

## *Original Paper*

# International Graduate Students' Perceptions of Writing Center Support: A Qualitative Study of Academic Writing Development

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### ***Abstract***

*International graduate students often use university writing centers for support with advanced academic writing. Yet writing center philosophies do not always align with multilingual writers' expectations, especially when students seek language-focused feedback alongside rhetorical and process-oriented support. This qualitative study examines how international graduate students perceive writing center visits as contributing to their academic writing development and what features of those visits shape these perceptions. Guided by a social constructionist perspective, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with seven international graduate students at a U.S. university who reported regular writing center use. Data were analyzed thematically through an iterative codebook approach. Participants viewed writing center visits as contributing to rhetorical awareness, process-oriented development, greater strategic awareness of writing, increased confidence, and reduced anxiety. At the same time, they described recurring tension between the writing center's no-proofreading philosophy and their need for support with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence-level clarity. They also emphasized that the perceived value of a session depended not only on tutor feedback but also on continuity, appointment access, session structure, and the center's non-evaluative environment. The study argues that writing center effectiveness for international graduate students is best understood holistically, as shaped by pedagogical, affective, and institutional factors rather than by tutor performance alone. Implications are offered for writing center policy communication, tutor education, and multilingual graduate writing support.*

### ***Keywords***

*international graduate students, writing center, multilingual writers, academic writing development, qualitative research, tutor education*

## Introduction

International graduate students write in contexts that are linguistically demanding, rhetorically complex, and often high stakes. In coursework, thesis- or dissertation-related writing, and other advanced academic tasks, they are expected to produce texts that meet disciplinary expectations while also demonstrating strong control of academic English. For many of these students, the university writing center is one of the most visible institutional sites of writing support. Yet the role of writing centers in supporting multilingual graduate writers remains contested. Writing centers have long emphasized collaboration, writer development, and attention to higher-order concerns rather than proofreading or editing (Bruffee, 1984; North, 1984). At the same time, multilingual graduate writers often seek support with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence-level clarity because these features are closely tied to academic credibility, reader uptake, and institutional evaluation (Nakamaru, 2010; Okuda & Anderson, 2018; Phillips, 2013).

This tension matters because it shapes how international graduate students interpret the value of writing center support. Existing research shows that writing center interactions can support multilingual writers' development in organization, argumentation, revision, confidence, and writer agency (Severino & Prim, 2016; Thompson et al., 2009). It also shows that multilingual writers may leave sessions dissatisfied when they expect language correction but encounter institutional policies that restrict direct editing or proofreading (Okuda & Anderson, 2018). Much of this literature, however, has focused on tutor practices, tutorial discourse, or satisfaction with tutor feedback. Less attention has been given to how international graduate students understand the writing center visit as a whole, including not only tutor behavior but also institutional policies, affective experience, and session logistics.

That gap matters for both writing center scholarship and L2 writing studies. In second language writing research, writing development is understood as more than the reduction of language errors. It includes rhetorical knowledge, process awareness, strategic control, and participation in disciplinary writing practices (Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014; Manchón, 2012). If writing centers are among the sites where multilingual graduate students engage with these dimensions of writing development, then students' interpretations of writing center support deserve closer attention. This is especially true for international graduate students, whose academic writing often unfolds under linguistic pressure, institutional scrutiny, and uneven access to disciplinary literacy.

The present study examines how international graduate students perceive writing center visits as contributing to their academic writing development and what features of the visit, beyond the tutor alone, shape those perceptions. Rather than asking whether writing centers work in the abstract, the study investigates how students themselves define useful support, what forms of development they attribute to writing center visits, and where tensions remain. Its central argument is that international graduate students perceive writing center support as valuable for rhetorical, process-based, and affective development, but that their experiences are shaped by a recurring mismatch between writing center pedagogical philosophies and multilingual writers' need for language support in high-stakes

academic contexts.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do international graduate students perceive writing center visits as contributing to their academic writing development?
2. What features of the writing center visit, beyond the tutor, shape these perceptions?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 International Graduate Students and Academic Writing Development

Academic writing is not simply a technical skill. It is a socially situated practice shaped by disciplinary expectations, rhetorical conventions, and institutional values (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Green, 2013). For international graduate students, participating in academic writing often requires simultaneous engagement with disciplinary knowledge, genre expectations, audience awareness, and advanced second language use. Writing development therefore cannot be reduced to surface-level correctness. In L2 writing scholarship, it has been conceptualized as involving language, rhetoric, process, cognition, and affect, all of which interact over time (Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014; Manchón, 2012; Norris & Manchón, 2012).

This broader account of writing development is especially important in graduate education. Graduate writers are expected to produce texts that are not only coherent and persuasive but also professionally and disciplinarily appropriate. They must therefore learn to make rhetorical choices that reflect reader expectations, genre conventions, and institutional norms. Crossley and McNamara (2014) argued that judgments of writing quality are shaped by task demands and assessment contexts, which suggests that writing development is inseparable from the environments in which writing is produced and evaluated. For international graduate students, writing development thus involves both learning to write within specific academic systems and negotiating the linguistic and affective pressures those systems impose.

### 2.2 Writing Centers and Multilingual Writers

Writing centers have traditionally framed their mission as supporting writers rather than fixing texts. Foundational work in writing center studies cast the tutorial as a collaborative conversation designed to develop writers' independence rather than provide editorial correction (Bruffee, 1984; North, 1984). That philosophy remains central to writing center identity and practice. At the same time, writing center scholarship has increasingly recognized that multilingual writers may arrive with needs that do not fit neatly within a strict higher-order-concerns-first model.

Scholars working with multilingual writers have shown that language issues are not easily separable from rhetorical effectiveness. Nakamaru (2010), for example, argued that multilingual writers in writing center tutorials are often engaged in language learning at the same time they are engaged in writing. Rafoth (2015) and Severino and Deifell (2011) likewise emphasized that writing center work with multilingual writers often requires attention to lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical issues together rather than as isolated domains. At the graduate level, these tensions can sharpen because students often

seek help on texts with substantial academic consequences.

Research also shows that writing centers do not always meet multilingual graduate writers' expectations. Phillips (2013) argued that general writing center approaches may be insufficient for some L2 writers because these students often need support that is more explicitly attentive to sentence-level construction, genre knowledge, and discipline-specific expectations. Okuda and Anderson (2018) found that multilingual graduate students were sometimes disappointed when requests for editing or proofreading were rejected, particularly when students viewed grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure as their most urgent concerns. These findings suggest that the no-proofreading philosophy, although pedagogically grounded, may be experienced by some multilingual writers as a barrier unless it is framed carefully and accompanied by meaningful alternatives.

### *2.3 Student Perceptions of Writing Center Support*

A substantial body of writing center research has examined session discourse, tutor practices, and satisfaction with tutorials. Studies have shown that writing center use can be associated with stronger organization, revision practices, and improved perceptions of writing quality (Severino & Prim, 2016; Thompson et al., 2009). Research has also highlighted affective outcomes such as increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater willingness to revise (Thompson et al., 2009). These studies point to the developmental potential of writing center support, but they often focus on measurable outcomes or local tutorial interaction rather than on students' broader interpretations of the writing center experience.

Research on perceptions has also addressed tutor identity and language background. Okuda (2019) showed that multilingual writers' evaluations of tutors may be shaped by assumptions about native-speaker authority, but that such assumptions can shift when tutors demonstrate expertise, empathy, and effective instructional strategies. This line of work complicates the native-speaker fallacy in writing center contexts and suggests that tutor effectiveness cannot be reduced to language background alone. At the same time, it shows that students approach writing center sessions with expectations tied to both linguistic legitimacy and academic expertise.

Although this scholarship is valuable, fewer studies have examined how international graduate students perceive the writing center visit as a holistic experience. That broader perspective matters because writing center use is shaped not only by tutor talk but also by environment, access, continuity, institutional framing, and the emotional conditions under which students seek help. The present study builds on prior work by shifting the unit of analysis from isolated tutor behaviors or narrow satisfaction measures to the writing center visit as a developmental experience interpreted by international graduate students themselves.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1 Epistemological Orientation and Research Design*

This study was guided by a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism assumes that

people make meaning of their experiences through socially situated interpretation rather than simply reporting objective facts about those experiences (Creswell, 2013). This perspective was appropriate because the study focused on how international graduate students understood, described, and evaluated their writing center visits in relation to academic writing development. Rather than seeking a single measurable effect of writing center use, the study examined the meanings participants attributed to those visits and the conditions under which they perceived them as helpful, limited, or both.

Consistent with this orientation, the study adopted a qualitative interview design. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allowed participants to describe their writing histories, expectations, frustrations, and perceived learning in depth, while also allowing the researcher to probe issues that emerged in relation to the research questions (Mishler, 1986). The study did not attempt to measure writing improvement through test scores, writing samples, or session observation. Instead, it focused on perceived writing development as understood by participants themselves.

### *3.2 Research Site*

The study was conducted at a writing center housed within a U.S. university. At the time of the study, the university enrolled just over 10,000 students, including approximately 2,000 graduate students across master's and doctoral programs. International students accounted for a small but visible proportion of the student body. According to publicly available institutional information, the writing center employed graduate and undergraduate tutors and offered support for academic writing through scheduled appointments. The center served both undergraduate and graduate students and operated according to a writing center philosophy that emphasized collaboration and did not define its role as proofreading or editing.

### *3.3 Participants*

Participants were seven international graduate students whose first language was not English and who reported using the writing center regularly for academic writing support. The study focused on graduate students because their writing demands often involve disciplinary complexity, high-stakes assessment, and advanced literacy expectations. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit students with sufficient writing center experience to reflect meaningfully on the role of writing center support in their academic writing development.

Participants were recruited through multiple channels. First, a recruitment email was distributed to international graduate students through the Office of International Education. Second, flyers were posted in the writing center, library, and other campus locations. Third, when permission was granted, brief in-class announcements were made in graduate courses. Interested students contacted the researcher voluntarily. When more students expressed interest than were needed, selection prioritized those who reported visiting the writing center at least twice per semester and using it for academic writing assignments.

**Table 1. Participant Overview**

Participant	Gender	First language	Self-reported visits before interview	total
Amina	F	Arabic	8	
Yuto	F	Japanese	12	
Khalid	M	Arabic	10	
Romaisah	F	Hindi	11	
Neritza	F	Spanish	8	
Demir	M	Turkish	10	
Jeanne	F	French	8	

The sample size was appropriate for an in-depth qualitative study of a narrowly defined population. The aim was not statistical generalization but rich description and analytic insight into how a particular group of students interpreted writing center support.

#### *3.4 Data Collection*

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 40 minutes each. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant availability. Participants reviewed consent information before the interview and were informed that they could decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. The study followed institutional procedures for informed consent and confidential handling of participant data. Interviews conducted in person were audio recorded on two devices to reduce the risk of data loss.

Interview questions focused on participants' histories of writing center use, expectations before their first session, reasons for returning, perceptions of successful and unsuccessful visits, changes they noticed in their writing over time, and aspects of the writing center visit they considered important beyond the tutor. The semi-structured format allowed for follow-up questions when participants raised issues central to the study, such as frustration with policy, preferences for certain tutors, or perceptions of confidence and writer identity.

Interviews were transcribed using a digital transcription platform and then reviewed manually against the audio recordings to correct transcription errors. During and after the interviews, the researcher wrote analytic memos to capture emerging ideas, recurring patterns, and possible relationships among participants' comments.

#### **Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positioning**

All participants were assigned pseudonyms, and identifying information was removed from transcripts and analytic materials. Audio files, transcripts, and coding files were stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher. Transcript files were uploaded to Dedoose for organization and coding.

Because the researcher had personal and scholarly interest in multilingual writing and writing center support, reflexive memoing was used throughout the project to monitor assumptions and analytic decisions. This was important for attending closely to participants' own meanings rather than simply confirming prior beliefs about writing centers or multilingual writing support.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis using an iterative codebook approach. Analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to identify patterns related to participants' definitions of helpful support, perceptions of writing development, frustrations, and the conditions shaping perceived effectiveness. Initial codes were generated from both the research questions and recurring meanings in the data. These codes were documented in a working codebook that included code labels, definitions, and example excerpts.

To strengthen analytic clarity, a second composition researcher reviewed and coded a subset of the transcripts using the draft codebook. Differences in coding were discussed, and code definitions were refined to improve conceptual distinction and analytic consistency. The researcher then coded the full dataset, grouping related codes into broader themes through constant comparison across participants. Dedoose was used to organize coded segments, compare patterns across cases, and support theme development. Analytic memos were used throughout the coding process to document interpretive decisions and emerging relationships among codes and themes.

Three principles guided theme construction. First, themes had to address the research questions directly. Second, themes had to represent patterned meanings across participants rather than isolated comments. Third, themes had to preserve the complexity of participants' accounts, including tensions and contradictions rather than only positive evaluations. Through this process, three major themes were developed: writing center visits as rhetorical and strategic support, recurring tension around language-focused needs, and the writing center visit as a holistic experience shaped by institutional and affective factors.

### **Findings**

The findings suggest that participants perceived writing center support as valuable, but not in a simple or uniform way. They did not describe writing development as immediate or limited to sentence-level improvement. Instead, they framed writing center visits as helping them understand academic writing more strategically while also expressing frustration when language-related needs were not addressed directly. Their evaluations of writing center effectiveness also extended beyond the tutor to include continuity, logistics, atmosphere, and the institutional framing of the center's purpose.

#### **Theme 1: Writing Center Visits Supported Rhetorical and Strategic Development**

Participants consistently described writing center visits as helping them develop in ways that went beyond correction. They referred to improvement in organization, argumentation, and audience awareness, and several described learning to think differently about writing itself. Rather than presenting the writing center as a place where errors were fixed, they described it as a place where they

learned to approach texts more deliberately.

Amina, for example, explained that the writing center changed how she understood argument structure: I thought my ideas were clear, but when the tutor asked me to explain my thesis in one sentence, I realized my argument was not organized. After that, I started outlining before I write.

Demir described a similar shift in how he understood effective academic writing:

When I went to the Writing Center, I learned that good writing was not only about fixing grammar mistakes. The tutor helped me understand my purpose, organize my ideas, and use words that matched academic writing. This also helped me think more about my audience and tone. I also learned useful strategies like planning and revising. Because of this, my writing skills and confidence improved.

These excerpts reflect a pattern that appeared across interviews. Participants valued questioning strategies that required them to clarify claims, explain relationships between ideas, and consider how a reader might interpret the text. In many accounts, the most useful part of the session was not receiving an answer but being guided toward a clearer understanding of the writing problem.

Several participants also described process-oriented learning. Repeated writing center visits helped them reconceptualize writing as drafting, revising, and refining rather than producing a single polished version on the first attempt. This shift was especially important for students who initially associated good writing with immediate correctness. Over time, participants reported becoming more willing to revise, reorganize, and revisit their work.

Khalid described this as a form of internalized strategic awareness:

At first I wanted them to fix sentences, but later I learned how to fix my own writing. Now when I write, I hear the tutor's questions in my head, like what is your main point here?

Comments like this suggest that participants perceived writing center support as extending beyond a single session or text. They did not simply report that one appointment improved one paper. Rather, they described applying ideas from writing center sessions to later writing tasks, anticipating audience expectations, and diagnosing writing problems more independently. In this sense, they linked writing center visits to greater self-monitoring and increased confidence in managing academic writing tasks.

Participants also associated these gains with gradual rather than immediate development. No participant described the writing center as producing instant transformation. Improvement was instead framed as cumulative, emerging through repeated visits and repeated exposure to questions about organization, purpose, and reader awareness. This gradual view of development was consistent across interviews and suggests that participants evaluated the writing center not only in terms of immediate textual change but also in terms of longer-term growth as academic writers.

## **Theme 2: Participants Valued the Writing Center but Experienced Recurring Tension Around Language Support**

Although participants described rhetorical and strategic gains, they also repeatedly expressed a need for language-focused support. Grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and clarity remained central concerns, particularly because participants viewed these features as closely tied to academic legitimacy.

For some, the writing center's refusal to proofread did not simply feel like a pedagogical stance. It felt like a gap between what the center offered and what they urgently needed.

Yuto explained this tension clearly:

Sometimes I need grammar help because reviewers will reject you for small language problems. I understand the policy, but when they say we do not proofread, I feel like my biggest problem is ignored.

Neritza described a similar frustration:

When I went to the Writing Center, I sometimes felt frustrated because I needed more help with grammar. The tutor focused more on my ideas and organization, so I felt my language problems were not fully helped. Because of this, I was sometimes unsure what kind of support I would get.

This tension appeared in different forms across the dataset. Some participants accepted the no-proofreading policy but still felt that the center should do more to help students notice patterns in grammar or word choice. Others distinguished between editing everything and providing targeted language support. For these participants, the problem was not that the writing center failed to function as an editing service. The problem was that institutional policy sometimes seemed to limit meaningful engagement with language issues that participants saw as central to their academic success.

At the same time, participants did not always reject the writing center's philosophy outright. Several recognized that too much correction could create dependence or weaken their ownership of the text. Some also reported that tutors helped them improve language indirectly by discussing sentence clarity, modeling alternatives, identifying recurring issues, or explaining why certain constructions might confuse readers. In such cases, language learning occurred through dialogue rather than correction.

Even so, the data make clear that language support remained a recurring point of tension. Participants often occupied an ambivalent position. They valued the writing center's emphasis on independence and discussion, yet they also wanted more explicit help with the linguistic features they believed were most visible to professors, reviewers, and other academic readers. This ambivalence is analytically important because it shows that participants did not evaluate writing center effectiveness in purely positive or negative terms. Instead, they experienced support as both genuinely developmental and, at times, insufficient.

### **Theme 3: Perceived Effectiveness Was Shaped by the Writing Center Visit as a Whole**

Participants' accounts showed that perceptions of writing center effectiveness were shaped by more than tutor behavior alone. The visit was experienced as a broader event that included the atmosphere of the center, the logistics of booking appointments, the possibility of continuity across visits, and the institutional positioning of the writing center as a supportive rather than evaluative space.

One important aspect was environment. Participants often contrasted the writing center with the classroom or with faculty feedback. Whereas professors were associated with evaluation, grading, and authority, the writing center was described as a lower-stakes space where participants could ask questions without fear of being judged. Romaisah explained:

With my professor I feel judged. In the writing center I can ask basic questions without feeling stupid. It is like a safe place to try and fail before I submit.

This sense of safety mattered because it shaped what participants were willing to say, ask, and attempt during the session. The writing center's non-evaluative atmosphere reduced anxiety and made it easier for participants to discuss confusion, uncertainty, or insecurity about their writing. In some cases, affective support appeared to be a condition for learning rather than an added benefit.

Participants also emphasized continuity. Those who were able to return regularly or work with the same tutor over time reported a stronger sense of progress. Continuity allowed tutors to recognize patterns in a student's writing, track recurring concerns, and build trust. At the same time, some participants appreciated working with multiple tutors because it exposed them to different perspectives. What mattered most was not a universal preference for sameness or variety, but the sense that repeated visits created momentum in writing development. Khalid stated:

When I visited regularly, I could see my progress more clearly. Sometimes the same tutor understood my writing better, and sometimes different tutors gave me new ideas. The most important thing for me was continuing the visits.

Logistics also shaped perception. Appointment availability, session length, and accessibility influenced whether students viewed the writing center as practically useful. Some participants suggested that short sessions limited what could be accomplished, especially when they needed to discuss both structure and language. Others noted that being able to secure appointments at key moments in the writing process made the center feel more relevant and more supportive.

Tutor-related perceptions remained important, but participants did not define tutor effectiveness primarily in terms of native-speaker status. Although some initially assumed that native English-speaking tutors would be better positioned to help with academic English, those assumptions were often revised. Participants ultimately valued tutors who were patient, respectful, responsive, and able to explain writing clearly. Several also appreciated tutors with multilingual or L2 backgrounds because those tutors seemed to understand the difficulty of writing in another language and could empathize with their concerns.

Taken together, these comments show that the writing center visit was perceived holistically. Participants' evaluations depended on the interaction of tutor behavior, institutional policy, emotional safety, and access conditions. Writing center effectiveness, in other words, was not experienced as a single feature of the session but as an outcome of the broader institutional and interpersonal context in which the session took place.

## **Discussion**

This study examined how international graduate students perceived writing center visits as contributing to their academic writing development and what features of the visit shaped those perceptions. Three major findings stand out. First, participants described writing center support as contributing to

rhetorical awareness, process knowledge, and strategic independence rather than only to local textual improvement. Second, they reported recurring tension between the writing center's no-proofreading philosophy and their own need for language-focused support. Third, they perceived writing center effectiveness holistically, as shaped by institutional, emotional, and logistical features in addition to tutor feedback.

The first finding supports broader conceptions of L2 writing development as involving not only language but also process, rhetoric, and self-regulation (Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014; Manchón, 2012). Participants often discussed writing center visits as helping them understand argumentation, organization, drafting, and audience awareness. These forms of growth align closely with writing center goals centered on writer development. Importantly, participants described these gains as cumulative and gradual. This suggests that writing center support may be especially meaningful when understood not as a one-time intervention but as an ongoing site of academic writing development.

The second finding highlights a persistent issue in writing center work with multilingual graduate writers. Although participants recognized the value of collaborative discussion and did not simply demand line-by-line editing, they still viewed grammar, vocabulary, and sentence-level clarity as central to academic success. This supports prior research showing that multilingual writers may experience frustration when their requests for language-focused support are rejected or reframed too narrowly (Nakamaru, 2010; Okuda & Anderson, 2018; Phillips, 2013). The present study extends that work by showing that this tension does not necessarily lead students to reject the writing center. Rather, students often hold both positions at once: they value rhetorical and strategic support, yet still feel that one of their most urgent needs remains only partly addressed.

This has implications for how writing centers communicate and enact their pedagogical principles. The data do not suggest that writing centers should abandon collaborative models or become editing services. They do suggest, however, that policy alone does not resolve students' language-related needs. Writing centers may need to communicate more clearly what kinds of language support they can provide, how tutors can address recurring language patterns without appropriating the text, and what additional resources are available when students need more specialized help. The issue, then, is not simply whether writing centers proofread, but how they define and explain their boundaries while still responding meaningfully to multilingual writers' realities.

The third finding extends existing scholarship by shifting attention from tutor behavior alone to the writing center visit as a holistic experience. Participants' perceptions were shaped by atmosphere, access, continuity, and institutional positioning. The writing center was valued not only as a source of feedback but also as a non-evaluative space where students could ask questions, test ideas, and revise without fear of judgment. Affective outcomes such as confidence and reduced anxiety were therefore not incidental. They were central to how participants defined useful support. This echoes research suggesting that writing center satisfaction is shaped not only by feedback quality but also by interpersonal comfort and perceived responsiveness (Thompson et al., 2009). For international graduate

students, these affective dimensions may be especially important because academic writing is often closely tied to identity, legitimacy, and vulnerability.

The study also contributes to scholarship on tutor identity. Consistent with earlier research challenging the native-speaker fallacy in writing center contexts (Okuda, 2019), participants did not ultimately evaluate tutors according to native-speaker status alone. Tutors were valued for expertise, empathy, clarity, patience, and respect for the writer. This suggests that writing center effectiveness is more strongly linked to tutor stance and training than to essentialized assumptions about linguistic background.

### **Implications for Writing Center Practice**

Several practical implications follow from these findings. First, writing centers serving graduate multilingual writers may benefit from making their pedagogical goals more explicit at the point of access. Clear communication about what the center can and cannot do may reduce frustration, but such communication should be paired with language that invites support rather than shutting it down. Students are more likely to accept policy boundaries when those boundaries are explained in pedagogical terms and accompanied by concrete alternatives.

Second, tutor education should include sustained preparation for working with multilingual graduate writers. This includes not only attention to rhetorical concerns but also practical strategies for addressing sentence-level issues in ways that remain collaborative and developmental. Tutors may need support in discussing grammar, vocabulary, and clarity as part of larger rhetorical choices rather than as separate or prohibited topics.

Third, writing center assessment should take affective development seriously. Confidence, reduced anxiety, increased willingness to revise, and a stronger sense of writer identity emerged as meaningful outcomes in this study. These outcomes should not be treated as secondary to textual improvement, especially for international graduate students whose writing lives are shaped by pressure, evaluation, and linguistic insecurity.

Finally, continuity matters. Writing centers may strengthen support for graduate writers by creating opportunities for repeat appointments, graduate-focused hours, writing groups, or other structures that support sustained engagement over time.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. It was conducted at a single institution, and the findings therefore reflect one local writing center context rather than all writing center environments. The data were based on self-reported perceptions rather than direct observation of sessions or analysis of writing samples. As a result, the study does not claim that participants' perceived development can be equated directly with measurable textual improvement. Because the study relied on retrospective interview accounts, participants' descriptions may also reflect selective recall. In addition, the participants were regular writing center users, which may mean that the sample was more positively disposed toward writing center support than students who visited only once or chose not to return. Future research could extend

this work by including occasional users, tutors, faculty, or longitudinal tracking of writing development over time.

## Conclusion

This study explored how international graduate students perceived writing center visits as contributing to their academic writing development. The findings show that participants experienced writing center support as valuable for rhetorical growth, strategic learning, confidence, and reduced anxiety. At the same time, they revealed a recurring tension between writing center pedagogies centered on writer development and multilingual writers' need for language-focused support in high-stakes academic contexts.

By focusing on students' interpretations of the writing center visit as a whole, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of writing center effectiveness. International graduate students did not evaluate support only in terms of what a tutor said during a single session. They evaluated it through a wider set of experiences involving institutional policy, emotional safety, continuity, and access. The study therefore suggests that writing center support for multilingual graduate writers should be understood not as a narrow tutorial event but as a broader institutional context in which pedagogical principles, student needs, and support structures intersect.

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