INVESTIGATING THE USE OF WHATSAPP TO IMPROVE THE WRITING SKILLS OF STUDENTS AT KING ABDUL AZIZ UNIVERSITY

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INVESTIGATING THE USE OF WHATSAPP TO IMPROVE THE WRITING SKILLS OF STUDENTS AT KING ABDUL AZIZ UNIVERSITY

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEA   Commission on English Language Program Accreditation

CEFR   Common European Framework of References

CPT   Cambridge Placement Test

CTU   Curriculum and Testing Unit

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

ELI   English Language Institute

ESL   English as a Second Language

ELT   English Language Teaching

EUSE   English Unlimited Special Edition

IELTS   International English Language Testing System

KAU   King Abdul Aziz University

MIM   Mobile Instant Messages

MPhil   Master of Philosophy

PFYP   Preparatory Foundation Year Program

SEU   Saudi Electronic University

TOFEL   Test of English as a Foreign Language

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KAJIAN TERHADAP PENGGUNAAN WHATSAPP UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KEMAHIRAN MENULIS PELAJAR DI KING ABDUL AZIZ UNIVERSITY

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan aplikasi WhatsApp menjadi semakin penting dalam pendidikan. Ia membolehkan pentadbir dan pengajar menghubungi pelajar untuk sebab dan tujuan pentadbiran dan pendidikan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji sejauh mana penggunaan WhatsApp meningkatkan kemahiran menulis pelajar dan untuk mengenal pasti tanggapan pelajar mengenai penggunaan WhatsApp untuk mempelajari dan melatih kemahiran menulis di dalam bilik darjah. Intervensi dilakukan dalam kelas seramai 104 orang pelajar di Institut Bahasa Inggeris, King Abdul Aziz University. Pelajar ini terlibat dalam enam tugasan menulis yang disiapkan dengan menggunakan WhatsApp. Pensampelan bertujuan berikutan pendekatan kaedah campuran digunakan, dengan tujuan untuk memahami masalah tersebut dengan lebih baik. Versi soal selidik Hamad (2017) yang diubah suai digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data kuantitatif dan untuk menilai tanggapan pelajar dalam hal ini. Bagi pengumpulan data kualitatif, perbincangan kumpulan fokus dijalankan pada akhir intervensi. Analisis data kuantitatif dan kualitatif membawa kepada beberapa penemuan penting. Pertama, kajian ini mendedahkan kepentingan memberikan ruang kepada pelajar untuk berkongsi dan memikirkan pengalaman mereka menulis dalam bahasa Inggeris dalam media elektronik seperti WhatsApp. Ia juga mendedahkan kemungkinan penggunaan WhatsApp untuk membina persekitaran pembelajaran sosial, yang banyak menerima sokongan dalam kajian lepas. Berdasarkan kajian ini, pengkaji berpendapat bahawa penggunaan WhatsApp

berpotensi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran menulis pelajar. Terdapat juga keperluan untuk mengetahui sama ada penambahbaikan ini berkesan dalam bidang kemahiran bahasa lain dan dalam konteks pembelajaran yang lain.

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF WHATSAPP TO IMPROVE THE

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ABSTRACT

The use of the WhatsApp application has become increasingly crucial in education. It has enabled administrators and instructors to contact students for administrative and educational reasons and purposes. The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent the use of WhatsApp improves students' writing skills and to identify students' perceptions regarding the use of WhatsApp to learn and practice writing skills inside the classroom. The intervention was done is a class of level 104 students at the English Language Institute, King Abdul Aziz University. Students engaged in six writing tasks which they completed using WhatsApp. A purposive sampling following a mixed methods approach was used, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the problem. A modified version of Hamad's questionnaire (2017) was used to collect quantitative data and to evaluate students' perceptions in this regard. The researcher of this study employed Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-cultural Theory, the Process Approach Theory of Flower and Hayes' (1981), and the Depth of Processing Theory of Craik and Lockhart (1972) in order to achieve the objectives of this study. As for collection of qualitative data, focus group discussions were conducted at the end of the intervention. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data led to some significant findings. Firstly, this study pointed towards the importance of giving space for students to share and reflect on their experience of writing in English on an electronic medium such as WhatsApp. It also uncovered the possibility of using WhatsApp to build a social learning environment, which has

been significantly supported in the literature. In the light of this study, this researcher found that there is potential for using WhatsApp to improve students' writing skills. There is also a need to find out if this improvement can be affected in other language skill areas and in other learning contexts.

1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

WhatsApp has become the primary mode of communication for many people especially young people of university-bound age. The importance of technology in education is undeniable in the last few years. The world has witnessed increasing incorporation of technology into language learning at all levels beginning from kindergarten up to university. Al-Asmari (2013), Hamad (2016), Lewis (2010) and Musa (2016) stress the importance of using technology in education and the significance of delivering the courses using technologies. Therefore, technology including mobile applications cannot be avoided in education and it can be exploited with the aim of enhancing language learning. In English language learning context, Ramakrishnan (2017) has researched the possibility of using WhatsApp to improve students' proficiency of English language. Ramakrishnan (2017) stresses that since most people use WhatsApp to share videos, texts and images, this enables them to learn English automatically. Ramakrishnan posits (2017) "It is natural that everybody is using WhatsApp now for sharing audio, video, text, images and GIF. It has made people learn English language automatically" (p. 6).

Dillon (2015) suggests another role for the teachers in this age. Dillon (2015) points out "Part of the role of all teachers serving as facilitators of learning is to foster a confidence and interest in students" (p. 44). Mobile phones with WhatsApp as the most used application can help teachers become successful facilitators of language learning. Research has shown that mobile phone applications become tools of learning languages. There have been many studies about the importance of using WhatsApp application in the classroom. These studies have focused on WhatsApp as a fitting tool to educate learners in the classroom.

Some of these studies have identified WhatsApp as a motivational tool for writing. Robb (2017) highlights the findings of a study that contributes to implementing WhatsApp application. Robb (2017) asserts that, "These findings affirm potential of instant messaging to increase student motivation for academic writing" (p. 3). Dwee and Sharif (2016) have stressed how WhatsApp has influenced students' role in being able to engage in learning and have fun. Dwee and Sharif (2016) state that "Learners found the writing prompts given through WhatsApp to be fun and engaging because the prompts revolved around themselves and their daily life." (p. 6). Gon and Rawekar (2017) have identified some benefits of using WhatsApp as a teaching and learning tool. For these researchers, the use of WhatsApp has shown that students were eager to share knowledge and to ask and answer questions on the WhatsApp group. With the use of videos, photos and messages on the WhatsApp group, and the teacher being the facilitator, this application has become an important tool of learning. Gon and Rawekar (2017) state that "Combination of medium like videos, pictures and voice notes along with constant availability of facilitator and learning anytime anywhere, has made WhatsApp a new and convenient tool for teaching learning activity" (p. 24).

However, other researchers indicate that there is still a need for more research about the impact of using WhatsApp instant messaging in learning English. Cetinkaya (2017) states that "Yet, it is early to know what impact the WhatsApp application, which has an important place in the daily lives of young people and has the qualities to be recognised as social network, will have on education" (p. 11). Although there are almost 2.8 billion users of WhatsApp, Wechat and Facebook Messenger, Winet (2016) asserts that the benefits of mobile instant messages are still under   evaluation.   Winet

(2016) states that "the usefulness of mobile instant messaging (mIM) is less well documented, perhaps because the wide availability of smartphones with sophisticated messaging apps is a comparatively recent phenomenon" (p. 1).

Researchers in Saudi Arabia have studied and identified the importance of using mobile phone applications in universities and schools. The focus of these studies is on the need for using mobile phone applications in learning English. Hamad (2017) stresses the importance of being ready to use new apps that have spread in the daily life. Hamad (2017) highlights that teachers should help students overcome the difficulty of learning and using the language. Hamad (2017) points out "It helps the students to believe in their abilities" (p. 12). Bensalem (2018) states that students' performance in their assignments was better with the use of WhatsApp. Bensalem stressed that WhatsApp increased students' motivation and interest to do their course assignments. Bensalem (2018) points out that "76% of students indicated that WhatsApp motivated them to complete their vocabulary assignments because they found the app convenient" (p. 30). These studies address and identify the need to put both teachers and students on the track of development by using the new tools. Still, the use of mobile phone apps such as WhatsApp for improving learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has not been given enough analysis since WhatsApp has not been used greatly in Saudi or Arab universities for learning purposes yet.

English is used by teachers and students in all classrooms and offices of the ELI as a means of communication. Students and teachers use English to write, send emails and messages, and they also chat in English. With the purpose of improving teaching and learning, the administration at the ELI has implemented up-to-date technology so that students learn better and get involved. ELI students have to specialize and choose their majors after they finish the Preparatory Year Programme.

Mostly, their study should be in English. Not only that, but also the exams they take are in English, too. This may affect their learning and their interests at the same time since they need English for graduation. Among the most common mobile phone applications the ELI administration approves is WhatsApp. The ELI administration encourages instructors to contact their students through WhatsApp for academic purposes (see Appendix D).

This study seeks to identify how WhatsApp is used in the context of EFL learning at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It will analyze the impact of using WhatsApp on students' performance in the writing skills. The focus will be on how students' performance can be improved through the use of WhatsApp in the classroom for learning the writing skills.

The focus in this chapter will be on the background of the study. It will discuss if the use of WhatsApp has any impact on the students' writing performance. There will be a focus on the benefits that the EFL students may get as a result of using WhatsApp to improve their writing skills. The main points of this chapter will be the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions and the significance of the study.

1.2   Background to the Study

Because technology is widely used in Saudi universities and institutes, there is still a need to evaluate research findings regarding the use of mobile phones for English learning purposes. Some teachers use Kahoot, Socrates and other apps to offer practice in grammar and quizzes. WhatsApp is used for sending messages and video clips and for sharing ideas and summaries. Students use WhatsApp to send

schedules and snapshots of various materials of their university subjects. Similarly, teachers of English may use WhatsApp for teaching different language skills. They may use it to reinforce learning and writing skills. This might be attractive to students and it may match their interests of working together. Ajid, Dwi, Reni and Yunita (2018) highlight the importance of collaborative learning in English teaching and learning. They choose WhatsApp application as a collaborative learning tool. They choose to use WhatsApp to teach English in the classroom because of the features it has. Ajid, Dwi, Reni and Yunita (2018) point out "One application that can be used is WhatsApp. In the features provided, students and teachers can interact with each other online. Discussion groups allow them to communicate, have the discussion, and send pictures, recordings and more. All activities can be arranged by teachers so that students can improve their skills in English during the classroom activities" (p. 2).

As stated in the 2018/2019 Pacing Guide set by the Curriculum and Testing Unit, there has been a tendency at the ELI, King Abdul Aziz University, for using the mobile phone applications in the classroom to teach grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing mechanics (see Appendix M). The new changes that took place in the world have caused the Saudi universities, as the case in many countries, to focus on new methodology of teaching English. Alsaleem (2013) highlights how educators have started researching the new technologies and their effects on student behavior and performance. Alsaleem (2013) chooses WhatsApp application because it is a potential tool. Alsaleem (2013) explains why she prefers using this app by stating that "One of the most interesting things about WhatsApp messaging and other popular technologies (text messaging, video games, etc.) is that they are potential learning tools" (p. 3). Learning to speak and write English becomes like a must for

all students, and instructors are encouraged to take the step towards using the mobile applications to improve their EFL writing. Alsaleem (2013) suggests that using mobile phone applications for teaching English can support students and can help them become engaged in learning. Saudi universities aim at using all aspects of technology including mobile phone applications to enable graduates to use English in their social life. Omer (2003) identifies what the Internet has changed in societies by saying that "the Internet becomes like a power over society" (p. 57).

Saudi university students including those in King Abdul Aziz University (KAU) must study and pass all levels of English in the Foundation Year, as a requirement to secure college entry. The programme of the Foundation Year is delivered in a modular system. In all these four modules, students have exams in listening, grammar, reading and vocabulary. Therefore, Foundation Year students study English and do their best to demonstrate a very high level in both speaking and writing the language. The English Language Institute (ELI) provides instructors with online courses to train them to take part in the new methods of teaching English. As a result, some instructors tend to use many different kinds of tools in the classroom. Students in turn are involved in the teaching process and it is perhaps significant that the students and instructors aim at having successful methods of learning.

1.2.1   King Abdul Aziz University Students

English Language Institute (ELI) is one of the faculties at King Abdul Aziz University (KAU). It is the institute where students start their Preparatory Foundation Year Programme (PFYP). The (ELI) hosts over 14,000 students in four campuses with the faculty and administrative of 600 staff. As stated on the ELI

website (2018), the ELI was accredited by the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) in 2013. The academic year is organized in four modules, using the Cambridge English Unlimited Special Edition and Unlock as course books.

Students who finish their high school at the age of eighteen apply to Saudi universities to begin their undergraduate studies. Once students are registered, they start studying English in the Preparatory Year Programme that lasts for one full academic year. All students who are accepted should complete a full-time course of 18 hours of English instruction per week. The ELI offers two tracks, a General English Track for Arts students whose courses are conducted in Arabic, and an Academic English Track for Science students whose courses are conducted in English. As per the ELI website (2018), "Both tracks are designed to help students achieve intermediate level proficiency in the use of the English language, mapped against the B1 band set by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). For the general track students, this is equivalent to approximately a 4.5 or above in General IELTS or a 45 or above in the iBT TOEFL. For the academic track students, this is equivalent to a score between 4.5 and 5.0 on the academic IELTS or a similar iBT TOEFL score". The ELI delivers this programme to thousands of male and female students on two separate campus. Students complete this programme in order to begin their degree courses in their field of study.

1.2.2   Writing at the English Language Institute (ELI)

On December 3 2018, The President of King Abdul Aziz University decided to establish an English writing centre within the university at the English Language

Institute. The decision has been taken because of the urgent need to find solutions for the writing problems encountered by the students in their academic writing field. This will give the opportunity for the students seeking help in improving their writing in English (see Appendix K).

Although in theory, each of the four courses offered at the ELI are supposed to consist of students who have attained a specific level of proficiency, in practice ELI classes are generally mixed levels. This is because students are placed in levels in two distinct ways. Each level contains students who have been placed in that level through an internationally recognized placement test (produced by Cambridge University Press), which is generally a reliable indicator of students' actual proficiency level. However, each class may also contain students who have passed into these levels based on a minimal level of performance on the ELI's own internally produced tests. These internally produced tests are less reliable as compared to the Cambridge produced exams. There is usually a gap between students who tested into each level via the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) and the others.

Furthermore, course reports show that students' speaking grades are better than their writing scores (see Appendix A). Students' in-class writing practice is not that much so in their writing exams, they find difficulties in writing coherent topics and sometimes correct sentences. They seem to be unable to organize their ideas or to collect them. They have problems concerning sentence structures and punctuation as well (see Appendix B). One hundred twenty students participated anonymously in the survey carried by this researcher in the academic year 2018/2019. More than half of the total number of participants chose writing as the most difficult of the other language skills (see Appendix C).

1.2.3 WhatsApp Usage in Saudi Arabia

Social media has affected people's careers socially, educationally and economically. It has affected the Arab world the way it has done to other societies. With respect to the number of social media users, within the Arab world, Saudi Arabia seems to account for a large percentage of users. WhatsApp is the most common application used by people in the Arab country world. The Arab Social Media Report (2015) states that "WhatsApp is the top preferred social Media channel in the Arab world" (p. 22). According to the same report (2015), Saudi Arabia users form 42% of total usage in the Arab World. People in the Arab countries use other applications such as Facebook and Twitter. As for the applications used by the Saudi users, Laha On Line Website (2015) states that "WhatsApp is the most-utilized social media platform in Saudi Arabia with 22% of all social-media usage being on this platform" (p. 1). In terms of raw numbers, Infographics.Social Media Marketing (2018) posted that "it was WhatsApp, which emerged as the most used chat platform with 24.27 million users" in Saudi Arabia (p. 10). WhatsApp users everywhere in the world use it to have connections with other people. They use it to share photos, video clips and knowledge. The main feature of WhatsApp is that users do not have to log in using a user name or password. They do it only for the first time when they download the application.

Alsaleem (2013) points out "more and more undergraduate students are using smart phones and WhatsApp applications in their writings in Saudi Arabia" (p. 4). She has stressed this fact because she notices that students are always on WhatsApp while they are at university. Alshammari, Parkes and Adlington (2017) consider the

popularity of WhatsApp application the main reason that makes students and instructors use WhatsApp application. Alshammari, Parkes and Adlington (2017) assert "Due to its popularity, it is not surprising that Saudi Arabian students and their instructors have adopted WhatsApp for various educational uses" (p. 2).

1.2.4 Saudi Government's Policies in Promoting EFL at the Tertiary Level

As stated by the Research and Studies Centre of the Ministry of Higher Education (2007), Saudi Arabia has made a great financial budget for education. Among the most important elements of the Saudi government's plan is integrating technology into schools, institutes, universities and governmental directorates. This has affected both the regulations and the rules set by the Saudi government. Learning and teaching English as a foreign language has become dominant in both schools and universities in the private and public sectors. The Saudi Government has asked the Ministry of Education to plan for making English one of the subjects to be at schools to prepare Saudi generation to the new education period. Al-Juhani (2016) highlights that "Saudi government was motivated by these changes and began introducing English as a foreign language to the education systems (public and private schools). It assigned the Ministry of Education to manage the change" (p. 3). Private Saudi schools have also been asked to take the same step by teaching English as one of the main subjects.

As stated on the website of King Abdul Aziz University (2018), all undergraduates who want to register at university must study English for a full academic year. The Ministry (2006) launched the Foundation Year Programme in all Saudi universities where students are required to study English over one year as a

requirement before they begin their academic study. This fact has been made a rule for all public universities. Students should take an English placement test so that they are placed appropriately according to their exam results. Learning English in the Foundation Year is a necessary step towards securing a college entry in the Saudi universities.

On the 10th of August 2017, as it is stated on the Ministry website, The Minister of Education issued a decision to establish a centre specialized in the development of English language education. The objectives of the Centre include the design of training packages and vocational training programmes in cooperation with the relevant sectors, to improve the language and professional competence of teachers of English, and to contribute to the development of standards for teaching English Language as a foreign language. The center adopts new initiatives, local and international educational partnerships to improve the level of students and to do research about learning environments and methodology. All these steps aim at supporting teaching and learning English.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education has set another important rule for graduates seeking a job of an English teacher. Al-Sudais (2017) states that "The minimum prerequisite for tutors to teach English in Saudi Arabia is a Bachelor's degree in English" (p. 2). As it is stated on ELI's website (2018), students seeking their masters and doctorates have to take the test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in order to pursue their academic studies. Al-Juhani (2016) considers English as "a resource for Saudi workers" (p. 3). The Saudi government's policy in encouraging English language learning has proved to be significant. One of the qualifications required for getting a job is that one should prove to be good at speaking and writing English.

1.2.5 Saudi Government's Initiatives in the Use of Technology for EFL Purposes

Saudi Arabia, as Al-Qarni states (2015), has a plan for integrating educational technology in schools and universities. Al-Qarni (2015)) suggests that "the effort to implement educational technology in Saudi Arabia has always been a number one priority" (p. 63). Saudi Arabia has also planned for many educational projects to improve the use of technology in education. Among these projects are e-learning projects and digital learning projects. This has been set by the government to improve the quality of learning and teaching, and to enable students all over the Kingdom to complete their studies. The Saudi Seventh Plan for Development, as Omer (2003) states, discusses and refers to "the importance of knowledge and technology, research and development", and "establishing new patterns of learning such as Open University and e-learning" (p. 7).

King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz issued a royal decree to establish the Saudi Electronic University (SEU) in 2011. This university provides both online and on-site education. It is one of most famous universities in the Kingdom which provides online learning. The Saudi government has shown a great interest in establishing universities everywhere in the Kingdom and launching many educational projects such as establishing King Abdul Aziz City for Development and Sciences with the aim of developing education and research.

Schools, institutes and universities are equipped with labs that provide all educational facilities including free internet access for all students. Students are able to study at home using their laptops and computers to get resources and knowledge. This has made learning possible for every active student who wants to complete his

part-time study. Technology including the Internet has changed and improved the performances of staff and university students. For the staff, the government has issued an important rule for applicants seeking a university job. Applicants should prove to be good at using technology. They should provide certificates that demonstrate their proficiency in using computers and the Internet. The government also established training plans for those staff so that they use all facilities professionally at work. This factor becomes important because now the Saudi universities depend on technology in making students' schedules and in providing students with online resources to make their academic career smooth and more successful.

King Abdul Aziz University is among the top Saudi universities that have started using distance learning. King Abdul Aziz University has initiated using blackboard and digital programmes to enhance students' learning. The ELI has instructed all teachers to adopt these tools, and it has provided yearly workshops and conferences about implementing technology in universities (see Appendix M).

1.2.6 ELI's Encouragement of the Use of Technology in the Classroom

Depending on the level they are studying, students have to write paragraphs or essays in both mid- module and final writing exams. As it is accessed on the website (2018), the ELI administrators encourage every single instructor to do their best to keep their students engaged by the use of technology especially the apps. As it is stated in the Pacing Guide provided by the planners (2018), "teachers are encouraged to use interactive forms of technology to increase student engagement" (p. 2). In the instructional packs prepared by the ELI planners (2018), "the instructor's main responsibility is to teach the Learning Outcomes specified for the course" (p. 7). In

all ELI English books, students have to practice writing very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities, emails, essays and personal experiences. Many of the writing exam questions are similar to the course books writing activities. This makes students focus on learning how to write very good sentences and topics with the help of their teachers in the classroom.

1.3   The Statement of the Problem

Research has been done in Saudi universities about using WhatsApp as an electronic tool to improve EFL learning. Hamad (2017), Bensalem (2018) and Amry (2014) have studied the impact of using WhatsApp to enhance EFL learning. Hamad (2017) has focused on using WhatsApp to help female students improve their EFL learning skills. Bensalem (2018) in turn did his study on using WhatsApp to improve vocabulary learning. Amry (2014) did her study on using WhatsApp to teach one unit of the textbook. However, no study has investigated the use of WhatsApp as a tool to improve the style of writings in emails, paragraphs or essay writing. Akakandelwa, Changala and Moonga (2018) state that the use of WhatsApp has an impact on the performance of students. In addition, the finding of the study by Mashru and Upadhyay (2015) reveals that the use of technology seems to be a motivating factor in encouraging students to be more engaged in doing activities in the language classroom. In the study of Dwee and Sharif (2016) students stated that the use of technology especially WhatsApp made it easier for them to write. Students elaborated significantly on how the use of WhatsApp increased their confidence in writing in English. Therefore, this study will be an investigation of the use of WhatsApp to improve the writing skills of students at tertiary level, which is the gap in the literature that this study aims to address.

The poor writing style and the disability to get good grades in their writing tasks and exams are two major difficulties that students at the ELI suffer from. The ELI module course reports provide clear data about students' performance in the writing skill compared to their abilities and marks in the speaking skill (see Appendix A). As a small number of students get good grades in their writing tasks and exams, this has been a major concern for ELI instructors. Students' performance on writing tasks reveals that they face difficulty in writing (see Appendix B).

Some studies conducted in Saudi Arabia have investigated whether or not the use of WhatsApp can help in improving EFL students' writing. Some studies such as Hamad (2017) used WhatsApp to investigate female students' learning of the four skills. Bensalem (2018) studied the use of WhatsApp to improve EFL students' Vocabulary Learning, in the Languages and Translation Department Northern Border University Arar, Saudi Arabia. Amry (2014) conducted a study at Taibah University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Technology, focusing on female students. Amry used WhatsApp to teach only unit six of the course Educational Media. Amry's study (2014) was limited because it was based only on a single unit. This researcher's study will be based on the whole of the textbook and for the course.

The reason for choosing WhatsApp as a new tool of teaching writing is precisely because it is as Susanti and Tarmuji (2016) point out "effective to enhance the students' language skills, motivation and rapport especially to adolescent learners" (p. 1). In the ELI context, the instructors of the ELI are encouraged to engage students by using apps that are effective to increase student interest and engagement. In the Pacing Guide (2017-2018), the ELI Pacing Guide planners state that some teachers have used Quizlet, Kahoot, Google forms and Edmodo on their own to encourage their students to learn the English Language. The ELI Pacing Guide planners

encourage instructors to use these apps for the purposes of teaching grammar and vocabulary and for teaching listening and reading passages (see Appendix M). The researcher in this study chooses WhatsApp because it has not been used at the ELI for the purposes of teaching the writing skills yet. According to the studies quoted above, WhatsApp is successful because it is novel, widely available, and students are constantly on WhatsApp. Hamad (2017) identifies the role of technology and she points outs "Since Technology is in a continuous rapid development and with every sun rise there is a new App, and as youth are using them, we have to keep ourselves updated with these Apps" (p. 12).

Bensalem (2018) highlights the importance of the wide spread of the new apps as a reason for using WhatsApp as a new tool of teaching English as a second language. Bensalem (2018) states that "The popularity of such apps has raised the interest of many language educators in exploring the potential of using WhatsApp in teaching certain aspects of second language learning" (p. 2). Amry (2014) stresses the social effect of using WhatsApp to learn and she highlights the difference between face-to-face learning and mobile learning technology. For Amry (2014), using WhatsApp has an important social dimension that reinforces learning in a community. Amry (2014) used WhatsApp as a tool to build the learning community that students need to be able to get knowledge and to interact with their colleagues. This is to build the needed rapport in the classroom among students when they share ideas on the WhatsApp group. Students learn from their peers' mistakes more because using pen and paper does not solve the social problem students usually suffer as they tend to be separate in the classroom. Amry (2014) states that "The mobile learning technology helps students to create a learning community, to easily construct knowledge and to

share it with other members of a WhatsApp group through instant messaging" (p. 18).

Another reason for choosing WhatsApp application in this study is that some studies have highlighted that students have positive perceptions of using WhatsApp to support and foster their learning and students tend to be more enthusiastic. Ajid, Dwi, Reni and Yunita (2018) point out "It can provide students with an opportunity for practicing the language for free, a more personal and comprehensive relation between students and teachers, a chance for students not to be more sociable only, but also to learn better" (p. 5). Kheryadi (2017) stresses the fact of enthusiasm when using WhatsApp as a tool of teaching English Language because students feel happy to use their own words on the group. Kheryadi (2017) states "However, the use of WhatsApp can increase their enthusiasm in learning. Regardless of their proficiency levels, most students feel excited to join online chats using their own words as it looks like that they communicate with their friends in daily context" (p. 11). Therefore, this researcher would like to investigate the extent to which students' writing skills improve through the use of WhatsApp and to investigate students' perceptions about using WhatsApp for learning writing skills.

This researcher identified a need to investigate the impact of using WhatsApp in the classroom for learning writing skills. The studies conducted by Hamad (2017), Bensalem (2018) and Amry (2014) in Saudi universities have led to an interest in investigating the topic on preparatory year students at the ELI who must study English for a full academic year in order to be able to choose their subjects after completing the full course program. The pressing need for improving writing skills at ELI and the success of the above studies in using WhatsApp to improve students' writing skills, encourages this researcher to do a study to see if this success can be

replicated at the ELI. The objectives of this study are to examine the extent to which students' writing skills improve when they use WhatsApp, and to determine students' perceptions and opinions about using WhatsApp to learn writing in the classroom.

Researching this problem by using a case study, administrators and pacing guide planners at the ELI can develop the intervention plan needed to motivate students and enhance learning the writing skills. Also, ELI instructors can support and prepare their modular lesson plans. They can prepare and plan activities that match learners' level and interest to help learners write well- structured and organized sentences and paragraphs.

1.4   Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1.   To examine the extent to which students' writing skills improve through the use of WhatsApp

2.   To determine students' perceptions of using WhatsApp to learn writing in the classroom.

1.5   Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1.   To what extent does WhatsApp improve students' writing skills?

2.   What are students' perceptions of using WhatsApp to learn writing in the classroom?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using WhatsApp by students at the ELI, King Abdul Aziz University and measure and evaluate students' improvement of their writing skills when they use WhatsApp to write. This study will also investigate students' opinions and viewpoints about learning writing skills through the use of WhatsApp in the classroom. This research will benefit ELI students who are the main target of the study, instructors, teacher trainers and pacing guide planners at the ELI. This study will benefit the administrators of the ELI in planning for modular workshops and meetings about implementing WhatsApp in the classroom for educational purposes.

Moreover, this research plans to encourage Saudi university students to take their role in the classroom in the learning process. The students will be the centre of learning and they are motivated to get benefited from the use of mobile phone applications at university. This might help students be ready for higher levels of English language. Possibly, students will learn from their peers' mistakes and they may be able to correct each other by using WhatsApp.

Furthermore, this study may encourage students at other Saudi universities to use WhatsApp positively. The outcomes of this study can help other teachers at the ELI to encourage their students to make use of their chat on WhatsApp to help each other and to practice writing sentences and short paragraphs about the topics they study in their textbooks. This study can also encourage teachers who teach low achievers and repeaters to face the challenges that they may experience when they enable their students to use mobile phones for learning purposes. This study may also encourage

the ELI instructors to share their students' outcomes with their colleagues at the ELI and to train students to use WhatsApp effectively in the classroom.

Finally, this study might serve as a kind of reference for secondary schools in Saudi Arabia where teachers can teach writing skills to improve students' writing style and spelling. It is hoped that EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia use the novel tools of technology that meet students' interests and needs.

1.7   Scope of the Study

This study will be conducted at the ELI, King Abdul Aziz University, one of the leading universities in Saudi Arabia. The focus will be on the ELI students who are studying English Unlimited Special Edition (EUSE) "B1+", and on the students' writing performance when they use WhatsApp in the classroom. These two course materials are aligned and mapped with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) proficiency level band and descriptors. Students study this level, 104, as part of the Foundation Preparatory Year Programme. This study includes teachers and students' use of WhatsApp in class as a new tool of teaching and learning focusing on writing skills.

1.8   Limitation of the Study

The academic year of the Foundation Year Programme consists of four modules, so each module lasts only for eight teaching weeks. Supported by the ELI administration, this researcher can manage to choose volunteering instructors to do the study in one class. Due to the administrative concerns, the number of students in the class selected for the case study was limited to nineteen. However, in an ideal situation, it would have been better to have around thirty students in each group.

Therefore, the conclusion of this study should not be considered definitive or final, but rather should be motivation for future studies.

One limitation of a case study is that it can be somehow long due to the length characteristic. Another limitation is that in case studies generalization might be challenging to achieve. Generalization from a case study to another study does not seem to be easy.

1.9   Definition of Key Terms

In this study there are many terms used in the literature review and in the other parts of this study. These terms are defined and used to clarify their use in the text and to avoid ambiguity of their use too.

WhatsApp: WhatsApp is a free messenger application that works across multiple platform and is being widely used among undergraduate students to send multimedia messages like photos, videos, audios along with simple text messages (Gon and Rawekar, 2017).

Writing: According to Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981), Flower (1984) and Hayes (1996), writing consists of three main cognitive processes/strategies: planning, translating and reviewing. Planning is divided into three sub-strategies: generating ideas, organizing, and goal-setting. Translating is when writers actually put their ideas into visible language, an activity through which the writer transforms the ideas from a linear or hierarchic plan into sentences. Reading and editing are the sub-strategies of reviewing. This includes correcting grammatical errors and altering the contents of the writing. (Shih-Chieh Chien- 2006)

Writing Skills: according to this study, the writing skills comprise of the components required to produce acceptable writing which are structure, content, lexical range (vocabulary), grammar and mechanics and cohesion. (This researcher's definition)

Writing Performance: students' writing output and the exam conditions. (This researcher's definition)

Writing Skills vs. Writing Performance: as defined above, writing performance refers to the student's ability to accomplish a particular writing task. Writing skills on the contrary refer to the individual components of a particular writing output which are referred to above. In this study, both were measured. Each student was given a total grade for the test and an individual grade for the components.

Students' Perceptions: student thoughts about technology used in the course. (Morris, 2016)

Vocabulary: describes that area of language learning that is concerned with word knowledge. Vocabulary learning is a major goal in most teaching programmes. (Thornburry, 2006)

Technology Integration: Process of making technological tools and services, such as computer systems and the Internet, a part of the educational environment -- includes changes made to the curriculum as well as to educational facilities (Duffy, Peter, 2008)

1.10 Summary

This chapter presents the background of the research, King Abdul Aziz University students, writing at English Language Institute, WhatsApp usage in Saudi Arabia, and WhatsApp usage at the English Language Institute. It also presents the Saudi government policy in promoting EFL at the tertiary level, and the Saudi government initiatives in the use of technology have been also presented in this chapter. This introductory chapter presents the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study and the scope of the study. The current chapter illustrates the limitation of the study and finally it provides the definition of the key terms.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Technological tools used in the English language classroom encourages students and teachers to use their personal electronic gadgets in the classroom, which could increase the effectiveness of language learning. Shih (2011) states that collaborative learning is among the benefits that students may get when they use technology. According to Mashru and Upadhyay (2015), integrating technologies into education has become a priority. Ahmadi (2018) stresses the importance of using technology by learners to develop and improve their language learning. Allam and Elias (2016) significantly encourage teachers and educators to be ready for using social media technologies in the classroom with aim of establishing a motivational language learning environment. However, this current study has focused mainly on the benefits of using WhatsApp to improve writing skills in English language learning.

This chapter illustrates and focuses on a review of related literature on using technology in learning and teaching English in higher education. The first part defines and discusses the several tools of technology used for teaching English, and it also examines how technology is helpful in English language teaching (ELT). Mainly, the chapter briefly defines and explains the significance of vocabulary and writing skills in learning and teaching English. Next, the chapter presents theories