An Academic Writing Reference for ESL Tutors at an Intensive English Program: Analysis and Design

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ABSTRACT

The majority of English as a Second Language (ESL) students are weaker in reading and writing than in listening and speaking (Matsuda, 2004). Responding to the challenges faced by ESL writers, many university Intensive English Programs (IEPs) often provide additional help by instituting writing centers with trained tutors. However, untrained tutors and even experienced writing tutors may struggle with ESL writing concerns (Harris & Silva, 1993).

This research project analyzes one tutoring program in a university IEP that includes writing feedback as a service for their students. The tutoring service had no consistent training standard for tutoring academic writing, so I conducted a qualitative needs assessment. My assessment included a mixed-methods exploratory analysis of the needs. The methods included surveys administered to IEP stakeholders (students, tutors, teachers, and administrators) as well as select follow-up interviews. This investigative study focused on the perceptions of the various stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the program and potential improvements for tutoring academic writing. Themes from these data shaped the development of a tutor reference guide for academic writing tutor training. Although the themes were gleaned from a specific research context, they offer principles that can be generalized in other writing center contexts.