The neutral and negative responses may indicate a need for more structured relationship-building activities, such as orientation sessions or feedback loops.

Statement B3.2 relates to active listening and B3.3 looks at clarity of explanations and both these statements have high agreement rates (73.7% and 70.9%, respectively) which suggests that tutors excel in these areas, which are critical for fostering student confidence and comprehension. Ryan (2019) posits that active listening and clear communication are hallmarks of effective tutoring, as they reduce anxiety and promote engagement. However, the negative responses (13.3%) could be an indication of occasional lapses, which could be attributed to time constraints or tutor inexperience with complex postgraduate queries.

Statement B3.4 looks at the use of diverse strategies and the 65.1% positive response indicates that tutors employ varied techniques, but the 21% neutral and 13.8% negative responses suggest room for improvement. Rafoth (2014) advocates for adaptive strategies tailored to individual needs, particularly for postgraduate students who often work on discipline-specific writing. Incorporating more scaffolded approaches (e.g., modelling, guided practice) could address these gaps.

Statement B3.5 and B3.6 received the highest positive ratings (74.3% and 71.4%), reflecting tutors' effectiveness in creating an open, supportive environment. North (1984) argues that empowering students to ask questions is central to the Writing Centre's mission of fostering independent university students. The small number of respondents with negative responses (approximately 14%) may arise from students who prefer more directive guidance, underscoring the need for tutors to balance facilitative and directive methods.

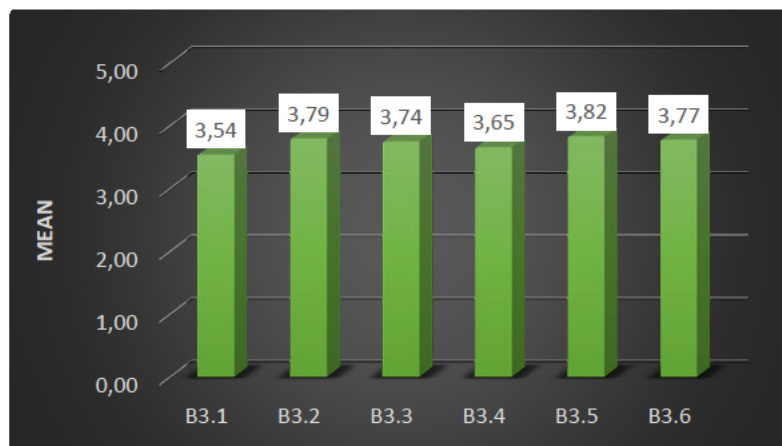
Table 6.17 below summarises the respondents' ratings on these interactional aspects.

Table 6.17: Respondents' ratings on tutor-student interactions

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 75	Percentile 25	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
Writing Centre tutors have a good relationship with postgraduate students	B3.1	336	3.54	1.15	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	0.001
The tutors listen to me during consultations	B3.2	336	3.79	1.18	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors are able to explain things clearly to me during consultations	B3.3	336	3.74	1.21	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors use various strategies and techniques in conducting consultations	B3.4	336	3.65	1.13	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors allow me to ask questions for clarification during Writing Centre consultations	B3.5	336	3.82	1.22	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The tutors help me to understand what is required in my work	B3.6	336	3.77	1.20	4.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Figure 6.9: Respondents' ratings on tutor-student interactions



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The following patterns are observed from Table 6.17 and Figure 6.9:

- **High Levels of Agreement on Interaction Quality:** Overall, respondents exhibit strong agreement regarding the quality of interactions with Writing Centre tutors. The statement "The tutors allow me to ask questions for clarification during Writing Centre consultations" has the highest mean score of 3.82, indicating that students feel comfortable engaging actively during consultations. According to Mackiewicz (2014) and Mackiewicz and Thompson, (2022), students use questions to actively participate and steer the focus of Writing Centre consultations. This allows them to co-construct language for their work and take control over the direction of the session in line with constructivist theory (Vygotsky 1978). Munje *et al.* (2018) add that the nature of questions significantly influences tutorial outcomes. Therefore, this is an indication that tutors should be trained to use questions effectively to maintain a student-centred focus and facilitate productive dialogue. This includes understanding the types of questions that promote learning and engagement. In addition, tutors should create an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, as this is linked to their satisfaction and learning outcomes.
- **Effective Communication and Clarity:** The statements "The tutors listen to me during consultations" and "The tutors are able to explain things clearly to me during consultations" also show high levels of agreement, with mean scores of 3.79 and 3.74, respectively. These results suggest that students perceive the tutors as attentive and clear in their communication, which are crucial for

effective learning during consultations. Writing Centres significantly contribute to improving students' writing skills, which in turn boosts their confidence and engagement in their academic work (Handford *et al.* 2021; Newsome *et al.* 2023). This support is crucial for both native and non-native English speakers, helping them navigate the complexities of academic writing (Schulze and Lemmer 2017; Wilmot 2018).

- **Positive Relationships and Use of Strategies:** The statement "Writing Centre tutors have a good relationship with postgraduate students" has a slightly lower mean score of 3.54 compared to other items, yet it still reflects a generally positive perception of the rapport between tutors and students. Research by Gale (2021) highlights that tutors developed increased empathy for students, improved interpersonal skills, and knowledge of teaching strategies through their Writing Centre work. This is in line with humanistic theory (Maslow 1943; Rogers 1957) which centres on the whole person and emphasises self-actualisation and empathy. Tutors should thus be trained to create psychologically safe spaces that validate postgraduate students' experiences while fostering independence and confidence. Additionally, "The tutors use various strategies and techniques in conducting consultations" received a mean score of 3.65, indicating that students recognise and appreciate the diverse methods employed by tutors to enhance their understanding. This is in line with research by O'Brien, Tighe-Mooney and Farrell (2017) as well as Mackiewicz and Thompson (2018) which shows that tutors use a variety of strategies during consultation sessions including questioning, constructive dialogue and scaffolding techniques. Cognitivist approaches also support training in questioning techniques, scaffolding complex tasks, and promoting metacognitive awareness in postgraduate writers. These techniques are valuable in students' writing development as Archer (2017) states that these techniques help students become creative, agentic writers and support diverse learning styles.
- **Consistency in Responses:** The median score for all items is consistently 4.00, with a narrow interquartile range, indicating that most respondents agree

on the effectiveness of tutor-student interactions. This consistency suggests that these positive perceptions are broadly shared among the respondents.

- **Statistical Significance:** The binomial test p-values for most statements are less than 0.001, confirming that the observed levels of agreement are statistically significant. The statement on the quality of the relationship between tutors and students, with a p-value of 0.001, also shows significant but slightly more varied responses compared to others.

In summary, the results indicate that students generally perceive their interactions with Writing Centre tutors as positive and effective. The high levels of agreement on the tutors' ability to listen, explain, and facilitate active engagement through questioning reflect a strong tutor-student relationship. The statistical significance of these findings underscores the reliability of the positive perceptions captured in this section, though the slightly lower score on the general relationship aspect suggests that there may be room for enhancing the overall rapport between tutors and students.

6.7.4 Overall summary of section B

Section B of the study provides an analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding the Writing Centre's services, focusing on three key areas: Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction, Tutor Competence, and Tutor-Student Interaction. The results indicate a generally positive assessment across all sections, with students expressing high levels of satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Writing Centre. The findings show that tutors are perceived as knowledgeable, confident, and capable of effectively supporting students' academic writing needs.

In terms of Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction, the majority of respondents agreed that the Writing Centre meets their needs, with significant improvements noted in their academic writing. Similarly, in the Tutor Competence section, respondents generally viewed the tutors as well-trained and knowledgeable, although there was some recognition of the potential need for further training to enhance their effectiveness.

The Tutor-Student Interaction section highlighted strong communication between tutors and students, with tutors being attentive, clear in their explanations, and

supportive of students' needs during consultations. The overall findings from Section B suggest that while the Writing Centre is performing well in supporting postgraduate students, there are areas for improvement, particularly in strengthening the rapport between tutors and students and considering additional training for tutors to maintain and enhance their competence. The statistical significance of most findings further reinforces the reliability of these positive perceptions, providing a robust foundation for understanding the effectiveness of the Writing Centre's services.

6.8 CROSSTABULATIONS – BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

To ascertain whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables (rows vs. columns), a Chi square test of independence was conducted. Again, it is pertinent to remember that for this study, postgraduate students include Advanced Diploma students who also have a research element in their studies and require structured support in academic writing for research. The crosstabulations between gender and level of study are indicated in Table 6.18 and Table 6.19 below.

Table 6.18: Crosstabulation between Gender and level of study (n=336)

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Level of study	Advanced Diploma	Count	41	92	133
		% within Level of study	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
		% within Gender	33.9%	42.8%	39.6%
		% of Total	12.2%	27.4%	39.6%
	Postgraduate Diploma	Count	34	71	105
		% within Level of study	32.4%	67.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	28.1%	33.0%	31.3%
		% of Total	10.1%	21.1%	31.3%
	Masters	Count	26	39	65
		% within Level of study	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	21.5%	18.1%	19.3%
		% of Total	7.7%	11.6%	19.3%
	Doctorate	Count	20	13	33
		% within Level of study	60.6%	39.4%	100.0%
		% within Gender	16.5%	6.0%	9.8%
		% of Total	6.0%	3.9%	9.8%
Total		Count	121	215	336
		% within Level of study	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%

Source: Author Generated (2025)

Table 6.19: Chi-quare test for crosstabulation between level of study and gender (n=336)

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided) 99.9% Confidence Interval			Monte Carlo Sig. (1-sided) 99.9% Confidence Interval		
				Significance			Significance		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	11,263 ^a	3	0,010	0,010 ^b	0,006	0,013			
Likelihood Ratio	10,851	3	0,013	0,014 ^b	0,010	0,017			
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	10,831			0,012 ^b	0,009	0,016			
Linear-by-Linear Association	8,674 ^c	1	0,003	0,003 ^b	0,001	0,005	0,002 ^b	0,001	0,003
N of Valid Cases	336								

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.88.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

c. The standardized statistic is -2.945.

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The p-value of 0.012 in Table 6.19 indicates a statistically significant relationship between "Level of study" and "Gender," meaning that gender has a notable influence on the level of study pursued by respondents. Specifically, the data in Table 6.18 shows that males are more likely to be in doctoral programmes, while females are more prevalent in advanced and postgraduate diploma levels, underscoring the significant role gender plays in academic progression within this sample. This is contrary to research in the United States of America where the National Centre for Education Statistics (2024) reports that there are more females earning degrees at Masters and Doctoral levels than their male counterparts.

6.9 BIOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE ON THE DIMENSIONS (SUB-THEMES)

The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric statistical method used to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the distributions of more than two independent groups. In the context of assessing the biographical influence on the dimensions (or sub-themes) within this study, the Kruskal-Wallis test is applied to examine whether different biographical factors, such as gender, age, or level of study, have a significant effect on the scores of the identified dimensions or sub-themes.

Specifically, the test compares the median ranks of the scores across the groups defined by each biographical factor to see if any group differs significantly from the

others. For example, if the test is applied to explore the influence of gender on a dimension like "Tutor-Student Interaction," the Kruskal-Wallis test will assess whether the median scores for this dimension differ significantly between male and female respondents. If the p-value from the test is below a specified significance level (e.g., 0.05), it indicates that the biographical factor (e.g., gender) has a significant impact on that particular dimension, suggesting differences in perceptions or experiences among the groups. The results are summarised below:

1. Gender

- No significant differences were found across gender categories across the three (3) dimensions.

2. Age (years)

- No significant differences were found across different age categories across the 3 dimensions.

3. Faculty

- No significant differences were found across faculty categories across the 3 dimensions.

4. Level of Study

- Significant Differences:
 - Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of Doctorate (3.33) and Postgraduate Diploma (3.89) ($p = 0.025$).

5. How long have you been using the services of the Writing Centre?

- Significant Differences:
 - Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction: The difference is significant with means of > 2 but ≤ 3 years (3.15) and < 1 year (3.80) ($p = 0.026$).
 - Tutor Competence: The difference is significant with means of > 2 but ≤ 3 years (3.12) and < 1 year (3.66) ($p = 0.026$), and > 2 but ≤ 3 years (3.12) and > 3 years (3.65) ($p = 0.015$).
 - Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of > 2 but ≤ 3 years (3.15) and < 1 year (3.78) ($p = 0.026$).

6. How often do you use the Writing Centre?

- Significant Differences:

- Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction: The difference is significant with means of Rarely (3.47) and Often (4.00) ($p = <0.001$), Rarely (3.47) and Always (4.24) ($p = <0.001$).
- Tutor Competence: The difference is significant with means of Rarely (3.38) and Often (3.90) ($p = <0.001$), Rarely (3.38) and Always (4.00) ($p = <0.001$).
- Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of Rarely (3.47) and Often (3.96) ($p = <0.001$), Rarely (3.47) and Always (4.28) ($p = <0.001$).

7. How important do you think the Writing Centre is to postgraduate student success?

- Significant Differences:
 - Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction: The difference is significant with means of Slightly Important (2.62) and Very Important (3.77) ($p = <0.001$), Slightly Important (2.62) and Extremely Important (3.98) ($p = <0.001$), Moderately Important (3.48) and Extremely Important (3.98) ($p = <0.001$).
 - Tutor Competence: The difference is significant with means of Slightly Important (2.62) and Very Important (3.65) ($p = <0.001$), Slightly Important (2.62) and Extremely Important (3.80) ($p = <0.001$), Moderately Important (3.42) and Extremely Important (3.80) ($p = <0.001$).
 - Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of Slightly Important (2.73) and Very Important (3.74) ($p = <0.001$), Slightly Important (2.73) and Extremely Important (3.95) ($p = <0.001$), Moderately Important (3.47) and Extremely Important (3.95) ($p = <0.001$).

8. How likely are you to recommend the services of the Writing Centre to other students?

- Significant Differences:
 - Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction: The difference is significant with means of Unlikely (2.75) and Very Unlikely (3.97) ($p = <0.001$), Neutral

(3.00) and Very Unlikely (3.97) ($p = <0.001$), Likely (3.62) and Very Unlikely (3.97) ($p = <0.001$).

- Tutor Competence: The difference is significant with means of Unlikely (2.92) and Very Unlikely (3.81) ($p = <0.001$), Neutral (3.02) and Very Unlikely (3.81) ($p = <0.001$), Likely (3.49) and Very Unlikely (3.81) ($p = <0.001$).
- Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of Unlikely (2.70) and Very Unlikely (3.95) ($p = <0.001$), Neutral (3.08) and Very Unlikely (3.95) ($p = <0.001$), Likely (3.59) and Very Unlikely (3.95) ($p = <0.001$).

9. How would you rate the services of the Writing Centre staff?

- Significant Differences:
 - Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction: The difference is significant with means of Poor (1.97) and Excellent (4.03) ($p = <0.001$), Fair (3.09) and Excellent (4.03) ($p = <0.001$), Good (3.47) and Excellent (4.03) ($p = <0.001$).
 - Tutor Competence: The difference is significant with means of Poor (2.25) and Excellent (3.84) ($p = <0.001$), Fair (3.14) and Excellent (3.84) ($p = <0.001$), Good (3.37) and Excellent (3.84) ($p = <0.001$).
 - Tutor-Student Interaction: The difference is significant with means of Poor (2.46) and Excellent (4.01) ($p = <0.001$), Fair (3.22) and Excellent (4.01) ($p = <0.001$), Good (3.39) and Excellent (4.01) ($p = <0.001$).

The results of the study provide valuable insights into how various biographical factors influence students' perceptions of the Writing Centre's services. Overall, gender and age were not significant determinants of the quality of assistance, tutor competence, or tutor-student interaction, suggesting a generally consistent experience across these demographic groups. However, differences were observed when considering the level of study, frequency of Writing Centre usage, duration of service use, importance placed on the Writing Centre's role in postgraduate success, likelihood of recommending the Writing Centre, and rating of the services provided by the Writing Centre staff.

Specifically, postgraduate students in more advanced stages of their studies, such as those pursuing a Doctorate, had lower perceptions of tutor-student interaction compared to those in earlier stages, such as Postgraduate Diploma students. This highlights the need for tailored support that addresses the evolving needs of students as they progress through their academic careers. Moreover, students who frequently use the Writing Centre or have been using its services for longer periods reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of assistance, tutor competence, and tutor-student interaction. This indicates that familiarity and regular engagement with the Writing Centre are positively correlated with more favourable perceptions, underscoring the importance of encouraging consistent use of Writing Centre services. The study also revealed that students who perceive the Writing Centre as crucial to postgraduate success or are highly likely to recommend its services to others have significantly more positive views on all measured dimensions. This finding emphasises the critical role of perceived importance and positive word-of-mouth in shaping student experiences and satisfaction.

Finally, the analysis showed a significant gradient in satisfaction based on the students' ratings of Writing Centre staff, with those rating the staff as "Excellent" consistently reporting the highest satisfaction across all dimensions. This suggests that the perceived professionalism and competence of the staff are key drivers of overall satisfaction. In conclusion, the results indicate that while certain demographic factors do not significantly impact students' perceptions of the Writing Centre, the level of study, engagement with the Centre, and perceived importance of the services play crucial roles in shaping student satisfaction. These findings can guide targeted interventions and service improvements to enhance the effectiveness and reach of the Writing Centre, particularly for postgraduate students at different stages of their academic journey and varying levels of engagement.

6.10 CORRELATIONS

Bivariate correlation was also performed on the data. The results are depicted in Table 6.20 below.

Table 6.20: Bivariate Correlation of data

		Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction	Tutor Competence	Tutor-Student Interaction
Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	--		
	N	335		
Tutor Competence	Pearson Correlation	0.938**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001		
	N	335	335	
Tutor-Student Interaction	Pearson Correlation	0.955**	0.952**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001	< 0.001	
	N	334	334	334
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Author Generated (2025)

The results indicate the following patterns.

The bivariate correlation analysis shows strong and statistically significant relationships among the three key dimensions of student satisfaction with the Writing Centre: Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction, Tutor Competence, and Tutor-Student Interaction.

- The **Pearson correlation** between **Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction** and **Tutor Competence** is **0.938** with a **p-value < 0.001**. This indicates a very strong positive correlation, meaning that higher levels of perceived tutor competence are strongly associated with increased satisfaction with the quality of assistance provided by the Writing Centre.
- The correlation between **Quality of Assistance and Satisfaction** and **Tutor-Student Interaction** is even stronger at **0.955** with a **p-value < 0.001**. This suggests that effective tutor-student interactions are crucial in driving overall satisfaction with the Writing Centre's services.
- Additionally, the correlation between **Tutor Competence** and **Tutor-Student Interaction** is **0.952** with a **p-value < 0.001**, indicating that perceptions of tutor competence are closely linked to the quality of interactions between tutors and students.

These findings highlight that all three dimensions are significantly interrelated. Enhancing one aspect, such as tutor competence, is likely to have positive effects on both tutor-student interaction and overall satisfaction, illustrating the importance of a holistic approach to improving Writing Centre services.

6.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This penultimate chapter presented a quantitative analysis of the training needs of Writing Centre tutors who support postgraduate students, offering empirical insights into key areas requiring training and development. Despite the Writing Centre's success in assisting postgraduate students, the results indicated that there are still areas for improvement, particularly in the areas of enhancing the rapport between tutors and students and contemplating additional training for tutors to maintain and enhance their proficiency.

Statistical analysis underscored the necessity for structured training programmes that enhance tutors' pedagogical skills, metacognitive awareness, and ability to provide feedback tailored to postgraduate writers' diverse needs. These results contribute to the broader discourse on Writing Centre pedagogy by empirically validating previously anecdotal claims about tutor training deficiencies. The implications suggest that Writing Centres should adopt a data-driven approach to professional development, ensuring tutors are equipped to meet the complex demands of postgraduate writers. Ultimately, this study reinforces the importance of targeted, evidence-based training in elevating the quality of writing support for postgraduate students. The ensuing final chapter looks at the development of a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students as per the main aim of the study as well as conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FRAMEWORK FORMULATION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has traversed a wide range of theoretical, contextual, and empirical landscapes, from the historical and pedagogical foundations of Writing Centres to the formulation of a structured framework for tutor training. Each chapter has contributed to building a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with postgraduate writing support, culminating in actionable insights that can inform practice, policy, and future research in the higher education context.

This concluding chapter begins by summarising the main findings of the research, highlighting the critical role of Writing Centres in supporting postgraduate students and the specific training needs identified through the mixed-methods research approach. It revisits the theoretical frameworks and contextual factors that have shaped the study, underscoring the importance of aligning training programmes with the unique demands of postgraduate writing support. The chapter consolidates the proposed framework for tutor training, underscoring its potential to address gaps in current practices and to empower tutors with the knowledge and capabilities needed to excel in their roles and contribute to student success at university. In addition to summarising the findings, this chapter provides a set of practical recommendations for Writing Centres in higher education institutions. These recommendations are designed to guide the implementation of the proposed tutor training framework, ensuring that it is adaptable to diverse institutional contexts and responsive to the evolving needs of postgraduate students.

This chapter reflects on the broader implications of the study for Writing Centre practice, postgraduate education, and academic support services. It considers the potential of this research to contribute to the ongoing transformation of higher education, particularly in addressing issues of equity, access, and student success. The chapter concludes by identifying areas for future research, encouraging further exploration of the dynamic interplay between Writing Centre pedagogy, tutor training, and postgraduate writing support. In essence, this final chapter serves as both a culmination of the research journey and a springboard for future action.

7.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Chapter One introduced the problem statement of this study emphasising that student success in higher education is a significant concern, with many failing to complete their studies on time or drop out entirely. Despite policy moves by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to increase student throughput rates, many institutions in South Africa continue to have high drop-out rates (Letseka and Breier 2008; Moodley and Singh 2015; Tanga and Maphosa 2018; Matsolo 2018; Boughey and McKenna 2021). The South African Human Rights Commission has highlighted low student success rates as a challenge to the transformation and social integration in South African universities. To contribute to student success in higher education institutions, it is essential for academic staff and academic support staff to understand and address the needs of students. Writing Centres, which form part of academic support staff in universities, are well-placed to contribute to the success of students in higher education institutions and developing well-rounded graduates and critical citizens who can contribute to societal transformation. Writing Centres play a crucial role in supporting the teaching and learning agenda in higher education institutions, helping students develop criticality in their writing and feel confident in their roles as lifelong learners. These centres provide students with a safe space, encouraging them to be active participants in their own learning. They also enable students to craft their academic voice, develop their critical thinking, and strengthen their academic writing.

Postgraduate students make up a significant number of the total number of students who require academic support and utilise Writing Centre services. Furthermore, they have a significant role in contributing to the advancement of academic excellence and research output at universities. However, little focus has been given to the unique needs of postgraduate students in terms of writing assistance. Hence, this study aimed to address this gap by focusing on postgraduate student needs as well as the training needs of Writing Centre staff who support the development of postgraduate students. This study therefore through empirical investigation proposes the implementation of a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students as a potentially unique approach to enhance postgraduate student success in higher education. This study focused on two selected Universities of Technology in KZN, namely the DUT and MUT Writing Centres.

A review of academic support training and development programmes is needed to equip Writing Centre tutors with the powerful knowledge on working with postgraduate students. This research is timely, as the South African National Development Plan (NDP 2013) recommends that higher education institutions double the percentage of their postgraduate degree holders by 2030. The findings from this research can potentially enhance strategies that contribute to postgraduate support and success in higher education.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Analyse the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Analyse postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Explore the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.
- Develop an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students.

The research questions emanating from the research objectives were:

- What are the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN?
- Which training methods are used in capacitating Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students?
- What are the experiences of postgraduate students in consulting with Writing Centre staff?
- What is the relationship between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at the selected UoTs in KZN?

To conclude the study, it is important to evaluate whether the objectives of this research have been met.

7.2.1 Objective One: To explore the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN

This objective was met as the study resulted in pertinent findings on the training needs of Writing Centre tutors, including the need for research-specific training and the need for discipline-specific training and also training on Writing Centre theory and pedagogy. It was confirmed through the findings that Writing Centre tutors are not currently trained to specifically support postgraduate students, hence the existing training gaps. The quantitative analysis of the data indicated that while Writing Centre staff are perceived as competent and knowledgeable (with mean scores for tutor competence generally above 3.6), there is a significant perception among students that additional training could enhance tutors' effectiveness. This is evidenced by the statement "The tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations," which had a lower mean score of 3.25, indicating moderate agreement. This suggests that there is a recognised need for further training to better equip Writing Centre staff in addressing the specific needs of postgraduate students. The moderate agreement on the need for further training is also statistically non-significant, which implies varied opinions on this issue, further highlighting the need for targeted tutor training programmes. This is further supported by qualitative findings which indicate that Writing Centre tutors require further training on Writing Centre theory and pedagogy, research-specific training such as on research methodologies, literature review and proposal writing, and discipline specific training that will enable tutors to more effectively guide postgraduate students in particular disciplines.

7.2.2 Objective Two: To analyse the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN

Findings show that this objective was achieved as the qualitative data highlighted that the training methods used in capacitating Writing Centre staff include a combination of Initial training workshops, which introduced core pedagogical theories (behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist and humanistic) and basic consultation protocols; Ongoing professional development, delivered through periodic in-house seminars; Peer-to-peer learning, whereby experienced tutors informally mentored newcomers during live consultations; Role-playing exercises, used in staff meetings to rehearse challenging student scenarios; and Reflective feedback sessions, in which tutors journaled about their instructional choices and experiences. While the specific training methods used

were not detailed in the quantitative data, the high mean scores related to tutor competence (ranging from 3.63 to 3.76) suggest that existing training methods have been effective to a certain extent. However, the lower mean score for the need for more training (3.25) implies that current training methods may not be comprehensive enough or may need to be updated to address evolving academic challenges faced by postgraduate students. Moreover, by triangulating tutors' lived experiences with student perceptions of competence, the research highlighted both the strengths of the existing programme (as evidenced by strong competence ratings) and areas for enhancement (as flagged by the call for further training). This analysis provided a crucial evidential basis for the development of the modular training framework presented in Figure 7.2.

7.2.3 Objective Three: To analyse postgraduate students' experiences in consulting with Writing Centre staff at selected UoTs in KZN

This objective was accomplished as the researcher collected data from postgraduate students both qualitatively, through interviews and quantitatively through survey questionnaires. Findings indicated both positive and negative experiences with consulting with Writing Centre staff. The data revealed that postgraduate students generally have positive experiences with Writing Centre staff. For example, from the quantitative data, the high mean scores for statements related to Tutor-Student Interaction (ranging from 3.53 to 3.82) suggests that students find the tutors approachable, communicative, and supportive. Particularly, students feel that tutors listen to them during consultations (mean score of 3.79) and allow them to ask questions for clarification (mean score of 3.82). These findings indicate a positive and interactive relationship between students and tutors, which is crucial for effective learning and support. However, qualitative data also indicated some negative experiences of students consulting with Writing Centre tutors with some postgraduate students expressing that some tutors lack confidence in assisting them and refer them to other tutors. In addition, students noted that some tutors are not knowledgeable in certain disciplines and some lack research specific knowledge.

7.2.4 Objective Four: To explore the interconnectedness between Writing Centre support services and the success of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN

This objective was met as a significant proportion of the postgraduate student respondents indicated that they perceived an improvement in their academic writing as a direct result of the services provided by the Writing Centre. The study therefore affirms that Writing Centre support can facilitate successful outcomes for postgraduate students in terms of their writing. The positive correlations found in the quantitative data between quality of assistance and satisfaction, tutor competence, and tutor-student interaction (all above 0.9) underscore the interconnectedness between these dimensions. The strong correlations suggest that improvements in any one area (e.g., tutor competence) are likely to have a positive impact on the overall satisfaction and effectiveness of Writing Centre support services. This interconnectedness implies that the success of postgraduate students is closely linked to the quality of support provided, emphasising the importance of maintaining high standards in all aspects of Writing Centre work.

7.2.5 Objective Five: To develop an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff working with postgraduate students

This objective was accomplished. Through the study's findings, a proposed conceptual framework for implementation materialised, supported by the selected theoretical frameworks used in Writing Centre praxis. The framework proposes how Writing Centres can be trained in order to effectively support postgraduate students. Based on the findings, the researcher developed an exploratory conceptual framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff which focuses on enhancing tutor competence through continuous professional development, with a particular emphasis on the evolving needs of postgraduate students. The framework integrates regular feedback from students, ongoing assessment of tutor performance, and targeted training sessions designed to address specific areas where improvement is needed, such as advanced academic writing support and personalised consultation techniques. This approach would ensure that the Writing Centre remains responsive to the needs of its postgraduate student population. The framework is illustrated and further explained in Figure 7.2.

In summary, the analysis of the data collected indicated that while the Writing Centre staff are generally perceived as competent, there is a recognised need for additional training to meet the specific demands of postgraduate students. The interconnectedness between the various aspects of Writing Centre services and their impact on student success underscores the importance of a holistic approach to tutor training and development. The statistically significant findings justify the need for targeted interventions aimed at improving both tutor competence and the overall quality of support provided to postgraduate students.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of the empirical findings from this study, the researcher proffers the following recommendations. These recommendations are designed to address the identified gaps in current practices and to ensure that Writing Centres are equipped to provide effective, contextually relevant support to postgraduate students.

7.3.1 Establish writing and productivity Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Postgraduate students often struggle with isolation during their studies and lack structured peer support. Tutor training programmes should incorporate the development and principles of Communities of Practice (CoPs) from Writing Centres. The theoretical underpinnings and real-world uses of CoPs can be explained to tutors during training, with a focus on how these communities foster information exchange, introspection, and cooperative learning and development. Tutors are crucial in creating, maintaining and facilitating postgraduate-focused CoPs that go beyond one-on-one consultations. This initiative can assist lecturers, postgraduate students and tutors in their academic writing endeavours by providing spaces for continued peer assistance, mutual development, and shared inquiry. CoPs can create environments for collaborative problem-solving, shared learning and motivation and accountability. Training in this area will further equip tutors with soft skills such as facilitation, peer mentoring, and understanding of group dynamics, enabling them to create inclusive, student-led spaces that promote collaborative learning. These initiatives may include postgraduate peer-writing groups, research conversation circles, or interdisciplinary academic cafés, all of which align with the principles of CoPs. Tutors can be

encouraged to initiate discipline-specific or interdisciplinary writing circles where students can share drafts, discuss challenges, and set writing goals. These could be called “Meet and Write” sessions and can be driven by tutors. For more target orientated results, participants could meet possibly once a week or once every fortnight depending on mutual agreement and specific goals could be established.

7.3.2 Time management strategies

The literature repeatedly demonstrated that postgraduate students frequently struggle with time management and making consistent time for writing. Many postgraduate students struggle with procrastination, long-term project planning, and balancing writing with other responsibilities. Furthermore, Writing Centre practice advocates for getting students to understand the value of ‘time on task’ and the importance of understanding that the more time one spends on writing and revising, the better that piece of writing will be. Tutors can model and share effective strategies and should therefore be trained on practical time management techniques such as the Pomodoro technique, writing sprints, and scheduled writing retreats. Tutors should be encouraged to facilitate informal workshops or group writing sessions in which these approaches are shared and used in a community setting with students. These writing support spaces, while based on productivity tactics, also serve as informal CoPs by encouraging accountability, shared goals, and a sense of belonging among participants.

7.3.3 Enhance affective support through emotional scaffolding and resilience-building training

The findings have demonstrated that the postgraduate experience can sometimes be emotionally taxing. Writing Centre practitioners should provide training in active listening and empathy to aid tutors in building rapport with postgraduate students from diverse backgrounds. This could include role-playing exercises during tutoring training. By training tutors in emotional resilience strategies, tutors will become holistic mentors helping students navigate the challenges of postgraduate writing with confidence. Tutors should be trained to address the affective or emotive dimensions of postgraduate writing and training should incorporate creating spaces for resilience building among postgraduate students. These could be in the form of workshops which provide techniques for managing perfectionism/imposter syndrome in writing. Also,

tutors could facilitate peer storytelling circles whereby postgraduate students and tutors share their experiences in order to normalise their struggles and show that others have also experienced the struggles that they might be going through regarding writing.

7.3.4 Multilingual and Intercultural Communication

Given South Africa's multilingual context in which DUT and MUT operate, tutors should be equipped with ways in which to support academic writing development in a linguistically inclusive way. This could include code-switching strategies, language sensitivity, and encouraging students to draw from their linguistic resources while developing academic discourse in English. This would assist postgraduate students who are struggling with academic conventions to get a simplified understanding of what is required of them in their home language. Training of tutors needs to foreground practical approaches that tutors can use that cultivates inclusivity in Writing Centre practice. These could include teaching tutors how to embrace translanguaging in discussions and brainstorming writing activities.

7.3.5 Train tutors as academic companions

Tutors can be trained to serve as academic companions who help scaffold long-term projects like dissertations and theses. This model will promote deeper trust, consistent feedback, and better tracking of student progress. Instead of once-off consultations, a writing coach model will encourage ongoing engagement between tutors and postgraduate students across a semester or research project. Furthermore, tutors could be trained to design and facilitate short, focused micro-workshops (15–30 mins) on specific aspects of academic writing such as 'how to write an abstract,' 'argumentation in literature reviews,' or 'navigating supervisor feedback.' These bite-sized, informal learning sessions can be delivered in-person or online. Near-peer mentoring could also be implemented whereby tutors who are doing their PhD studies can assist Masters students which would build confidence and allow for shared expertise.

7.3.6 Gamify the writing support experience

Training tutors in motivational strategies and playful pedagogies may help reduce writing anxiety among postgraduate students. The concept of gamifying writing challenges could be used to turn writing into a collaborative game to boost motivation.

Tutors could use gamification strategies, for example writing challenges, badges for achieving milestones like “500 words in 30 mins” or weekly leaderboards in writing groups, to make the process of academic writing less intimidating and more engaging for postgraduate students.

7.3.7 Reverse-tutoring sessions

Writing centre tutor training should focus on how to use the reserve-tutoring technique. Reverse-tutoring sessions can be implemented in the Writing Centre whereby tutors could request that postgraduate students engage with them on their discipline-specific writing conventions, research methodologies, and academic expectations, creating a dynamic two-way learning exchange. For example, sessions could take various forms including ‘how we write methodology in Chemistry’ or bite-sized ‘Tutor the Tutor’ tutorials at the beginning of the consultation where students share supervisor expectations, or even feedback swaps where students critique tutors' attempts at writing in their academic style. This method would break down hierarchical barriers, validating the students' expertise, and ultimately producing more versatile tutors who understand the nuanced differences between writing in different disciplines. Reverse-tutoring will enable tutors to gain discipline-specific insights, while students build metacognitive awareness of their writing.

7.3.8 Digital literacy and AI-assisted writing tools

The use of AI tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and referencing software have become more common in academic writing, therefore tutors should be trained to critically engage with these technologies. Training can include ethical use of AI tools and guiding students in integrating such tools into their writing processes without replacing critical thinking. Tutors can also demonstrate how to use these tools to enhance productivity, revise drafts, and develop better academic writing habits. Research findings indicated concerns regarding AI generated work and thus there is a need for staff training programmes to include the element of new emerging technologies which could have a direct or indirect impact on the nature of consultations. Future training needs to address the integration of AI technology in Writing Centre work. In addition, training should train tutors on conducting online consultations for postgraduate students. Furthermore, a repository of short video tutorials for example

on literature review writing and referencing can be created by tutors for on-demand access.

7.3.9 Nudge-Based Writing Support

Tutors can be trained on how to use nudge-based writing support to build habitual writing practices by sending gentle, timely reminders to postgraduate students to motivate postgraduate students to write consistently, combat procrastination, and build sustainable habits. These reminders could be sent via the WOnline platform using the Mass Email option with messages filtered to only send to current postgraduate students. These nudges can help address common intention-action gaps by breaking writing into micro-tasks, for example through sending messages like “Write for 25 minutes now” or “Have you written today?” Furthermore, tutors could enhance impact by sending customised post-session nudges to the postgraduate students they have consulted with saying for example, “You’re halfway through the week - 200 more words today?” or “Keep going! Don’t lose your flow”. Through integrating nudges, Writing Centres could build habitual writing with minimal tutor workload - shifting from reactive tutoring to proactive habit-building.

7.3.10 Training for research purposes

It has been established from the findings that there is a need for tutors to be trained in research-specific writing needs. As such, the researcher recommends that tutors be trained on various aspects of research such as research methodologies, the development of research proposals and the crafting of literature reviews in order to effectively guide and support postgraduate students visiting the Writing Centre.

7.3.11 Discipline-specific training

The findings highlighted that both tutors and postgraduate students lamented the lack of discipline-specific training among the tutors. Tutors need to be equipped to support students across diverse academic fields. Therefore, Writing Centres at the selected UoTs should provide training that addresses the research methodologies and expectations of specific disciplines. Collaborations with discipline experts and departments should be prioritised to develop tailored training modules for tutors.

7.3.12 Collaboration with departments and faculties

The findings underscore the need for the Writing Centre to foster collaborations with academic departments to effectively address the needs of the postgraduate students who visit the Writing Centre. Collaboration enhances knowledge sharing; community building and quality improvement of the support provided to postgraduate students. Therefore, Writing Centres should facilitate regular networking opportunities for Writing Centre staff. Furthermore, collaboration with Mental Health and Wellness departments would be important. Recognising the emotional labour and mental health challenges of postgraduate study, tutors can be trained to spot signs of burnout or academic distress and refer students appropriately. They can also co-host sessions with campus wellness units on “writing and wellness,” addressing issues such as impostor syndrome, perfectionism, and procrastination.

7.3.13 Continuous training and development

Writing Centre pedagogy and postgraduate writing demands are constantly evolving, necessitating that tutors engage in continuous training and development. Writing Centres at the selected UoTs should engage their staff in continuous training and development opportunities such as workshops, seminars and peer-to-peer learning to keep tutors abreast of the best practices and emerging trends. Tutor training should be ongoing, adaptive, and responsive to emerging postgraduate needs. There could be regular sessions which could be called “lunch and learn” sessions where tutors discuss challenges and share tutoring strategies. Guest speakers such as PhD supervisors could be invited to provide insights into postgraduate writing expectations.

7.3.14 Reflective practice

Reflective practices enhance self-awareness, improve tutoring strategies, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Therefore, the researcher recommends that tutors in the selected UoT Writing Centres are trained on how to engage in reflective practice by maintaining journals, engaging in debriefing sessions with their respective practitioners, and seeking feedback from students and peer tutors. Reflective activities should be integrated into regular training programmes and provide structured opportunities for tutors to share their experiences. Tutors should be supported in reflecting on their roles and professional growth through structured reflection and dialogue sessions. These moments of reflexivity, when conducted in a

group setting, can themselves serve as internal CoPs that promote sustained professional learning and mentorship. Such reflection also supports the development of a scholarly identity, particularly for tutors who are themselves postgraduate students.

7.3.15 Strengthen institutional support

Institutional support is critical for the sustainability and effectiveness of Writing Centre initiatives. The researcher therefore recommends that Writing Centres at the selected UoTs advocate for institutional recognition and support such as staffing funding, and resources for training programmes.

7.3.16 Regular training needs assessment and feedback

In order for training programmes within the Writing Centres in the selected UoTs to remain relevant and responsive to the needs and evolving demands of students, the researcher recommends that Writing Centres should periodically assess the training needs of Writing Centre tutors and the evolving needs of postgraduate students through feedback mechanisms such as focus group discussions and surveys.

7.3.17 Promote research and innovation

Research findings indicated that most tutors are not aware of theories used in Writing Centre practices; as such, this study recommends that Writing Centre tutors be encouraged to engage in research on Writing Centre pedagogy, tutor training and postgraduate Writing Support. A solid grounding in learning theories such as behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist and humanistic learning theories is essential for Writing Centre tutors because it can guide tutors' pedagogical choices when working with students. Tutors who understand, for example, behaviourist principles can structure sessions to reinforce positive writing behaviours, while those versed in constructivism can design activities that help students co-construct meaning. A theoretical toolkit enables tutors to recognise and adapt to different students' needs, whether that means scaffolding complex arguments (cognitivist) or fostering a safe, student-centred environment (humanistic). Theories promote reflective practice and provide lenses through which tutors can debrief and critically evaluate their interventions (e.g. "Was my questioning sufficiently open-ended?" or "Did I provide the right kind of corrective feedback?"), leading to continual professional growth. It further ensures coherence and consistency - when all tutors share a common conceptual

framework, Writing Centre services become more equitable, so that every postgraduate student receives support grounded in proven instructional principles. Additionally, the ability to draw on multiple theories empowers tutors to design new strategies such as combining peer-learning circles (constructivist) with structured practices (behaviourist) - that respond to evolving academic challenges. Theory underpins both the “why” and the “how” of effective writing support, equipping tutors to deliver interventions that are intentional, evidence-informed and responsive to the complex needs of postgraduate writers.

7.3.18 Educate various stakeholders on the role of Writing Centres

Research findings indicated that postgraduate students as well as some lecturers have a misinterpretation of the role of the Writing Centre, often regarding it as a fix-it shop. Therefore, this study recommends that there be awareness raised to various stakeholders on the critical role of Writing Centres and their significance in supporting postgraduate students. This awareness could be through the development of marketing materials such as posters and flyers and through the hosting of workshops that explain the role of the Writing Centre.

7.3.19 Structured training framework

Based on the research findings, the researcher recommends that the proposed training framework be implemented by the selected UoTs. Collaboration between the Writing Centre practitioners and academic departments can help in the design and implementation of the framework.

These recommendations place Writing Centre tutors in the role of facilitators of collaborative learning ecosystems rather than only as one-on-one advisers. Tutors can support postgraduate students in creating long-lasting writing habits and furthering their own professional development by using CoPs, productivity techniques, and peer networks. These ideas challenge conventions, incorporate technology, and rethink conventional tutoring methods.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into the training needs of Writing Centre tutors supporting postgraduate students, it is important to acknowledge its limitations.

- The study was conducted at two selected UoTs in KZN thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings to other institutions, provinces or countries. The unique contexts and student demographics of these UoTs may not fully represent the diversity of Writing Centres and postgraduate students' needs across South Africa or globally.
- The sample size of tutors and postgraduate students in MUT was lower than that of DUT tutors as the MUT Writing Centre is still relatively new compared to DUT.
- The researcher focused exclusively on postgraduate students, thereby excluding undergraduate students and other user groups. Therefore, the findings may not fully address the broader training needs of Writing Centre tutors who work with diverse student populations.
- Due to time and resource constraints, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which restricted the breadth and depth of data collection and analysis. As such, aspects of research such as longitudinal trends or long-term impact of training programmes could not be explored.
- The study did not extensively explore the role of institutional policies and resource allocation in shaping Writing Centre practices and training programmes. Therefore, the findings may not fully account for the influence of institutional factors on the effectiveness of Writing Centres.
- The findings may not fully capture the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as lectures, faculty members or university leadership who play a role in shaping Writing Centre practices as the primary focus of the research was on tutor training needs.

While the findings of this study offer valuable insights, they should be interpreted with the above limitations in mind.

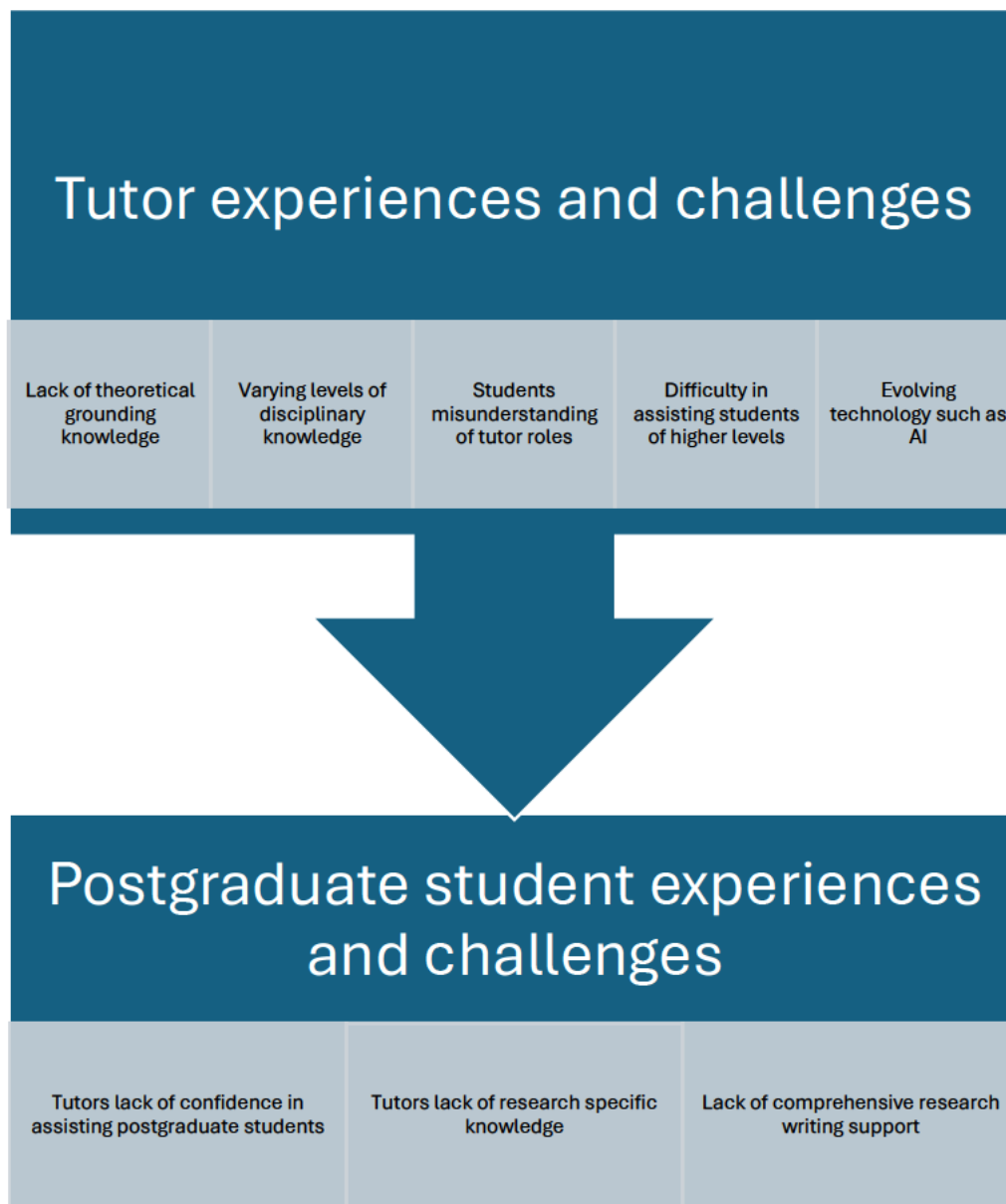
7.5 THE FORMULATION OF A FRAMEWORK FOR THE TRAINING NEEDS OF WRITING CENTRE STAFF SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

The main aim of this study was to formulate a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students. The following section reflects the current experiences and challenges of both Writing Centre staff and postgraduate students in relation to Writing Centre support offerings.

7.5.1 Current experiences and challenges in relation to Writing Centre service offerings

The lack of tailored training for Writing Centre tutors dedicated to the needs of postgraduate students has resulted in various challenges for both tutors and postgraduate students, which contributes to overall negative experiences. This is depicted in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Tutors and Postgraduate Student Current experiences and challenges



Source: Author Generated (2025)

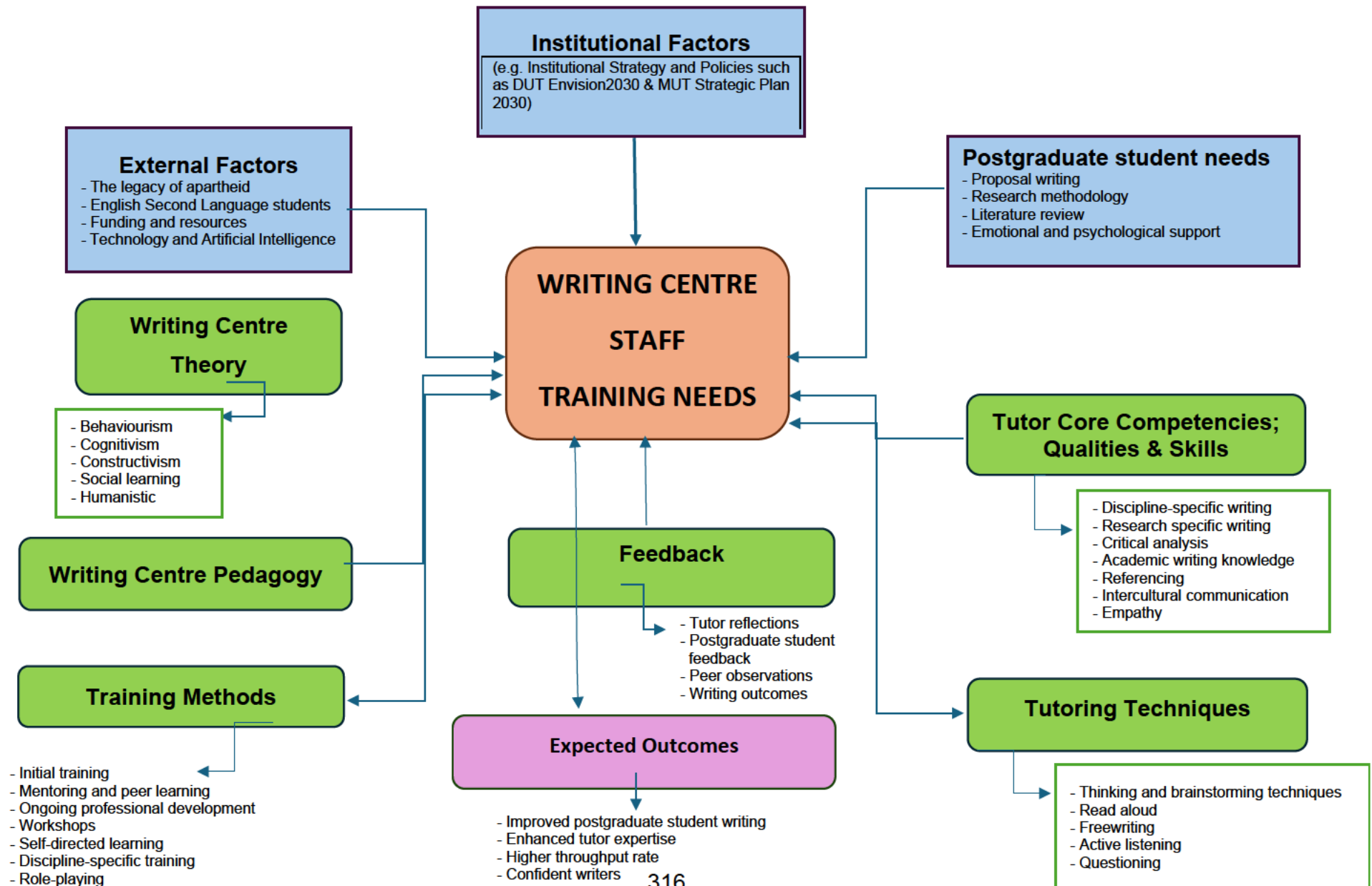
7.5.2 Conceptual Framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students

Based on the findings of the study, a conceptual framework is developed and proposed. As Archer (2010) notes, postgraduate writing support must address both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, particularly in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. This framework responds to that imperative by creating an integrated approach to tutor development that acknowledges the complex realities of South African higher education institutions. Research by Clarence (2020) underscores the

need for Writing Centres in Global South contexts to negotiate unique historical legacies while preparing students for global academic participation, a tension this framework explicitly engages with.

The framework is visually depicted in Figure 7.2 and a narrative is provided on how the framework can work to enhance the Writing Centre staff training to meet the needs of postgraduate students.

Figure 7.2: Framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students



Source: Author Generated (2025)

The proposed conceptual framework has been developed to guide the identification and fulfilment of training needs for Writing Centre staff in a UoT higher education context. The framework recognises the multifaceted influences that shape tutor development and pedagogical practices and responds to both institutional requirements and student demands. In order to create a dynamic training framework this study proposes the promotion of a systems-based approach that combines theory, pedagogy, feedback, and strategy.

Institutional factors form a foundational layer that influences all aspects of Writing Centre functioning. Strategic documents such as the DUT ENVISION2030 and MUT Strategic Plan 2030 outline the university's broader objectives, including enhancing postgraduate throughput, advancing research output, and promoting inclusive academic development. These policies provide a directive for the alignment of Writing Centre practices with institutional goals, thereby shaping the scope and depth of tutor training.

External influences significantly shape the needs and practices within Writing Centres. In terms of technology and AI, the increasing use of AI writing tools necessitates new competencies among tutors to guide students in ethical and critical use of these technologies. In addition, South Africa has a legacy of apartheid and historical disparities continue to affect access to quality education, necessitating responsive and inclusive tutoring approaches. Moreover, the majority of students in South African higher education are English Second Language (ESL) speakers, and this necessitates targeted linguistic and academic support from the Writing Centre staff. A significant external factor affecting Writing Centres pertains to funding and resources where financial and infrastructural constraints impact the scalability and quality of tutor training programmes. These external factors influence the training needs of Writing Centre staff by creating teaching and learning environments that demand context-sensitive strategies.

The increasing number of postgraduate students has introduced new academic support requirements. These include assistance with proposal writing, research

methodology, literature reviews, emotional and psychological support. To effectively meet these needs, Writing Centre staff must be equipped with specialised training that extends beyond undergraduate-level academic support. This entails developing both academic (discipline-specific expertise, research literacy, critical thinking, etc.) and competencies (empathy, active listening, mentorship, cultural sensitivity, etc.) among tutors.

At the core of the framework is the identification of Writing Centre staff training needs. These needs arise from the convergence of institutional policies, external challenges, and specific student demands. The training of tutors must be intentional, theory-informed, and adaptable, ensuring staff can deliver high-impact academic support across varying student profiles.

Effective training must be rooted in sound educational theory. The framework's theoretical grounding draws on multiple educational paradigms that have proven effective in Writing Centre contexts. The framework draws on multiple learning theories to inform tutoring philosophy and practice including behaviourism, which emphasising positive reinforcement and repetition; cognitivism, which focuses on mental processes and learning strategies; constructivism, which advocates for active, student-centred learning; social learning theory, which highlights learning through interaction and observation, humanistic theory, which prioritises empathy, self-efficacy, and holistic student development. These theories collectively shape the pedagogical orientation of Writing Centre training.

The application of these theories results in context-sensitive Writing Centre pedagogy, which in turn informs practical training approaches. For example, a constructivist approach may favour collaborative peer learning, while a humanistic approach supports the development of empathetic tutor-student relationships. Training approaches must be adaptive and reflective, incorporating strategies that align with the centre's ethos and student diversity.

To fulfil their roles effectively, tutors require a comprehensive set of competencies, including discipline-specific writing expertise, research-specific writing knowledge, critical thinking and analysis skills, mastery of academic writing conventions and

referencing, intercultural communication proficiency, empathy and emotional intelligence. These skills ensure that tutors are not only academically prepared but also capable of forming supportive relationships with diverse student populations.

Practical tutoring techniques are essential tools for facilitating student learning. Key techniques include brainstorming and thinking techniques, read-aloud techniques, freewriting and prewriting activities as well as active listening. These techniques help promote student agency, deepen engagement, and foster improved writing outcomes. Feedback serves as a critical feedback loop within the training ecosystem. It enables the continual refinement of training content, pedagogical practices, and tutoring strategies. Feedback can be both formative (used to guide tutor development during training) and evaluative (used to assess the effectiveness of training and inform institutional decision-making). Feedback loops ensure that training remains responsive, relevant, and reflective of evolving academic contexts.

The ultimate goal of this framework is the attainment of expected outcomes such as enhanced tutor capacity and pedagogical effectiveness; improved postgraduate student writing; greater alignment between Writing Centre practices and institutional strategic objectives; the development of an inclusive, supportive, and academically rigorous environment; enhanced tutor expertise; and higher postgraduate throughput rate. This framework provides a holistic and theoretically grounded approach to developing Writing Centre staff in a contextually responsive manner. It highlights the central role of training in fostering effective academic support while accounting for institutional, external, and student-driven factors. The implementation of such a framework will enhance the impact of Writing Centres and contribute meaningfully to student success in higher education.

7.6 INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS

The integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings underscores that Writing Centre tutors need be trained to cater for the unique academic needs of postgraduate students. This research has provided an analysis of the effectiveness and impact of Writing Centre services on postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Guided by Human Capital Theory, the study conceptualised tutor training as an institutional investment that enhances tutor competence and effectiveness, which in turn contributes to postgraduate student success. This theoretical lens shaped the examination of tutor competence, professional development, and service effectiveness at the selected UoTs in KZN. The findings of the study demonstrate that well-trained tutors are better equipped to provide high-quality, responsive, and inclusive writing support, thereby contributing to postgraduate student satisfaction and academic success. In this way, the Human Capital theory directly links institutional investment in tutor development to improved educational outcomes.

Drawing on Constructivist and Social Learning Theory, the findings further demonstrate that effective writing support is co-constructed through meaningful tutor-student interactions rather than transmitted in a purely directive manner. The strong correlations identified between tutor competence, tutor-student interaction, and the overall quality of assistance provided confirm the interconnected nature of these dimensions, as reflected in the proposed conceptual framework. These results suggest that postgraduate writing development is enhanced when tutors engage students through dialogic, responsive, and scaffolded learning processes.

In addition, insights informed by Cognitivism and Behaviourism highlight the importance of structured guidance, feedback, and reinforcement in postgraduate consultations. While Writing Centre staff were generally perceived as competent and supportive, the moderate agreement among students regarding the need for further training indicates that tutors require continuous professional development to respond to the increasingly complex cognitive demands of postgraduate academic writing. Overall, the findings affirm that the effectiveness of Writing Centre services is shaped not only by tutor knowledge and skills, but also by theoretically informed interactions between tutors and postgraduate students. Positive and constructive interactions were found to be a significant factor in enhancing the overall satisfaction of students, further emphasising the importance of personalisation and responsiveness in tutoring approaches. This thereby reinforces the relevance of the study's theoretical framework in explaining and interpreting the research outcomes. Through examining various dimensions such as tutor competence, tutor-student interaction, and the overall quality

of assistance provided, the study has highlighted the critical role that Writing Centres play in supporting the academic success of postgraduate students

7.7 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Building on the key findings of this study, the following section highlights the contributions made to theory, practice, and policy. These contributions reflect how the study addressed the research problem and objectives, while providing insights that are relevant not only to the two UoTs (DUT and MUT) but also to the broader South African higher education sector. The discussion is organised into theoretical contributions, which extend existing understanding of tutor training and postgraduate writing support, and empirical contributions, which provide evidence-based recommendations for improving Writing Centre practice.

7.7.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to Writing Centre scholarship, particularly within the context of postgraduate academic support at South African UoTs. By drawing on multiple learning and development theories, including Human Capital Theory, Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Social Learning Theory, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how writing centre tutors acquire, apply, and share knowledge and skills in practice. The findings extend existing frameworks by highlighting the unique training needs and challenges of tutors that are critical for postgraduate support but previously underexplored in South African Writing Centre literature. Human Capital Theory, for instance, helps conceptualise tutor training as an investment in professional development that enhances institutional capacity, while Behaviourist and Cognitivist perspectives illuminate the design and effectiveness of structured training interventions. Constructivist and Social Learning approaches explain how tutors develop skills through active engagement, scaffolding, and peer observation. Collectively, these theoretical lenses demonstrate how established models of learning and development can be applied and integrated within the South African writing centre context to support postgraduate academic success.

7.7.2 Empirical Contributions

Empirically, the study provides new evidence on the experiences and perceptions of postgraduate students and Writing Centre staff at DUT and MUT. Using a mixed-methods design, the study captured both measurable trends from questionnaires and nuanced insights from semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The findings reveal specific training gaps, professional development needs, and perceptions of effectiveness for Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students, as well as postgraduate students' experiences of Writing Centre support. By focusing on postgraduate students, a population previously underexplored in South African Writing Centre research, the study addresses a critical gap. The findings also provide comparative insights across the two institutions, offering practical guidance for enhancing Writing Centre practices at both UoTs and informing policy and development strategies across the sector more broadly.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have important practical, institutional, and sectoral implications for Writing Centre Practice, tutor development, and postgraduate support within UoTs and the South African higher education landscape more broadly. These implications arise directly from the identified training needs of Writing Centre tutors and the growing demand for postgraduate academic writing support.

7.8.1 Implications for Writing Centre practice

Practically, the study informs the design and implementation of training programmes that equip writing centre tutors to meet the complex needs of postgraduate students. The study highlights the need for structured, ongoing, and context-specific tutor training programmes that explicitly include postgraduate writing support. Writing centres at DUT and MUT may benefit from developing formalised training frameworks that extend beyond first-year and undergraduate support to address the complex academic writing demands of postgraduate students, including thesis writing, academic argumentation, discipline-specific conventions, and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence tools. Such training would enhance tutor confidence, consistency of support, and the overall quality of postgraduate consultations.

7.8.2 Implications for Institutional Policy and Management

For policymakers and academic developers, the study underscores the need to recognise postgraduate students as a distinct user group with specific learning and support requirements. At an institutional level, the findings suggest the need for greater recognition of Writing Centres as strategic academic support units within UoTs. Management structures should consider allocating adequate resources, including funding, time, the integration of digital tools including Artificial Intelligence, and professional development opportunities, to ensure that Writing Centre practitioners and tutors are sufficiently trained to support postgraduate students. Furthermore, institutions may need to review workload models and staffing arrangements to ensure sustainable support for both undergraduate and postgraduate populations.

7.8.3 Implications for Tutor Professional Development

The study underscores the importance of viewing Writing Centre tutoring as a form of human capital development. Institutions should invest in tutor training that integrates theoretical and practical components, drawing on learning theories such as constructivism, social learning, and cognitivism to promote reflective practice, peer learning, and skills transfer. This approach would not only improve tutor effectiveness but also contribute to tutors' academic and professional growth, particularly those pursuing postgraduate studies themselves.

7.8.4 Implications for the South African Higher Education Sector

Beyond DUT and MUT, the findings contribute to ongoing national conversations about postgraduate throughput, academic literacy, and student success in South African higher education. The study provides empirical evidence that Writing Centres play a critical role in postgraduate support yet remain under-researched in this regard. The implications therefore extend to other UoTs and traditional universities, encouraging sector-wide reflection on the scope, training, and strategic positioning of Writing Centres.

7.9 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study revealed that there was a gap in literature pertaining to empirical research on the training needs of Writing Centre staff particularly as it pertains to supporting the development of postgraduate students. Future research can build on the findings of this study and contribute to the ongoing development of Writing Centre practice and pedagogy. The study therefore proposes the following directions for future research:

- A similar study could expand the scope to include multiple institutions across different regions or countries to provide a broader perspective.
- Future studies could include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the representativeness and robustness of the findings.
- Future research could investigate the training needs of tutors supporting undergraduate students, international students, or other specific groups.
- Future studies could adopt a longitudinal design to track changes in training needs and outcomes over time.
- A research study could investigate the impact of institutional policies, funding, and resource availability on Writing Centre operations and tutor training.
- A future study could explore alternative research designs or methodologies to address specific aspects of the research problem.
- Future research could incorporate the views of a wider range of stakeholders to provide a more holistic understanding of Writing Centre operations and training needs.

This study reinforces the need for a holistic approach to the training and development of Writing Centre staff. Through the implementation of a comprehensive training framework that addresses specific needs, integrates regular feedback, and focuses on postgraduate academic support, Writing Centres can continue to play a pivotal role in the academic journey of postgraduate students. The insights gained from this research contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational academic support services and provide a foundation for future studies aimed at improving the quality and impact of academic support at higher education institutions.

7.10 LEARNINGS FROM MY PHD JOURNEY

This PhD journey has been an intellectually rigorous and transformative process, one that has reshaped both my academic and personal growth. Before embarking on this research, I had limited engagement with Writing Centre literature and the theoretical underpinnings of writing centre work as was similarly indicated by tutors in the focus group discussions. Navigating the challenges of research and expanding my knowledge has deepened my engagement with Writing Centre literature and theories. This journey has truly transformed my academic identity and strengthened my understanding of the field. I am no longer just knowledgeable in terms of the work done, but I feel I have grown holistically through the process.

The methodological aspects were not without their hurdles. On the quantitative side, collecting data proved challenging, as many participants were hesitant to complete the research questionnaire. It was only after I had emphasised that it would take a short time to complete that the responses were forthcoming. However, the qualitative side provided a rich learning experience. Through interviews with practitioners, Writing Centre tutors, and postgraduate students, I uncovered new insights about the need for comprehensive training for tutors. I realised that prior to the interviews, most of the Writing Centre practitioners at both DUT and MUT had not critically thought about the need for targeted training for tutors assisting postgraduate students. Integrating these diverse data sources and drawing meaningful themes was a complex but rewarding process. Ultimately, this journey has not only provided answers but also highlighted areas for improvement and potential training implications in the Writing Centre space.

7.11 CONCLUSION

The principal aim of this study was to develop a framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal. The study has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students, addressing a critical gap in the literature and practice of academic support services. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study has illuminated the unique challenges faced by postgraduate students, the essential competencies required by Writing Centre tutors, and the gaps in existing training programmes. The findings have

underscored the importance of structured, contextually relevant training frameworks that align with the evolving demands of postgraduate education and the broader goals of equity, access, and transformation in higher education.

The proposed framework for tutor training, grounded in theoretical principles and empirical evidence, provides a practical and adaptable tool for enhancing the professional development of Writing Centre staff. By focusing on foundational knowledge, pedagogical skills, discipline-specific expertise, and interpersonal competencies, the framework equips tutors to address the diverse needs of postgraduate students effectively. Furthermore, the emphasis on ongoing professional development, mentorship, and institutional support ensures that the framework remains dynamic and responsive to the changing higher education landscape.

The recommendations presented in this chapter offer actionable steps for Writing Centres, institutions, and policymakers to implement the framework and strengthen their support for postgraduate students. These recommendations highlight the importance of fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and reflective practice within Writing Centres, ensuring their continued relevance and effectiveness. By prioritising the training and professional development of Writing Centre tutors, institutions can enhance the quality of academic support provided to postgraduate students, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes and student success.

This study has demonstrated the transformative potential of well-trained tutors in addressing the challenges of postgraduate writing support and in contributing to the broader goals of higher education. As Writing Centres continue to evolve, the insights and recommendations from this study will serve as a valuable resource for fostering excellence in academic support and empowering postgraduate students to achieve their full potential.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Patience Mutsvairigwa, Masters in Management Sciences (HR)
Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr. N. Govender, PhD in Management Sciences (Marketing);
Dr. M.E. Lourens, PhD in Management Sciences (HR)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for showing interest in this study. I am a registered student at the Durban University of Technology studying for a Phd in Management Sciences specializing in Human Resources Management. I would like to invite you to participate in the research titled: *A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.*

Outline of the Procedures:

This research will analyse the training and development needs of academic support staff, specifically the Writing Centre staff supporting postgraduate students at Universities of Technology (UoT) in KwaZulu-Natal. The focus of this research is on training and development as a way of enabling Writing Centre staff to responsively support postgraduate students in developing their academic writing. Participants will be drawn from the DUT and MUT Writing Centres and data will be collected through interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire. You have been selected to participate in this study because you are either a Writing Centre practitioner/ tutor or a postgraduate student who is part of /utilises the services of the Writing Centre.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: The risk involved in this research is minimal. If any of the questions are found to be embarrassing, offensive or of a sensitive nature, you may choose not to answer them. In addition, to keep your identity anonymous as a participant, you will be assigned numbers instead of names to protect your identity as one providing the information. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw or terminate at any time should you wish to do so.

Reasons for withdrawal from the Study: This research may be terminated early in particular circumstances. If you do not follow the study protocol or fail to adhere to the instructions given, you may be withdrawn from the study. Furthermore, if at any point you cannot be contacted or become unreachable, you may also be withdrawn from the study. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time for personal reasons. Should you do so, you will still be entitled to the confidentiality of your personal information and data collected during your participation.

Benefits: The information that is obtained from the study will be used for academic purposes only. It is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject and create opportunities for further research. Therefore, by participating in this research, you could contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. It is envisaged that participating in this research will provide you

with the benefit of reflecting on your experiences as a stakeholder in the Writing Centre space and gaining a deeper understanding of yourself and your experiences, leading to personal growth and self-awareness.

Remuneration: You will not receive any remuneration for taking part in the study.

Costs of the Study: You will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality: Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured using pseudonyms for you as a participant; however, the actual names of the departments from which you come from will be used. Your choice with regards to anonymity and confidentiality will be respected. With respect to confidentiality, you are assured that your responses are confidential and will strictly be used for the purposes of the study. Furthermore, you will be free to ask any questions for clarity should you have any doubts. Data will only be accessed by the researcher and the statistician.

Results: The results of the study will be available to you should you request, and the findings will be outlined in the thesis document.

Research-related Injury: The research will not cause any physical harm or injury whatsoever to you.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings

Only the researcher and the statistician will have access to the data collected in this study. The data will only be used for the purposes of this study. Recordings, interview notes, questionnaire responses as well as transcribed interviews will be stored in a safe place and will be kept for 5 years upon completion of this research before being disposed of.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact the researcher Miss Patience Mutsvairigwa (email: 21143359@dut4life.ac.za), my supervisors Dr. N. Govender (email: nereshneeg@dut.ac.za) and Dr. M.E. Lourens (email: melaniel@dut.ac.za) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Com, M.E. complaints can be reported to the Acting Director: Research and Postgraduate Support on researchdirector@dut.ac.za



CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.

Names of Researcher/s: Patience Mutsvairigwa

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, _____ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant Date Signature / Right Thumbprint

I, _____ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Patience Mutsvairigwa

Full Name of Researcher Date Signature

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) Date Signature

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date Signature

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH WRITING CENTRE PRACTITIONERS

1. Interview number:
2. Date:
3. Interviewer name:
4. Details of respondent (if shared):

Section A

Gender:

Race:

Age:

What is your current role in this Writing Centre?

How long have you been in this position?

What is your highest qualification?

Section B

Questions	Probes
Could you describe the current training that you conduct for Writing Centre staff	When does it take place? How long is it? How frequent/ regular is the training?
What type of training do you provide? What is the frequency / duration of the training?	
How does the training you provide effectively serve to capacitate staff in supporting the development of postgraduate students?	
Which components of the training have worked well in supporting the development of postgraduate students?	If so, why? If not, why not?
What are the current barriers to providing effective training for development of postgraduate students?	
What positive changes/ revisions have been made to the training in the last 5 years?	
How might you modify your training in future to allow for the development of postgraduate students?	
Which learning theories do you currently adopt in your training?	
How much emphasis is placed on training in equipping tutors to support the development of postgraduate students?	Is there particular attention paid to training tutors for consulting with postgraduate students?
What feedback have you received from postgraduate students who have used your Writing Centre?	Have you acted on that feedback? If so, what way? How has the feedback influenced how you train Writing Centre tutors?

APPENDIX C: STRUCTURED CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Directions to respondents:

- Please answer all questions.
- Place only one ✓ per question.
- Please do not leave any question or statement blank.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your gender

1.1	Male	1
1.2	Female	2
1.3	Non-binary	3
1.4	Prefer not to say	4
1.5	Other	5

2. Please indicate your age range in years

2.1	Less than 20	1
2.2	20 -29	2
2.3	30-39	3
2.4	40-49	4
2.5	50-59	5
2.6	60 and above	6

3. Which Faculty are you registered under?

3.1	Accounting and Informatics	1
3.2	Applied Sciences	2
3.3	Arts and Design	3
3.4	Engineering and the Built Environment	4
3.5	Health Sciences	5
3.6	Management Sciences	6
3.7	Natural Sciences	7

4. Please indicate your level of study

4.1	Advanced Diploma	1
4.2	Postgraduate Diploma	2
4.3	Masters	3
4.4	Doctorate	4

5. How long have you been using the Writing Centre?

5.1	Less than 1 year	1
5.2	1 year	2
5.3	> 1 but $\leq$ 2 years	3
5.4	>2 but $\leq$ 3 years	4
5.5	Over 3 years	5

6. How often do you use the Writing Centre?

6.1	Rarely	1
6.2	Sometimes	2
6.3	Often	3
6.4	Always	4

7. How important do you think the Writing Centre is to postgraduate student success at university?

7.1	Not at all important	1
7.2	Slightly important	2
7.3	Moderately important	3
7.4	Very important	4
7.5	Extremely important	5

8. How likely are you to recommend the services of the Writing Centre to other students?

8.1	Very unlikely	1
8.2	Unlikely	2
8.3	Neutral	3
8.4	Likely	4

8.5	Very Likely	5
-----	-------------	---

9. How would you rate the services of the Writing Centre staff?

9.1	Poor	1
9.2	Fair	2
9.3	Good	3
9.4	Very Good	4
9.5	Excellent	5

Section B

Direction: Please state your level of agreement for each statement regarding your usage of the Writing Centre

10. Postgraduate students' Writing Centre experience		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10.1.	I received the necessary assistance from the Writing Centre tutors					
10.2	I am satisfied with the services of the Writing Centre					
10.3	I believe the Writing Centre tutors are well trained to carry out their work					
10.4	Writing Centre tutors have a good relationship with postgraduate students					
10.5	The tutors are knowledgeable on how to conduct their work					
10.6	The tutors are confident in their approach during consultations					
10.7	The tutors listen to me during consultations					
10.8	The tutors are able to explain things clearly to me during consultations					
10.9	The tutors use various strategies and techniques in conducting consultations					
10.10	The tutors equip me with knowledge of how to write academically					
10.11	My academic writing has improved since I started visiting the Writing Centre					
10.12	The tutors allow me to ask questions for clarification during Writing Centre consultations					
10.13	The tutors help me to understand what is required in my work					
10.14	I can use what I learnt from the Writing Centre in other academic work					
10.15	I believe the tutors still need more training in order to assist me during Writing Centre consultations					

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Interview number:
2. Date:
3. Interviewer name:
4. Details of respondent (if shared):

Section A

Gender:

Race:

Age:

What programme are you registered for?

What is your current postgraduate level of study (Advanced Dip, Postgrad Dip, Masters, or PhD)?

What is your year of study?

Section B

Questions	Probes
Describe your experience with consulting with Writing Centre tutors?	
How well-trained are the Writing Centre tutors to support your academic writing journey?	
What strategies do Writing Centre tutors use to consult with you as a postgraduate student?	
What are the key challenges you have experienced/ faced in consultation with the Writing Centre tutors?	
What do you wish can improve in the way Writing Centre tutors conduct their consultation?	How can they improve?
What training do you believe is necessary for Writing Centre tutors to have in order to support your development as a postgraduate student?	

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL/ MODERATOR GUIDE

Introduction:

The researcher will introduce herself as the moderator and explain the purpose of the focus group, which is to explore the experiences of Writing Centre tutors and their training needs for supporting the development of postgraduate students.

The researcher will explain that the focus group will last approximately 60 minutes and will be recorded for research purposes.

The researcher will remind participants that their responses will be confidential and anonymous.

Icebreaker:

The researcher will ask participants to introduce themselves and share their role and experience working as a Writing Centre tutor.

The researcher will ask participants to share challenges they have faced when working with postgraduate students in the Writing Centre.

Main Questions:

What strategies do you use to support students who are experiencing writing-related challenges?

How do you stay up-to-date with best practices in writing pedagogy and tutoring?

Are you aware of learning theories used in Writing Centre praxis?

Do you believe you have been trained on learning theories?

What training do you undergo as a Writing Centre tutor?

Do you believe you are well trained and equipped to support the development of postgraduate students?

What components of training have worked well in you supporting the development of postgraduate students?

How do you think training can be modified to allow for the development of postgraduate students?

Probing Questions:

Explain any challenges you have faced in the implementation of learning theories when consulting with postgraduate students

How do you believe you can be well-trained and equipped to support the development of postgraduate students?

How do you balance meeting the needs of the students with the expectations of the Writing Centre or institution?

Closing Questions:

What do you think are the most important qualities or skills for a Writing Centre tutor working with postgraduate students to have?

What additional thoughts or feedback do you have about your experiences as a Writing Centre tutor?

Debrief:

The researcher will thank participants for their time and input.

The researcher will let the participants know that their feedback will be used to improve the quality of Writing Centre training and tutoring.

The researcher will offer any additional information or resources that may be relevant to the discussion.

APPENDIX F: IREC APPROVAL LETTER



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Benoni Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: irahad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

26 October 2023

Ms P Mutsvaigwa
80 Currie Road
Musgrave
Durban
4001

Dear Ms Mutsvaigwa

A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN

Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 097/23

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final data collection tools for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tools have been approved. Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

It is compulsory for a student or researcher to apply for recertification on an annual basis. The failure to do so will result in withdrawal of ethics clearance. It is the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor to apply for recertification.

Please note that you are required to submit a Notification of Completion of Study form together with an abstract to the DUT-IREC office on completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

APPENDIX G: DUT GATEKEEPERS APPROVAL LETTER



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Open House
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

30 June 2023

Ms Patience Mutsvairigwa
c/o Department of Human Resources Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology

Dear Ms Mutsvairigwa

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted **Gatekeeper Permission** for you to conduct your research "A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN" at the Durban University of Technology. **Kindly note that this letter must be issued to the IREC for approval before you commence data collection.**

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

Upon completion of your research project, you are requested to share the summary of your key research findings.

Kind regards.
Yours sincerely,

DR V GOVENDER
ACTING DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

APPENDIX H: MUT GATEKEEPERS APPROVAL LETTER



Research Directorate

UMLAZI KWAZULU-NATAL
PO Box 12363 Jacobs 4026 Durban
Tel: 031 907 7450

18 July 2023

REF: RDO/08/2023

Ms Patience Mutsvairigwa
Durban University of Technology

Dear Ms Mutsvairigwa

PROTOCOL: 'A framework for the training needs of writing centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN.'

The MUT Research Ethics Committee considered your application at their meeting held on 23 June 2023. It is my pleasure to inform you that permission to conduct the research project above was granted.

The approval is valid for two years from 23 June 2023. Any changes to the project must immediately be brought to the attention of the MUT Research Ethics Committee.

Your acceptance of this approval denotes your compliance with South African National Research Ethics guidelines (2004) and the MUT Research Ethics Policy, Procedures and Guidelines

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr A Micnic
Director: Research

APPENDIX I: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

EDITING CERTIFICATE

Kuben Chetty (MBA)
MBA
B-TECH – JOURNALISM
edit@wordrefiner.co.za

31 March 2025

PATIENCE MUTSVAIRIGWA
Durban University of Technology (DUT)
Faculty of Management Sciences
PhD
21143359@dut4life.ac.za

RE: CONFIRMATION OF EDITING OF PHD THESIS

This serves to confirm that the PHD thesis of Patience Mutsvairigwa titled “A framework for the training needs of Writing Centre staff supporting the development of postgraduate students at selected UoTs in KZN” has been edited.

Kuben Chetty

Thank you for your support. For any queries kindly email: edit@wordrefiner.co.za

APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT

PhD Thesis - Patience Mutsvairigwa

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	6%	7%	1%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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Dr N Govender (Supervisor)