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A systematic review of academic writing services in low- and middle-income countries

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Background

Research excellence, implying the growing volume of high-quality research published in a university and research impact (author and article citations), are among the key indicators used to rank universities globally. A high volume of credible research output, high citation rate, local and international research collaboration, income generation and access to funding (Kempenaar & Murray, 2019) and social and scientific impact through innovation, behaviour change and solving social problems make universities rank highly globally. As institutions of higher learning, the demand to research, write, and publish in reputable platforms such as peer-reviewed journals, organisational reports, books, conference proceedings, and online databases is very high.

The academic library is an essential facilitator of the university. It supports the "teaching, learning and research university programmes by providing access to comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, information resources" in various formats to ensure academic success (Aga Khan University Library, 2021). It provides the information resources required to conceptualise research, develop background and literature review, package methodologies, data collection and reporting, and deduction of inferences. As a custodian of information, it also allows completed research output to be curated, accessed and showcased. Therefore, the library plays a crucial role in the research and writing process and must be equipped with the requisite skills, facilities, services and resources to support this process. Hosting the university writing centre and services as an emergent service of the library and an offshoot of the information literacy service may prove yet another cutting-edge role of libraries and librarians.

As part of the university's academic services, writing centres have been established to provide students and researchers with free consultations, writing instructors and group teaching in workshops and courses to firm up writing excellence (University of Toronto, 2020). An academic writing centre seeks to provide a university with a vibrant platform for research, writing, and knowledge publication expected at the graduate level (McGurr, 2020). It is a rich space for fast-paced scholarly communication. Increased publication of scientific knowledge brings about worldwide influence in the broader scientific community (Huenneke et al., 2017). Academic writing centres empower both the language of communication used in writing and the standards expected of research for publication (Tan, 2011).

In its mission, the International Writing Centres Association (IWCA) seeks to nurture the development of writing centre personnel by enabling opportunities for professional activities

like meetings and publications, encouraging research into writing centre activities and programmes, and providing forums and platforms for writing centre issues (International Writing Centres Association, 2021). Since its inception, the IWCA has seen the emergence of regional affiliation bodies that add to its vigour. These include the Middle East/North Africa Writing Centres Alliance, Canadian Writing Centres Association, European Writing Centre Association, Latin American Network of Writing Centres and Programs and various branches from the United States. However, there does not seem to be an affiliate body from LMICs, though Archer and Richards (2011) indicate an increasing presence of writing centres in South African universities.

Since the introduction of academic writing centres, various best practices have emerged. For example, in North America, Tan (2011) found that establishing writing centres dealt with the problem of writing by developing a positive attitude towards writing and improving writing ability. The North American region, particularly the United States of America, has been avant-garde in establishing writing centres in most institutions of higher learning (Clarence, 2019). This has since spread to Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe and is gaining traction in Asia and some parts of Northern Africa (Hodges et al., 2019). South Africa has also seen some growth in the establishment of academic writing centres to counter the historical disadvantages in scholarly communication emergent from her apartheid past (Archer, 2010).

There is less publishing and scholarly communication from the lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially Africa, than from developed countries (Confraria et al., 2017). Several significant factors have been identified as the cause of this dearth of scholarship. Among them is the little importance given to research in higher education institutions and research management capacity across LMIC universities (Fosci et al., 2019). While the focus may be more on financial investment to conduct research, the capacity to enhance scholarly communication is also central. In addition, establishing a writing centre demands allocating funds, planning, and equipping the facility with the necessary furniture, equipment, technology, and human resources. The importance of establishing academic writing centres in LMIC lacks an evidence base; this gap can be filled through a systematic review of the effectiveness of academic writing services in Low- and Middle-income Countries.

Qualitative synthesis is regularly used within systematic reviews. This process involves pooling qualitative and mixed-method research data and then drawing conclusions regarding the collective meaning of the research (Bearman & Dawson, 2013). Despite its limitations,

there has been increased recognition of the role of systematic reviews of qualitative research in developing an evidence base for implementing new services. A synthesis of research undertaken with qualitative designs will open up an area that has been less consulted and will make the findings from diverse sources available to the policy agenda. The review will also lead to better-informed decisions regarding establishing academic writing services and future research agendas.

This review aims to synthesise qualitative research on academic writing services in LMIC and seeks to address the following questions:

- What are the areas of existing research on academic writing services, and which ones are specific to the LMIC context?
- What are some of the key services that are provided in academic writing centres?
- Which barriers and enablers do institutions experience in implementing academic writing services?
- What strategies should academic institutions adopt to implement academic writing services?

Methods

A systematic literature review approach was used to identify previous studies, and the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) were followed in conducting the search (Moher et al., 2009). The PRISMA statement is a set of reporting guidelines that reflect advances in methods to identify, select, appraise, and synthesise studies.

Evidence shows that the use of the PRISMA statement is linked to a comprehensive literature review (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA statement improves the quality of literature review by providing guidelines that ensure reviewed studies are reported comprehensively and transparently (Liberati et al., 2009).

Relevant literature was searched in specialised databases, including Scopus, ERIC, LISTA, Emerald, and Google Scholar. The study used several terms and their variations to create a search strategy, including well-known keywords such as academic writing services, academic writing centres, and writing centres.

The literature search was constrained to the studies focusing on academic writing services in the Low- and Middle-income Countries. The search scope was peer-reviewed publications published in English in the last ten years. The researchers carried out a qualitative synthesis of the results from the included studies.

The identified searches were further filtered to qualitative studies and mixed methods research. Further keyword searches on learning outcomes, challenges and barriers, and promotion factors were used to gather the relevant publications.

Details of the search process are shown in Figure 1.



PRISMA Flow Diagram

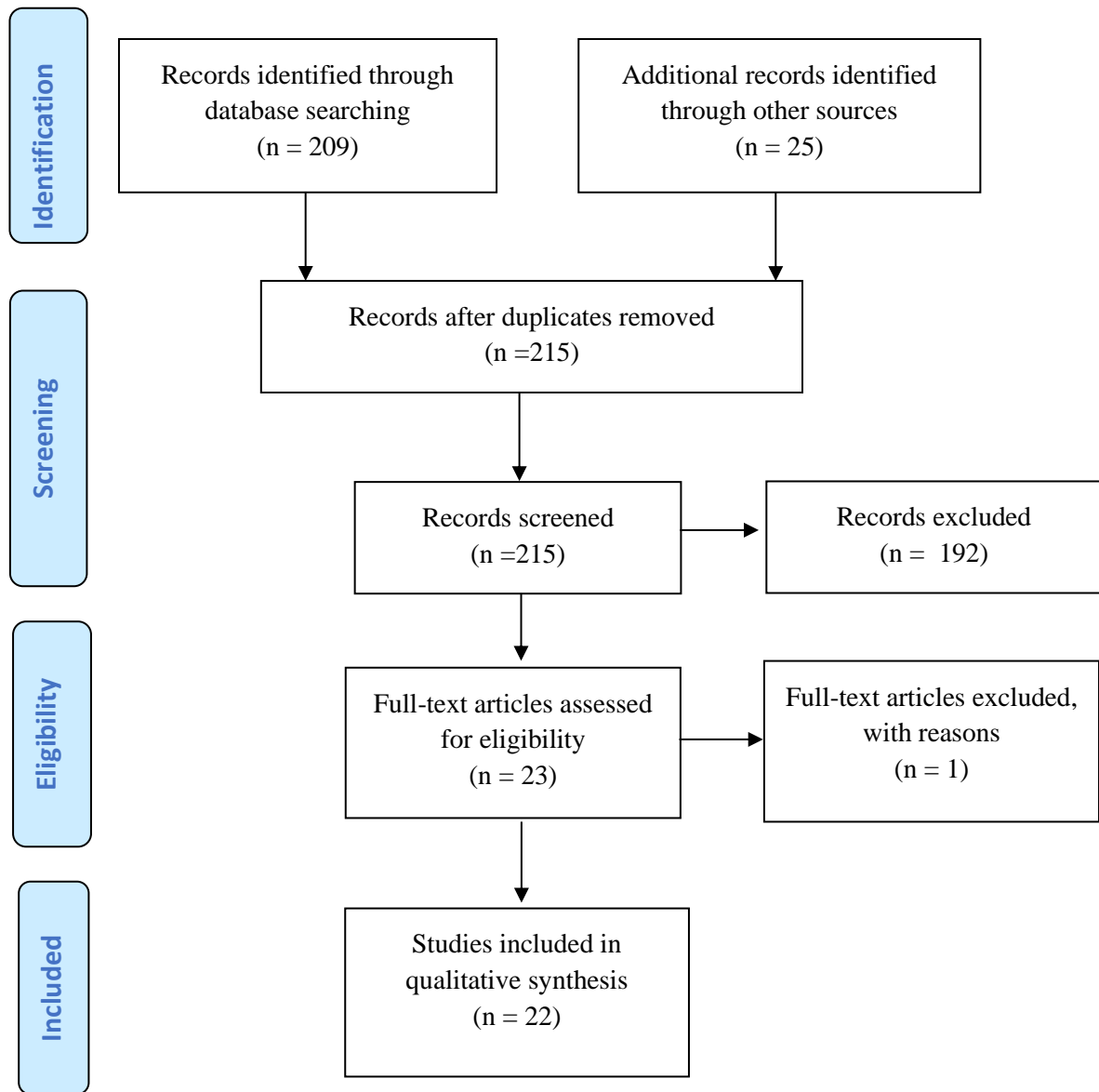


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

Information sources and search strings

Scopus, ERIC, LISTA, Emerald, and Google Scholar were searched for studies relevant to academic writing services between 2013 and 2022, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Database search strategy

Date	Database	Search query	Limits	Results
04/05/2023	Scopus	((TITLE-ABS-KEY(academic AND writing AND services) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY(academic AND writing AND centre))) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY(("developing countr*" or "low middle income countr*" or "low* and middle income countr*" or "low* or middle income countr*" or lmic*))) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2022 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English"))	- English Language - LMIC - 2013 to 2022	17
04/05/2023	Emerald	abstract:"Academic Writing Centre" OR (abstract:"Academic Writing Services") AND (LMIC)	- English Language - LMIC - 2013 to 2022	42
04/05/2023	LISTA	“academic writing service” OR “academic writing centre” OR “academic writing skills” OR “academic writing support”	- English Language - LMIC - 2013 to 2022	16
04/05/2023	ERIC	"Academic Writing Centre" OR "Academic Writing Services"	- English Language - LMIC - 2013 to 2022	16
04/05/2023	Google Scholar	“academic writing service” OR “academic writing centre” OR “academic writing skills” OR “academic writing support” AND LMIC	- English Language - LMIC - 2013 to 2022	118

Data collection process

One of the researchers (A.G) conducted thematic synthesis, which entailed finding appropriate data and extracting it to reference management software (EndNote). Data was organised through a template approach. Subheadings were included as themes that emerged from the objectives and collected data. Another researcher (P.G) engaged in a qualitative data analysis

through an iterative process of reviewing and categorising data to identify common themes and subheadings. This process involved multiple rounds of analysis and refinement to ensure that the identified themes and subheadings accurately captured the nuances of the data.

Two authors (A.G and P.M) applied the study selection criteria to eliminate bias. For the articles included in the qualitative synthesis, quality was independently scored by one reviewer (P.G) with a standard grading scale. Differences in scores were resolved through discussion (Hawker et al., 2002).

Results

Study characteristics

Of the 215 articles initially identified, 22 were included in the qualitative synthesis. The majority of the articles included in this systematic review were studies from South Africa ($n = 6$), followed by Malaysia ($n = 4$) and Turkey ($n = 3$). Other LMICs identified had a single study each. Three studies, Almatarneh et al. (2018), Çanakli and Bastürk (2022) and Heron et al. (2022) studied the population of one nation domiciled in a different nation – Jordanian students in Malaysia, Moroccans in Turkey and Syrian academics in Turkey, respectively. The distribution of studies is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Location of the studies included in the qualitative synthesis

Country (or countries) of data collection	N*
South Africa	6
Malaysia	4
Turkey	3
Kenya	1
Libya	1
Thailand	1
All-inclusive (Global)	1
*N totals ≥ 22 as some studies took place in more than one county.	17

Study design

Multiple study designs were used for the articles included in this review, as shown in Table 3 below. Six studies used qualitative methods, five used mixed methods, and one used quantitative methods. There were two case studies, one an observational study and another one an online content analysis study. However, three studies did not indicate the design adopted.

Table 3: Study characteristics

	Author	Title	Research design/approach	Data collection method
1	Rahim (2015)	The academic writing support needs of undergraduate across disciplines	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews
2	Almatarneh et al. (2018)	The academic writing experience of Jordanian postgraduate students at a university in Malaysia	Mixed methods	Online questionnaires and in-depth interviews
3	Alsied and Ibrahim (2017)	Exploring challenges encountered by EFL Libyan learners in research teaching and writing	Mixed methods	Questionnaire and interviews
4	Archer and Parker (2016)	Transitional and transformational spaces: mentoring young academics through writing centres	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews
5	Çanakli and Bastürk (2022)	The effect of multilingualism on the writing skills of Moroccan students learning Turkish as a foreign language (A1-A2)	Qualitative	Case study and document analysis
6	Collett and Dison (2019)	Decentering and recentering the writing centre using online feedback: Towards a collaborative model of integrating academic literacies development	Mixed methods	Online survey and semi-structured interviews
7	Drennan (2017)	Traversing the spaces of higher education through writing	Quantitative	Questionnaire

8	Heron et al. (2022)	Interdisciplinary collaborative writing for publication with exiled academics: the nature of relational expertise	Qualitative	Focus group interviews
9	Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	A framework for supporting postgraduate research writing: insights from students' writing experiences	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews
10	Lancaster (2019)	Profiling the international academic ghostwriters who are providing low-cost essays and assignments for the contract cheating industry		Observation Online data analysis
11	Makhanya et al. (2021)	Characterising collaboration: Reflecting on a partnership between academic support staff and lecturers to help university students learn how to write for the discipline of chemistry	Qualitative	In-depth interviews
12	Muna, et al. (2019)	Establishing a health sciences writing centre in the changing landscape of South African higher education	Case study	Observation, reflection, Document review
13	Olasina (2017)	An evaluation of educational values of YouTube videos for Academic Writing	Mixed methods	Semi-experimental, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews
14	Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Writing centres as a solution to the problems of international scholars in writing for publication	Mixed methods	Survey questionnaire

4.3 Study population

In the 22 studies included in the review, the population was comprised of university scholars, mostly postgraduate students and faculty members. Four hundred twenty-four students were involved, as well as 24 faculty members. Two studies listed 28 and 168 academics or

scholars, but categories of faculty or students were not delineated. The participants' profiles are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Participants included in the studies incorporated in the qualitative synthesis

#	Author	Title	Country	Population
1	Rahim (2015)	The academic writing support needs of undergraduate across disciplines	Malaysia	- 9 students - 4 academics
2	Almatarneh et al. (2018)	The academic writing experience of Jordanian postgraduate students at a university in Malaysia	Malaysia	- 90 students
3	Alsied and Ibrahim (2017)	Exploring challenges encountered by EFL Libyan learners in research teaching and writing	Libya	- 42 students - 4 academics
4	Archer and Parker (2016)	Transitional and transformational spaces: mentoring young academics through writing centres	South Africa	- 7 academics
5	Bromley et al. (2021)	An Introduction to Transatlantic Writing Centre Resources	Global	Listing of global writing centres
6	Çanakli and Bastürk (2022)	The effect of multilingualism on the writing skills of Moroccan students learning Turkish as a foreign language (A1-A2)	Turkey	- 115 students
7	Collett and Dison (2019)	Decentering and recentering the writing centre using online feedback: Towards a collaborative model of integrating academic literacies development	South Africa	- 8 students
8	Drennan (2017)	Traversing the spaces of higher education through writing	South Africa	- 80 students
9	Heron et al. (2022)	Interdisciplinary collaborative writing for publication with exiled academics: the nature of relational expertise	Turkey	- 28 academics
10	Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	A framework for supporting postgraduate research writing: insights from students' writing experiences	Malaysia	- 24 students
11	Lancaster (2019)	Profiling the international academic ghost writers who are providing low-cost essays and assignments for the contract cheating industry	Multiple countries	- 103 writers

12	Lee et al. (2016)	Exploring the affordances of The Writing Portal (TWP) as an online supplementary writing platform (for the special issue of GLoCALL 2013 and 2014 conference papers)	Malaysia	- 16 pre-service teachers
13	Makhanya et al. (2021)	Characterising collaboration: Reflecting on a partnership between academic support staff and lecturers to help university students learn how to write for the discipline of chemistry	South Africa	- - 2 academics
14	Muna, et al. (2019)	Establishing a health sciences writing centre in the changing landscape of South African higher education	South Africa	-
15	Olasina (2017)	An evaluation of educational values of YouTube videos for Academic Writing	South Africa	- 40 students
16	Olson et al. (2021)	Design and Implementation of the First Peer-Staffed Writing Centre in Thailand	Thailand	- 3 academics
17	Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Writing centres as a solution to the problems of international scholars in writing for publication	Turkey	- 168 academics

Key services provided by Academic Writing Centres

The services offered in academic writing centres appear to vary per the users' needs, as listed in Table 4 below. However, all the studies included academic writing as a key skill that needed training and support for students, faculty and other academicians to write effectively and be more published, enabling scholarly communication. Some studies identified mostly students as completely lacking proficiency in academic writing and, therefore, requiring basic training, including training in language construction, especially where English is not a first or even second language, as is the case in most LMIC countries (Abdul-Rahim, 2015; Çanakli and Bastürk, 2022; Drennan, 2017; Jeyaraj et al., 2022; Makhanya et al., 2021 and Olasina, 2017).

Other studies, while identifying that students and academicians may have basic writing skills, still observed that most required varied support to enable them to write for publication (Almatarneh et al. (2018); Archer and Parker (2016); Heron et al. (2022); Lee et al. (2016); Olson et al. (2021) and Uysal and Selvi (2021)). The need to create networks and relationships among writers and develop communities of practice was also listed as a service provided by writing centres, achieved through mentorships, consultations and collaborations (Archer and

Parker (2016); Collett and Dison (2019). Writing centres also provide ‘physical spaces’ for interaction and writing commons (Drennan (2017).

Table 5 showcases the services identified in the various studies.

Table 5: Keys services provided in academic writing services

#	Author	Country	Services provided
1	Rahim (2015)	Malaysia	Academic writing skills development (text organisation, referencing, grammar, data analysis)
2	Almatarneh et al. (2018)	Malaysia	Need to provide academic writing workshops and seminars (support)
3	Alsied and Ibrahim (2017)	Libya	Lack of library resources, lack of Internet, lack of training
4	Archer and Parker (2016)	South Africa	A space for mentoring new academics, creating coherent communities of researchers and writers
5	Bromley et al. (2021)	Global	Showcasing the development of writing centres in the transatlantic region outside of the United States, including IWCA
6	Çanakli and Bastürk (2022)	Turkey	Teaching the students the four basic skills in line with the achievements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
7	Collett and Dison (2019)	South Africa	one-on-one consultations between tutors and students (contribute to departmental strategies for integrating the development of students' academic literacies into curricula while retaining the current model's valuable work)
8	Drennan (2017)	South Africa	A physical space aimed to tackle the issue of academic literacy among historically disadvantaged students in higher education
9	Heron et al. (2022)	Turkey	Innovative and effective support to academics working in their country despite the risks or who have been forced into exile nearby
10	Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	Malaysia	Centralised learning centres (centralised graduate research unit), which provide generic writing support for students; academic preparation programmes; academic career preparation; mentoring programmes; peer-support services and activities, e.g., peer writing groups, writing retreats
11	Lancaster (2019)	Multiple countries	Academic ghostwriters advertise their academic writing services and provide for students’ assessment needs without the student needing to do any work, helping fuel the international industry of contract cheating and raising ethical dilemmas.

12	Lee et al. (2016)	Malaysia	To provide the writing portal (TWP), a supplementary online writing platform to support students' writing needs throughout the five stages of the writing process, i.e. planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, and engender collaboration amongst students.
13	Makhanya et al. (2021)	South Africa	Helping university students learn how to write for their disciplines of study
14	Muna, et al. (2019)	South Africa	To enhance the proficiency of instructors in incorporating academic literacies into the syllabus, organise measures that facilitate students' acquisition of academic literacies.
15	Olasina (2017)	South Africa	Academic writing curriculum at the writing centre framework that emphasises the following: grammar, vocabulary, organisation, referencing, pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading and group assignment writing
16	Olson et al. (2021)	Thailand	Provide support for students and community partners who might need assistance with writing projects and provide the framework for collaboration with university faculty
17	Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Turkey	Instructional support and consulting assistance for academic members of the university during their writing for publication process by means of one-on-one tutorials

Promotion factors for academic writing centres

The overarching theme that promotes academic writing centres is collaboration, as mentioned in each study reviewed. The writing centre is a space for collaborative work and learning to increase success and output. There is a collaboration among users (learners, students, researchers) who wish to gain proficiency in writing in their fields and get published. The writing centre is also a safe space for academic writing development. There is also collaboration among academic writing service providers, i.e., faculty, supervisors, discipline professionals and academic writing experts. This working together is seen as promoting the services of the writing centre.

Other factors that are seen to promote the academic writing service are the provision of adequate resources, especially funds, requisite human resources, academic writing resources and tools such as web tools and online access, and the provision of an ambient enough physical space to promote creativity and put users at ease to be able to optimise their output. Altogether, these activities have been identified as helping promote the work of the writing centres by

improving writers and increasing the quantity and quality of the written output, as depicted in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Promotion factors for Academic Writing Services

Study	Country	Influencing factors/promotion factors
Rahim (2015)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - structured institution-wide academic writing support centre - society demands on the quality of university output - academic writing support system
Archer and Parker (2016)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training and funding - transformative spaces for idea development
Collett and Dison (2019)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - using technology to expand capacity in order to give students feedback on their writing within a blended learning environment that focuses on formative assessment
Drennan (2017)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changing the perception of the function of the writing centre – from being a remedial centre for students’ language ‘deficiencies’ to a centre for the development of ‘better writers, not better writing - development of discipline-specific writing skills for students to become respected members of specific communities of knowledge - collaborative partnerships between writing centre practitioners and academic staff members
Heron et al. (2022)	Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing relationships among writers and authors to advance writing and share knowledge
Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish the needs of centre users (students) – evaluate and study (research) user needs - collaboration between writing experts with departmental supervisors
Lancaster (2019)	Multiple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vigilance against ghostwriting - Improved academic writing training
Lee et al. (2016)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collaboration amongst student participants – interaction - collaborative learning environment - ease of access to online services - availability of web tools - online collaborative autonomous
Makhanya et al. (2021)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collaboration and partnership between academic support staff and lecturers - building partnerships across disciplines and with academic support staff

Muna, et al. (2019)	South Africa	- relationship-building; well-resourced inter-faculty and departmental structures – funding/grant
Olasina (2017)	South Africa	- new approaches to engage and motivate learners, - alternative ways of teaching, digital, online, interactive, playback - collaborative writing and learning
Olson et al. (2021)	Thailand	- demonstrate and publicise its value - peer-staffed writing centre where students are trained to consult as peer tutors – enthusiastic - motivated and determined writing centre staff - extra class credit for those being trained
Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Turkey	- providing supplementary materials, such as handouts, booklets, or books

Barriers to Academic Writing Services

Lack of library resources, the Internet and training were identified as barriers to successful service provision (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2017; Joseph Jeyaraj et al., 2022). In addition, Olson et al. (2021) identified the cost of implementing academic writing services as a barrier. Conversely, Lancaster (2019) examined contract writing as a service and how it negatively impacts academic writing by creating an ethical dilemma of contract cheating and ghostwriting. Further, not making financial resources available and lack of space allocation were also viewed as hampering the rolling out and advancement of academic writing services (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2017; Muna et al., 2019; Rahim, 2015). In some instances, a negative attitude towards the writing centre, seen as a space for weaker learners (Drennan, 2017; Uysal & Selvi, 2021), and therefore being a place for remedial instruction, hindered the service from achieving its noblest ideal. According to Olson et al. (2021), writing centres are not staffed with dedicated staff but by persons doubling up from other departments and responsibilities. There is a need for adequately trained and dedicated staff. The identified barriers are indicated in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Barriers to Academic Writing Services

Study	Country	Barriers
Rahim (2015)	Malaysia	- logistics - inadequate resources
Alsied and Ibrahim (2017)	Libya	- negative attitudes towards students - lack of motivation - lack of library resources - unstable Internet

Collett and Dison (2019)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - marginalisation of writing centres - inadequate resources - inadequate staff
Drennan (2017)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wrong perception regarding the purpose of writing centres
Heron et al. (2022)	(Syrian academics in) Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - managerial conflicts - author resistance - time constraints - space constraints
Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inaccessibility to resources - inadequate support by the institution
Lancaster (2019)	Multiple countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ghostwriters - contract cheating - ethical dilemmas - plagiarism
Muna, et al. (2019)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of space to host the writing centre - uncertainty on the potential benefits of the writing centre
Olasina (2017)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - challenges of the adoption and use of educational technologies
Olson et al. (2021)	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - funding for the writing centre - lack of time by staff
Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - poor physical conditions of the writing centre - inadequate opening hours of the centre

Strategies for implementing successful academic writing services

As outlined in Table 8, the reviewed studies outlined various strategies for establishing academic writing services. For example, there is a need to position the academic writing centre in an easily recognisable and accessible location. The library appears to be a strategic location for a writing centre because of its resourcefulness in collections, technologies, and staffing (Muna et al., 2019; Olasina, 2017). In addition to establishing a strategic location for the academic writing centre, online tools should be availed to widen access to writing resources (Dison & Collett, 2019; Lee et al., 2016).

A properly structured and pedagogically sound academic writing curriculum should be implemented to ensure skills are imparted to upcoming writers and facilitate writing across disciplines (Archer & Parker, 2016; Makhanya et al., 2021; Rahim, 2015). Adequately trained staff should be engaged in the writing centres (Collett & Dison, 2019; Uysal & Selvi, 2021),

and collaboration between discipline faculty and writing centre staff should be ensured (Drennan, 2017; Heron et al., 2022; Muna et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2021). According to Alsied and Ibrahim (2017), Archer and Parker (2016) and Jeyaraj et al. (2022), top university management must fully support academic writing centres and set aside budgets to facilitate their establishment and sustenance.

Table 8: Strategies for implementing successful academic writing services

Study	Title	Strategy
Rahim (2015)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a structured institution-wide academic writing support in the form of a writing centre - identifying the instructional needs of students across the disciplines at the university level or in higher education - provide relevant instructional practices for academic writing - provide effective feedback, clear guidelines, clear expectations, approachability and focused attention to students
Almatarneh et al. (2018)	(Jordanian students in) Malaysia	- Collaboration
Alsied and Ibrahim (2017)	Libya	- Funding
Archer and Parker (2016)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top management support - interdisciplinary approach - comprehensive training programme
Bromley et al. (2021)	Global	- advocacy
Çanakli and Bastürk (2022)	(Moroccans in) Turkey	- multilingual learning resources
Collett and Dison (2019)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - move beyond physical spaces to an online model - tutors to work closely with subject matter experts - decentralisation of writing centres - capacity building of writing centre tutors
Drennan (2017)	South Africa	- interdisciplinary collaboration
Heron et al. (2022)	Syrian academics in Turkey	- collaborative writing to stimulate thinking

Jeyaraj et al. (2022)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifying the challenges faced by researchers, students and faculty in the writing process - providing required resources, human, capital, facilities, space, technology - providing support for writers - showcasing success and impact
Lancaster (2019)	Multiple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching and inculcating writing ethics
Lee et al. (2016)	Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - supplementary online writing platform - collaborative learning environment - access to usage statistics
Makhanya et al. (2021)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - build partnerships - collaboration - tailor-make curriculum alongside study areas
Muna, et al. (2019)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working in and across the disciplines - establishing working relationships with course conveners, lecturers, and facilitators to offer customised workshops
Olasina (2017)	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifying the gaps that exist which make academic writing difficult - identifying the challenges posed by technology
Olson et al. (2021)	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing the framework for collaboration with university faculty - seek funding - demonstrate the value of academic writing services - peer-staffed writing centre - collaboration with faculty
Uysal and Selvi (2021)	Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing supplementary materials - providing an optimal environment for the tutors and consultants - providing tutors who specialise in a specific discipline

Discussions

Nearly 40% of the articles in this review are based on research from South Africa. Many African countries are not represented at all, while others are underrepresented. This highlights the lack of research on academic writing services in LMIC outside South Africa.

Academic writing services

Although a wide range of services are provided in academic writing centres, training and student support seemed to be the most prevalent services. Other services included writing for publication and enhancing scholarly communication. Some academic writing centres provide basic training, including training in language construction, especially where English is not a first or even second language, creating networks and relationships among writers, mentorships, consultations and collaborations.

Influencing factors

Concerning the influencing factors, academic writing centres provide structured institution-wide academic writing support centres and help meet society's demand for the quality of university output (Rahim, 2015). They provide space for collaboration amongst students, a collaborative learning environment, and a range of collaborative learning tools (Lee et al., 2016). They are also seen as new approaches to engaging and motivating learners, thus providing an alternative approach to teaching and learning (Olasina, 2017).

Academic writing centres can be promoted by demonstrating their value and recruiting dedicated writing centre staff (Olson et al., 2021). However, there is a need to change the perception of the functions of academic writing centres from remedial centres to a centre for developing better writers (Drennan, 2017).

Academic writing services barriers

Regarding barriers to the implementation of academic writing services, institutional support, lack of undertaking needs assessment, and lack of guidelines were identified as some of the most significant constraints (Rahim, 2015). Other barriers included technological factors and failure to adopt online models of teaching and learning (Collett & Dison, 2019). Financial factors, such as costs associated with implementing academic writing services, were also identified as barriers (Olson et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings revealed that inadequate financial resources and lack of space hindered the establishment of academic writing services (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2017; Muna et al., 2019; Rahim, 2015).

Strategies for enhancing academic writing services

This study revealed that several strategies are used to enhance academic writing services. Various scholars identified collaboration between academics, writing centre staff and students as some of the most significant strategies (Almatarneh et al., 2018; Drennan, 2017; Lee et al., 2016; Makhanya et al., 2021; Mohammad Almatarneh et al., 2018).

Moreover, as emphasised by Archer and Parker (2016), top management support and seeking funding, as pointed out by Olson et al. (2021), are crucial strategies for enhancing these services. Creating adequate space and incorporating technologies have also been identified as suitable approaches for improving academic writing centres.

Collectively, these strategies emphasise the importance of collaboration, support, resources, and technology in advancing academic writing services.

Conclusion

Little has been written on academic writing centres in LMIC. This review seeks to provide a case for their establishment in the sub-Saharan African higher education sector.

Academic writing centres offer a diverse range of services. The core offerings included training and support for students focusing on skills like language construction, particularly for non-native English speakers. Guidance on writing for publication and enhancing scholarly communication are significant services in these centres.

The review identified several barriers that impede the implementation of academic writing services. Institutional support plays a pivotal role, and the absence of it can hinder progress. Moreover, technological factors and financial constraints create additional hurdles. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that includes securing institutional support, conducting thorough needs assessments, establishing clear guidelines, leveraging technology effectively, and securing adequate financial resources to enhance the provision of academic writing services.

This review revealed that collaboration among stakeholders fosters a comprehensive approach to addressing academic writing needs. Support from management and securing funding ensures the sustainability and development of these services. Adequate resources, such as space and technology, enable writing centres to effectively support students and academics, showcasing

the interconnectedness of these strategies in advancing the quality and accessibility of academic writing services.

However, one of the limitations of this research is that it only considered academic writing services in the higher education sector and studies undertaken in low- and middle-income countries. Therefore, the research findings may not apply in other contexts or to academic writing centres that may have been established in high schools and tertiary institutions. Nonetheless, even within the context of the identified limitations, this research provides valuable insights and contributes to the knowledge base in the academic writing domain.

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