

From a Vision (in October 2021) to a Reality (in April 2025): My Journey in Establishing the ‘English Writing Support Centre: Univ-Tlemcen’

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Abstract:

Taking the initiative to make something new in any context is not something easy to do as the novelty of the matter makes it challenging to start it, convince people about it and to effectively run it. The researcher's journey in founding the *English Writing Support Centre: Univ-Tlemcen (EWSC)* is not an exception, yet it was worth establishing as EWSC is a place dedicated to provide personalised guidance and support to all students and even faculty members who want to improve their academic writing and research writing and publishing needs, respectively.

In essence, this article aims at spreading a culture of writing centres establishment in Algerian universities partly by reviewing the background and the context factors of EWSC establishment and partly by discussing the challenges and the lessons learned from EWSC foundation. Establishing similar centres in Algerian universities is highly recommended because of their perceived benefits on students, teachers, and their university.

Keywords: English Writing Support Centre; establishing; planning; challenges; University of Tlemcen.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching the module of Comprehension and Written Expression to the first year and the second year students of the Department of English, at the University of Tlemcen (Algeria) since 2014, has made the researcher very experienced with not merely the teaching of writing to foreign language learners but even passionate in helping students improve their writing skills as well seeing that the researcher has become increasingly aware of students writing difficulties and challenges. Typically, it appeared that students are struggling with writing problems that go beyond teachers' expectations or that are not expected for a university student to have. These include but are not limited to: simple sentence structures, not to say complex or compound sentence structures; capitalization; punctuation; spelling; grammar; paragraph and essay format, and coherence to list a few.

In a way to boost their writing, the researcher sought to allot 20 minutes in almost every session she teachers to the communicate aspects that matter her students writing in any step of the writing process. She frequently does this in her sessions because her teaching experience has made her believe in the idea that the teaching of writing and the writing process should be socialized in way or another to be effective. From here, she started looking in the literature for a way of teaching or a notion in pedagogy that allows her socialising some steps in the writing process, like proofreading, editing, and revising in writing tutorials. Ultimately, she came up with the notion of *writing centers*. It was in October 2021 that the researcher started surfing some writing centres websites, downloading article about the writing centre pedagogy and analyzing guidebooks and videos about writing centre establishments for the sake of learning about these centres and how to start up one. It is important to note here that it was only through professional development that the researcher came to know about the idea of writing centres, their pedagogy and everything about them seeing that the concept of writing centres was never introduced or discussed in neither the academic studies nor the pre-service training that the researcher had before.

After all the reflections and experiences that the researcher has had about the teaching of writing to EFL students and all the research, reviews and

analysis done as to writing centres, the researcher got convinced that this type of institutions is worth trying and initiating at the university of Tlemcen, even with her own expenditures and a volunteering cooperation with some colleagues as writing tutors. Why not to be later established in all universities across Algeria at higher costs and with recruitment just like how CEIL (*Centre d’Enseignement Intensif des Langues*)¹ institutes has been established in Algerian Universities.

The researcher’ drive to start up the establishment of a writing centre at the university of Tlemcen at any coast stems from the believe that academic writing matters a lot when it comes to university studies, teaching and research writing publishing. Typically, all students and even faculty, namely non-English faculty, are in now in consent need to boost their academic writing, research writing and publishing skills, more than any time before and this is due to many factors. The latter include but are not limited to: (a) the complexity of the writing process, (b) the variety of writing styles and genres; (c) the introduction of EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) across all university levels and faculties; and (d) the leadership of the English language in academic research writing and publishing.

The fact that the researcher has finally found a way to reduce students’ problems in writing, improve their academic writing and meet their writing needs in the EFL context makes her so excited and passionate to found the first writing centre in the university of Tlemcen, namely the *English Writing Support Centre: Univ-Tlemcen (EWSC)* on April 15th, 2025. The centre is a volunteering initiative which is hosted by the FLPAPT research Laboratory (Foreign Language Policy in Algeria and Teacher Professionalism) and its goal is to provide personalised guidance and academic support to all students and faculty members who are interested in improving their writing skill. In so doing, she took several steps including planning, staffing, training and the development of programs and services

¹ that means *Intensive Teaching Centre of Languages* .

after considering the relevant needs analysis background and the context factors that are going to be presented in the sections that follow.

2. Needs analysis and planning

There is no wonder that writing is at the top of language skills when it comes to students' academic progress and learning, seeing that no skill can help students sustain from the tough university life as writing does. For example, students generally demonstrate the extent of their learning through writing paragraphs and essays for classroom assignments or exams. In addition to this, academic writing has become prominent in academia partly because teachers evaluate their students' learning through writing and research projects and partly because writing is the imperative skill in students' transition from Master level to Doctorate studies. Moreover, writing is required everywhere; whether students choose to continue their studies, apply for a scholarship or find a job. It follows from these instances that writing matters a lot to students' academic progress and achievements and that students who find writing difficult are often at serious risks of failure in their university studies and professional life.

Despite all the efforts and attention given to academic writing training and writing instruction in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, students' writing remains a persistent complaint among teachers and students alike and this is due to a number of reasons:

- *The complexity of the writing skill:*

Writing is a complex process because it involves several stages (pre-writing, idea formulation, preliminary writing, editing and revision, and final writing)

- *The different types of academic writing:*

Academic writing is not limited to a specific type of writing as writing serves several purposes. These include descriptive writing, narrative writing, argumentative writing, and analytical writing; with each written in a given format (a paragraph, an essay, a research paper, a dissertation, a thesis, etc.) using a specific methodology and style.

- *Time constraints and larger Classes:*

Teaching writing to 40-45 students, for 01H: 30mn per-week and dealing with its process and some writing genres and styles is never enough.

- The implementation of English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) in Universities:

English has become the leading language in teaching and learning in all Algerian Universities and across all faculties and departments.

- The leadership of the English language in academic research writing and publishing:

English is the leading language of scientific research writing and publishing in all disciplines.

Following the complexity of writing and its significance in students’ academic progress, the researcher sought to develop a plan for ‘EWSC Univ-Tlemcen’ establishment for the sake of boosting students’ writing skills beyond the classroom milieu.

3. The Context Factors of the ‘English Writing Support Centre (EWSC): Univ-Tlemcen’ Foundation Plan

Before setting up the plan of EWSC foundation, the researcher did careful readings and thorough syntheses (See Belkhir, 2025) about the concept of writing centres, the writing centre pedagogy, the steps involving their establishment and the development of their services, staff, and writing consultants (Hoon, 2009; Lunsford, 1991; Reichelt et al., 2013; Tighe-Mooney & Farrell, 2015; Kennell, 2014; Harris & Silva, 1993; Williams & Severino, 2004; Strong & Fruth, 2001). In light of the attained knowledge and information, reflective analyses on the relevant context factors to establish one were first put forward, negotiated, then eventually be in practice.

Starting-up EWSC Univ: Tlemcen has taken the researcher thorough reflections on its practical matters and on its management matters.

3.1 Practical Matters Planning

EWSC’s planning as to its practical matters have to do with its vision, mission, services, and benefits.

a. Vision

EWSC Univ-Tlemcen is a new initiative designed to support all students of the university of Tlemcen and also non-English language faculty members in improving their academic writing and research writing and publishing, respectively. Therefore, this centre is deemed as a place for collaboration that is set to promote excellence in undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate writing skills and provide quality academic writing support to students and writers from the Tlemcen University community, helping them become good writers, self-confident editors, and effective communicators in writing.

b. Mission

The core mission of the ‘EWSC Univ-Tlemcen’ is to support students at all levels and in all disciplines with effective writing and editing strategies that are specially designed to help them improve their writing and become successful proofreaders and editors of their own work. To fulfill its mission, EWSC undertakes collaborative consultations with its clientele that aim at:

- Offering personalised guidance and support to students at all levels and from different specialties at any stage of the writing process (outlining, drafting, organizing, drafting, editing, and revising);
- Developing effective writing strategies on students to help them become gradually successful writers, proofreaders and self-editors;
- Reducing students writing anxiety and demotivation by communicating their writing, needs, difficulties and concerns in a collaborative, non-offensive environment.

In view of that, the target of EWSC consultations is to make sure that the students, not necessarily their texts, are what get changed and improved. In this way, EWSC’s mission is not to edit or produce correct papers for students but to provide students with individualized guidance and writing strategies that would help them become better writers, self-confident editors, and independent writers as well.

c. Services

EWSC offers free of charge writing-related support and services which include:

- *Drop-in hours/sessions*: they are short consultations of 15-30 minutes. Their sessions are scheduled twice a week in the afternoon time and they last for one hour and a half. The consultations are organized on a first-come first-served basis. In a typical consultation, students usually come with a precise question in mind about writing. Their questions can be about the structure of a paragraph or an essay; the criteria of a recommendation or a reference letter, a citation style; understanding the instruction of a writing assignment or any other writing issue or concern.
- *One-to-One /One-to-Pair consultations*: These are booked consultations between a student and an EWSC consultant. A typical consultation can last between 40 to 50 minutes. In the consultation, students can benefit from a proofreading service, get a personalized feedback and an individualized attention on how to improve their writing, and learn effective writing strategies that would help them become effective, confident and independent writers. To get the most of the consultation students and non-English faculty members should at first book a consultation in advance either by coming to the centre or by emailing the centre at wsc.info13@gmail.com seeing that some students and faculty members would have scheduling conflicts and want to do online. Then, they should bring a document in print to be discussed during the consultation they booked for before. This document can be the first draft of their paragraph, essay, report, summary, research paper; or simply a writing assignment or an essay prompt. This is because writing consultation is run based on the writer's needs. That is, it is the student needs that lead the consultation, not the consultant. In fact, the consultant's role is to listen to your writing needs or concerns and help you improve your writing or do a writing assignment.
- *Writing Workshops*: these workshops are held prior occasional events, like the start of Semester 1 and Semester 2 lectures, semester 1 and 2 tests and exams, the doctoral week, master/doctorate research proposal submissions, Master Dissertation submission and Master Dissertation defense to name a few.

- Writing Resources: Students can have access to printable and web-based writing resources, such as posters; reference documents; hand-outs; guidebooks and worksheets about writing in general and academic writing in particular.

In essence, EWSC services and resources are specifically designed to help students get several benefits.

d. Benefits

The foundation of EWSC Univ-Tlemcen can be effective at:

- Making students grow as confident, critical and autonomous writers by developing on them revision and self-editing strategies;
- Boosting students' English writing skills in general and academic writing in particular through the personalised feedback discussions they receive in every writing consultation they do.
- Reducing student writing anxiety and increasing student confidence in writing different genres (paragraphs, essays, research papers, abstracts, letters, oral presentation speech, etc) as students can get guidance at any step of the writing process;
- Helping not only students but even university teachers and doctorate students across-disciplines (Medicine, technical sciences, economic sciences ... etc.) develop their research writing and publishing in English through the obtainable writing support and guidance at EWSC consultations.
- Supporting the teachers of writing with professional development owing to the writing resources they can use; the writing consultations they do with students, and the writing –related resources, worksheets, workshops and events that they can develop and organize.
- Aiding students and non-English language teachers achieve success in all aspects of academic writing.

3.2.2 Management Matters Planning

EWSC's management matters relate to its context, location, clientele, staff, training, equipment and resources, funding, rewards, advertisement and evaluation.

a. Context

EWSC focuses on academic writing since its launch on 15th April 2025 ² (see the link below). Yet, it will expand its context to creative writing and oral presentation and persuasive communication speech and skills.

b. Location

EWSC is located for the moment in the FLPATP laboratory research and its physical space is subject to change to a shared space in the Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of English, or even CEIL as suggested by the principals of the University of Tlemcen.

c. Clientele

EWSC opens its door to all students of the University of Tlemcen be them undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate students. Besides this, EWSC allocates a room all university teachers and researchers who want to improve their academic writing and research writing and publishing skills. To be precise, EWSC is created not only for the students of the Department of English but more importantly for students of *all* the Departments and faculties of the University of Tlemcen. In addition to this, the centre welcomes all teachers and researchers who seek help in their English academic writing and research publishing across disciplines.

d. Staff

EWSC is staffed by:

- *A director* to manage day-to-day operations of EWSC, including scheduling and supervising, training and finding consultants; evaluating the effectiveness and the work of EWSC by analyzing the ongoing writing center records and reports; designing workshops on the teaching of writing; and developing and maintaining student and faculty resources to support writing practice and pedagogy.
- *An assistant* to help the director with the organization of EWSC consultations, events, and technical stuffs.

² <https://www.univ-tlemcen.dz/en/actualites/3798/the-opening-of-an-emerging-volunteer-centre-to-support-english-writing>

- A *receptionist* to meet, greet, and help students and faculty as they come in the writing center; to help them make appointments and answer their questions.

- A *group of enthusiastic and experienced writing consultants* to hold one-on- one consultations with students and guide them during any step of the writing process. They can be either part-time or full-time teachers at the Department of English who are not supposed to be all teachers of writing but who should be good listeners; interested in helping students and having the capacity to sympathize with writers in non-authoritative and non-directive ways . For the moment EWSC has 19 volunteered consultants (See table 1) and this makes them have a propensity to be so.

Table 1: EWSC Writing Consultants

EWSC Univ-Tlemcen Consultants		
Rank	N°	Consultation Type
Full-time Professor	6	Onsite
Associate Professors	6	Online and Onsite
Assistant Professor	2	Onsite
Doctorate Student	5	Online and Onsite

e. Training

It is important to note that the researcher was granted a writing consultant certificate in June, 2023 from INAS (the International Network of Algerian Scientists) after fulfilling the writing consultant online training that she was receiving from Dr. Kamal Belmihoub, Lecturer and ESL Writing Director at Baruch College New York City, United States, from October 2021 to October 2022. Besides this training, she contributed in establishing AOWL (the Algerian Online Writing Lab) and she was assigned by Dr. Kamal Belmihoub and INAS to work at first as an online consultant and then as an assistant director at AOWL and that was from November 2022 to June 2023.

The researcher, as a trained and a former writing consultant and assistant manager at AOWL and as the founder and director of EWSC, sought to offer a short training to EWSC volunteering consultants before engaging with their onsite/online consultations because the writing centre

pedagogy is totally different from the common teaching practices. In essence the training takes in four sessions:

- *Session 1*: presenting EWSC mission, services, resources, events and program to EWSC staff.
- *Session 2*: Presenting and discussing information about:
 - How to Start a Writing Consultation;
 - How to Deal with a Student’s Paper;
 - How to End a Writing Consultation;
 - Does and Don’ts in a Writing Consultation.
- *Session 3*: demonstrating with videos what a tutorial looks like with someone playing the role of a tutor and another playing the role of a student.
- *Session 4*: Observing an actual consultation, based on the consultant’s content, and giving feedback on the consultant’s performance.

Writing consultants should not only be trained but should also strive to create a cool and welcoming environment to do these tasks:

- offer guidance to students who seek help in their writing including different types of writing like: paragraphs, essays, article manuscripts, papers and dissertations;
- discuss any step of the writing process or review a piece of writing in progress;
- discuss the overall flow and organization of a paper;
- develop strategies on students to become successful revisers and editors of their own work;
- help students view themselves as writers and gain confidence in their ability to make effective decisions about their own writing processes;
- help students recognize mechanical errors;

f. Equipments and Resources

Equipment and resources do largely depend on the services that the centre offers. In fact, EWSC has started small because it has been founded and launched on a volunteering basis. Seeing that the core part of EWSC

activity is one-to-one consultations between a student and a consultant, only essential equipments and resources are afforded. These include:

- Paper (blank sheets of paper and lined paper)
- Office materials (4 round tables and 15 comfortable seats, 2 comfortable desks, a PC, a printer, a photocopier, pen containers, pens, pencils, erasers, markers, paper folders, paper baskets)
- A filling cabinet for paper-based appointments and records
- White boards for posters
- Literature on academic writing (dictionaries, guidebooks, hard /soft copy handouts, essay/paragraph models, worksheets on specific writing mechanics, style guides, reference style guides, theses, dissertations, and journals)
- A data show projector, speakers and a microphone for oral presentations, webinars and web meetings and collaborations with writing centre directors and consultants outside Algeria.

g. Funding

For the moment, the researcher is funding, with her own expense, the basic writing tools (paper, pen containers, pens, pencils, erasers, markers, paper folders), EWSC posters, printed writing resources (dictionaries, guidebooks, hard /soft copy handouts, essay/paragraph models, worksheets on specific writing mechanics, style guides, reference style guides), and all the possible needs in EWSC consultations, workshops and main events. Yet, the all office material furniture (round tables, seats, desks, and whiteboards) and electronic tools (desk-top, laptop, printer, photocopier, data-show projector, scanner, and speakers) are of the FLPATP research Lab, the lab which is hosting EWSC services and the main events.

h. Rewards

Since EWSC is a volunteering initiative and no financial support is granted for the centre so far, certificates are the only rewards that EWSC can grant to its staff. In essence, hardcopy certificates are awarded to EWSC director, FLPATP director and secretary and to all the writing consultants, in every ESWC-closing day.

i. Advertising

Advertising about EWSC is so important. In fact, it takes the researcher much time and efforts to spread the word about EWSC notion, services and location because the centre is new to the students, teachers and principals community. To advertise about EWSC mission, services, location, opening hours and days, and venue the researcher uses different advertising strategies. These include:

● *Reaching Maximum Number of Students and Faculty Member by:*

- Meeting with the Principals of the University of Tlemcen and informing them about EWSC vision, mission , services and perceived impacts,
- Making short visits to Departments across the University of Tlemcen and presenting EWSC services to the heads of these departments,
- Sticking A2 and A3 EWSC posters in the entrance of the visited departments,
- Partnering with students’ group delegates or clubs and faculty associations or Organizations to spread the words about EWSC location, services and perceived benefits.
- Distributing printable and colourful EWSC flyers and brochures to students and teachers.
- Hosting varied writing events and workshops, such as essay writing, creative writing and business English writing retreats with coffee breaks and calm music in the background.

● *Social Media:*

- Creating Social Media pages in the name of the *English Writing Support Centre: Univ-Tlemcen* in facebook, twitter or Intregram is important. The researcher with the help of her assistant created one in facebook. Its name is **English Writing Support Centre Univ-Tlemcen** and its link is <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61574239951517>
- Making daily Posts of hashtags.
- Posting short videos, testimonies and success stories in Social Media, Facebook, in this case.

• *Faculty Engagement:*

- emailing faculty members about EWSC location, services and perceived benefits.
- Invite faculty to refer students to EWSC.
- Collaborate with faculty in suggesting and developing writing resources, worksheets, and events that cater students' needs and interests.

j. Evaluating

Evaluating EWSC is crucial because it tells what is working well in the centre and what isn't and what actions the centre needs to consider in EWSC's future services, staffing and equipments. In fact, EWSC evaluation takes place both inside and outside the centre. EWSC staff semester-meetings and the EWSC paper-based testimonies records represent the evaluation that occurs inside the centre. While the following up with students via emails and exit consultation forms is the evaluation is attained outside the centre.

4. Challenges and Lessons Learned

There is no doubt that learning about something new is not easy but starting up its foundation, spreading the word about it, and convincing people about its effectiveness is even more difficult. Learning about writing centres and their pedagogy in the literature and from their community was among the first steps or bricks of EWSC establishment (Belkhir, 2025), and since then many insights were gained and different challenges and lessons were learned. A number of them is going to be listed in the points that follow:

- Learning about the writing centres and their pedagogy and fulfilling the writing consultant and assistant director training were much time and effort consuming processes. Yet, the researcher's eagerness in finding a way to improve students' writing skill in a place apart the classroom setting, made her feel in almost all times very enthusiastic and so passionate in learning about it and how to implement it.
- Planning EWSC project and dealing with its piloting and establishment procedures were not easy since EWSC is the first writing centre in the

University of Tlemcen, Algerian Universities included. But receiving words of encouragements and appreciation while spreading the word about EWSC notion, mission and services among the University of Tlemcen principals, teachers, colleagues, and students contributed a lot in making its foundation a success and an unforgettable experience, full of challenges and excitement.

- Finding a place for EWSC was so hard at the beginning, but once the researcher fulfilled her learning about writing centres and online writing consultant training and started collecting resources and volunteering teachers to join the pilot phase of EWSC, the director of FLPATP lab. got convinced by her will, put her trust on the efforts spent by the researcher, and accepted to open the door of her lab to EWSC.
- Creating EWSC posters, brochures, Facebook page, Gmail drive, logo and preparing and organizing EWSC resources, equipments, events, and certificates were also very demanding, while they teach the researcher many things regarding: poster applications, design styles, computer skills, video applications, and scheduling techniques that she did not know before.

5. CONCLUSION

EWSC Univ-Tlemcen is worth planning and starting up not only in the University of Tlemcen but in all the universities of Algeria and north-Africa because of its countless benefits on students, teachers and the university as a whole and because of its effect in spreading a culture of writing centres establishment in Algerian Universities. The researcher believes that EWSC Univ-Tlemcen does not only help students and faculty members boost their academic writing and research publishing skills as discussed before, but also opens a door to a new context of research for academics who are interested in conducting research and imperial studies in English Foreign Language writing skills and academic research writing and publishing. The researcher recommends University principals, academics and teachers across Algerian universities to encourage the establishment of

similar writing centres and hope that the steps she followed and the plan she developed in establishing EWSC Univ-Tlemcen, as reviewed in this article, will inspire and aid to some extent the teachers interested in improving their students writing skill and establishing writing centres and will contribute in making EWSC officially established and funded by the Ministry of Higher Education and the University of Tlemcen. It is worth noting at the end of this article that details and statistics with regard to EWSC piloting period (26/11/2024-08/04/2025), launch period (15/14/2025-02/07/2025), clientele' perceptions, and staff experiences will be described and discussed in an article that will be published in the few next months.

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