A CASE STUDY OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES VIA WHATSAPP AMONG LOW PROFICIENCY ESL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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2023

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by

HAEZA BINTI HARON

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dear Allah,
Thank you for choosing me to embark on this journey meaningfully. With the adventure of each day, I discover the strength and the best in myself. *Alhamdulillah*.

To my beloved parents,
This thesis is dedicated to you, Haron bin Din and Sharifah Aishah binti Syed Mohamed, for your unconditional love and support through my ups and downs.

To my supervisors,
My gratitude and thanks to both of you, Dr Shaidatul Akma Adi Kasuma and Assoc. Prof. Dr Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh for your guidance.

To The Jays,
My beloved husband Munzir bin Musa, my daughter Ayatun Naema, my furbabies MatDan and Kekjaa.
I am eternally grateful for your love, understanding and encouragement.
You have given me the strength and perseverance to accomplish my ultimate goal. *Thank You.*

To my beloved family members,
This thesis is devoted to all of you (my siblings: Abang and Apin), (my sisters: Awa and Fara), (niece: Nusaiba), (nephew: Naquib) and other relatives for your unconditional support.

To the Ministry of Education,
Thank you for the PhD scholarship.

To the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation,
My utmost appreciation for your cooperation.

Special thanks for the knowledge of research and life to Assoc. Prof. Dr Noor Hanim Rahmat, Dr Azlena Zainal and others.

I place on record my sense of gratitude to everyone who directly and indirectly contributed to my PhD journey through their prayers, words of encouragement and presence.

"Thank you for life and all the little ups and downs that make it worth living…"

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Covid-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EF	Education First
ESL	English for Second Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MCO	Movement Control Order
MTP	Mobile Technology, Teacher's Role, Peer Interaction
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NUTP	National Union of the Teaching Profession
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SNS	Social Network Sites
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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KAJIAN KES FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI AKTIVITI PENULISAN ARGUMENTATIF BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA MELALUI WHATSAPP DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR UNIVERSITI YANG LEMAH

ABSTRAK

Kajian kes ini mengkaji pandangan pelajar universiti yang lemah dalam penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris terhadap tiga faktor pembelajaran yang mempengaruhi kemahiran menulis esei argumentatif. Tiga faktor tersebut ialah teknologi mudah alih melalui WhatsApp, interaksi rakan sebaya dan peranan guru, yang kesemuanya penting merentasi banyak persekitaran pembelajaran. Bagi menjawab persoalan kajian, kajian kes ini memfokuskan kepada tiga faktor iaitu teknologi mudah alih melalui WhatsApp, interaksi rakan sebaya dan peranan guru untuk mengkaji sama ada pelajar pada peringkat universiti yang lemah melihat faktor-faktor ini sebagai kriteria pembelajaran penting yang boleh membangunkan dan menyokong penulisan argumentatif Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua mereka. Kajian kualitatif ini telah dijalankan di salah sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia, melibatkan 13 pelajar sarjana muda tahun satu yang mengikuti kursus kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris. Kumpulan WhatsApp telah diwujudkan dan pelajar-pelajar dimasukkan sebagai peserta. Penyelidikan ini dihadkan kepada membantu pelajar untuk meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata, menggalakkan penjanaan idea, dan meningkatkan keupayaan untuk membina struktur ayat melalui perbincangan WhatsApp sebelum menghantar penulisan argumentatif ke WhatsApp dalam bentuk fail pdf. Data untuk kajian kes ini telah dikumpulkan, termasuk perbincangan WhatsApp, temu bual dengan 13 pelajar dan 2 guru, dokumen penulisan argumentatif pelajar dan skor penulisan pelajar.

Pelajar-pelajar menghantar esei penulisan argumentatif mereka setiap minggu selama lapan minggu selepas tiga hari perbincangan WhatsApp dengan guru berdasarkan lapan topik. Markah penulisan pelajar mendedahkan bahawa ketiga-tiga faktor ini membantu meningkatkan keupayaan menulis mereka dalam penulisan argumentatif dan kematangan mereka dalam berkongsi idea. Data kemudian ditranskripsi dan ditriangulasi menggunakan AtlasTi. Implikasi dari dapatan kajian ini mensyorkan WhatsApp sebagai alat untuk menyokong penulisan argumentatif pelajar, menonjolkan kepentingan sistem sokongan untuk menggalakkan pelibatan pelajar dalam perbincangan dan meningkatkan pembelajaran berkesan mereka dalam keupayaan menulis argumentatif. Sekiranya tidak ada dasar yang ditentukan, guru dan pelajar akan terus bergantung pada pembelajaran sua muka tanpa memaksimumkan potensi alat teknologi mudah alih untuk pengajaran bahasa. Universiti, kolej, dan institusi pendidikan Malaysia harus melaksanakan dasar yang mendorong guru dan pelajar untuk berkongsi tanggungjawab melaksanakan teknologi mudah alih dalam pendidikan Bahasa Inggeris. Sehubungan itu, tiga faktor yang mempengaruhi pengukuhan pembelajaran, pengkaji mencadangkan faktor-faktor tersebut dikelompokkan di bawah istilah sistem sokongan, "*System of Support*".

A CASE STUDY OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES VIA WHATSAPP AMONG LOW PROFICIENCY ESL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

This case study examines low-proficiency university students' views of three learning factors that influence ESL argumentative writing skills. This case study focuses on three factors: mobile technology via WhatsApp, peer interaction and teacher's role to examine the low proficiency students at the university level view these factors as important learning criteria that can develop and support their ESL argumentative writing in answering the research questions. This study was conducted at one of the public universities in Malaysia and involved 13 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English proficiency course for beginners. A WhatsApp group was created, and students were added as participants. This research was limited to aiding the students in enhancing their vocabulary, promoting the generation of ideas, and improving the ability to construct sentence structure via WhatsApp discussion before submitting their argumentative writing. The data for this case study were gathered from WhatsApp discussions, interviews from the 13 students and 2 teachers, students' argumentative writing and writing scores. The students submitted their argumentative writing essays weekly for eight weeks following three days of WhatsApp discussions with the teachers based on eight topics in pdf file to the WhatsApp group. The students' writing scores revealed that these three factors helped improve their writing ability in terms of argumentative writing and enhanced their maturity in sharing ideas. The data were then transcribed and triangulated using AtlasTi. The implications of the findings suggested that WhatsApp is recommended

as a tool to support the students' argumentative writing, highlighting the importance of the System of Support to encourage students' engagement in discussion and increase their effective learning in argumentative writing ability. In the absence of defined policies, teachers and students will continue to rely on face-to-face approaches without maximising the potential of mobile technological tools for language instruction. Malaysian universities, colleges, and educational institutions should implement regulations that encourage teachers and students to share responsibility for implementing mobile technology in language education. studies. Therefore, the three factors are suggested to be grouped under the term *System of Support* derived from this study focuses on three factors: mobile technology via WhatsApp, peer interaction and teacher's role as important learning criteria that can develop and support their ESL argumentative writing.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the association between numerous elements of English argumentative writing involving the use of WhatsApp. The research background, research problems, and the purpose of the study are all presented in this chapter. Along with the objectives, the research questions derived from them outlined, with the study's significance in aiding low proficiency ESL students in their argumentative writing. Finally, the study's limitations are also taken into consideration.

1.2 Research Background

Given the significance of English language acquisition in education through technological methods, researchers have become interested in the exploitation of diverse generic technologies. The importance of the English language in the globalised world is notable for cross-cultural awareness and communication (Zakaria et al., 2018), and technology has significantly influenced the growth in English usage around the world. Furthermore, the limitations in terms of space and time have been removed from English language teaching and learning as a result of technological advancement and the adaptation of various technological tools (Yunus et al., 2019).

Language educators have been motivated to adopt new technologies and explore creative ways in language learning across a broad range of teaching settings, especially in teaching English as a second language, as a result of the paradigm shift from the traditional whole class and teacher-centred to the learner-centred and the proliferation of new technologies. (Martinez-Alba & Cruzado-Guerrero, 2019). The

same research added that with the growing number of technologies, from tablets to laptops to online programmes, organisers and virtual tutors, teachers have a wealth of available resources that can help them teach their students to read and write while making them aware of the valuable resources that can help them in the future. Therefore, the concept of language learning through new technologies can be adapted to suit the new era of teaching and learning.

According to UNESCO (2020), by opening up new teaching and learning opportunities and by including communities where conventional educational facilities are limited, mobile technology has reached the farthest corners of the world. The world is now changing due to Coronavirus disease (Covid-19). Because of this, most universities were forced to close in February 2020 due to the pandemic, and instructors were compelled to start offering classes online. Due to this new phenomenon, teachers around the world are currently witnessing an unprecedented massive migration from traditional face-to-face in-class learning to online learning. There were announcements of the closure of universities and schools across 61 nations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and South as well as North America (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, UNESCO is helping governments recognise and leverage mobile technology's power to make learning more inclusive, open and equitable.

The potential learning opportunities describe mobile learning as beneficial to students despite the lack of integration that support learning (Bernacki et al., 2020). Researchers have provided numerous examples of how mobile technology products have improved learning. Students use their mobile devices as a platform to engage in learning activities (Huang et al., 2010), seek assistance and participate in collaborative learning (Reeves & Sperling, 2015). Although according to Ravizza, Uitvlugt, and Fenn (2017), mobile devices have also been correlated with self-regulatory issues in

the classroom and have a negative impact on students' recall of knowledge compared to more conventional note-taking techniques (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014), these wearable technologies can be used to promote positive behaviours during learning to improve student participation (Chen et al., 2017).

Long-standing studies have shown that ESL students in higher education critically need assistance to develop their academic writing abilities and achieve their professional goals (Ankeny, 2019). As mobile phones have grown commonplace in the classrooms, teachers have attempted to incorporate technology into the curriculum in useful ways (Bensalem, 2018). Mobile messaging apps have gained interest as a tool to support academic education for this reason because of its accessibility and ability to connect students outside of the classroom. For mobile learning, a variety of electronic tools are available, including WhatsApp and Telegram (Hamad, 2017), as well as email (Mpungose, 2020), from the app on mobile phones to tablets. English Language teaching also makes use of social media platforms like Facebook (Adi Kasuma, 2017) and Instagram (Akhiar et al., 2017). More recently, a number of researchers (Andujar, 2016; Avci & Adiguzel, 2017; Dehghan et al., 2018; Thabit & Ahmed, 2019; Mpungose, 2020) have fostered the learning of language by using a number of applications and found that the use of WhatsApp can significantly improve learning because it encourages students to be active in their studies and helps them have a positive attitude (Andujar & Hussein, 2019). A research done in 2019, 60 percent of university students viewed WhatsApp as the most popular platform to assist language learning at the university level, followed by Facebook at 43 percent (Madge et al., 2019). Studies have shown that the interaction between students regarding personal, school, and course-related topics creates a sense of belonging, eliminates

social barriers, and enhances the motivation of students (Çetinkaya & Sütçü, 2018). Hence, in this study, the researcher look at peer interaction in the WhatsApp group.

Malaysia has dropped four positions in this 2019 annual Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index, which assesses the expansion of English proficiency globally, but unable to aid the writing difficulties students are currently facing. Malaysia's score of 59 percent has caused it to drop from the 22nd position to the 26th in the most recent edition of the rankings, despite the fact that it is currently ranked third in Asia, behind Singapore's 67 percent and the Philippines' 60 percent. The index, now in its ninth year, assesses the results of 2.3 million adults across 100 nations and regions who took the EF Standard English Test (Hanewald, 2016). Aminuddin Awang, the President of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), stressed that the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in the education sector should conduct a thorough investigation to identify the root cause of the issue rather than solely blaming teachers because Malaysian students have a poor command of the English language.

According to various studies, writing is the first challenge in learning English in terms of vocabulary, correctness, complexity, and cohesion (Azlan & Yunus, 2020; Yunus et al., 2019; Musa, 2016). For six years in elementary school and five years in secondary school, English is taught in Malaysia as a second language. Although writing proficiency is a crucial component of academic accomplishment, Malaysian students have generally struggled in this area. It consequently becomes a significant area of investigation for researchers who study second languages (Mohammad et al., 2018). It is a concern that a growing proportion of Malaysian students are unable to generate coherent sentences in either spoken or written English texts because the usage of the English language is required in the majority of local and foreign colleges and

businesses. As writing is a complex process of discovery, stakeholders and educators need to find ways to enable students to resolve their obstacles (Madge et al., 2019).

Specifically, in this study, the researcher examines the impact of WhatsApp of the factors in learning ESL writing. The factors chosen in this study are mobile technology, peer interaction, and the teacher's role. The three factors were chosen as it is widely used now due to Covid-19. However, according to Aicha (2014), without experienced teachers, this technology is futile. Because there are minimal concerns about technology adoption in terms of attitude, the researcher decided to explore the teacher's involvement as a second component (Baek et al., 2017) and to be able to understand why this phenomenon occurs, peer interaction was included as the interaction between fellow students has been extensively investigated as the most common type of interaction in a classroom setting (Philp et al., 2010, p.261; Philp et al., 2014; Sato, 2013). Therefore, in order to examine the impact of the factors in ESL writing, this study incorporates WhatsApp as a form of prevalent communication tool among students in higher education.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This section discusses and elaborates on the studies conducted on the identified problems of the study as identified in the literature to establish the research gap. The researcher look at the three factors which are mobile technology, peer interaction, and the teachers' role in order to aid ESL low proficiency students in argumentative writing and encourage educators to create a technology-infused environment (Bernacki et al., 2020) emphasizing on providing in-depth exploration of findings from a qualitative approach. In the context of the ninety-eight previous research conducted, the use of WhatsApp had been widely studied from 2012 to 2021 in the field of language

learning, as listed in Appendix F reliance mainly on questionnaire and interview. Language learning research paid significant attention to singular learning factors, for example, teacher's roles and ESL writing (Bernacki et al., 2020). Consequently, the absence of literature between mobile technology, peer interaction and teacher's role and their impact specifically on ESL argumentative writing via WhatsApp in aiding the low proficiency students was the basis for the researcher's selection. Hence, this research intends to fill this gap in earlier research on ESL argumentative writing and add to the literature of affecting factors on argumentative writing ability. Further elaboration on the specific focus to argumentative writing is in Chapter Three.

The fundamental role of mobile technology is chosen as a factor as it plays a crucial part in improving learning outcomes, and from previous studies (Andujar et al., 2020; AS Mustafa et al., 2021; Suadi, 2021,) as listed in Appendix F have acknowledged this. Shadiev et al. (2017) found that the research trends were chiefly focused on mobile learning with constructivism and collaborative frameworks that showed positive outcomes in language learning. Therefore, in this study, the researcher looked at peer interaction in the mobile setting, within a WhatsApp group, as other platforms such as Facebook (Peeters, 2018); and wikis (Akbari et al., 2016) has also been previously investigated. Hence, in this study, the researcher acknowledges that more research is needed with regards to how mobile technology interact with other factors in fostering or hindering learning, in encouraging educators to develop a technologically advanced environment that makes use of affordances while reducing the difficulties brought on by these mobile devices that are becoming more and more commonplace (Bernacki et al., 2020).

It is challenging to imagine a L2 programme that does not involve tools in some capacity, claimed Motteram (2013). The significance of online writing tools in fostering writing abilities was also supported by studies by Jun and Lee (2012) and Gillam and Wooden (2013). Prior research on students' opinions of online learning, however, appeared to have a restricted scope in particular fields or specialities. Gibby (2007) used several online interactions to investigate how Spanish language learners perceive themselves. For this study, WhatsApp as a platform is to help the ESL low proficiency students, overcome some of their difficulties in L2 (second language) writing. Various studies have been conducted on peer interaction using WhatsApp on a mobile technology platform. Some of the research includes Kartal (2019) and research on various contexts such as reading, speaking, and listening skills (Aktas & Can, 2019; Hashemifardnia, La Hanisi, Risdiany, Utami, & Sulisworo, 2018; Namaziandost, & Esfahani, 2018). However, very minimal research has been conducted on the use of peer interaction to develop writing skills specifically argumentative writing with the aid of WhatsApp to low proficiency students. There is a lack of studies that combines the 3 factors in one research using the qualitative case study method for argumentative writing. While there are many studies on peer interaction and teacher support in L2 writing, a lack of studies that focus on the combined roles of the 3 factors in L2 argumentative writing is observed. The current study, therefore, look at the three factors combined.

In relation to this, Kang (2015) agreed that peer interaction might assist in the development of L2, and more research should be done to better understand the phenomena as it is a needed practice in the L2 classroom. To add to the importance of incorporating WhatsApp, based on all the literature mentioned by Madge et al. (2019), more than 90 percent of the studies did not offer any detailed information on how they

used WhatsApp in learning writing. This research investigates the latest trend, as it aims to explore the impact between a network of factors (mobile technology, peer interaction and teacher's role) in the development of English writing ability on WhatsApp as a platform.

It has been established that encouragement and increased linguistic confidence can help enhance ESL writing (Ahmed et al., 2013). Research on ESL writing also examines aspects that aided writers' interest, motivation, and enjoyment by influencing their writing abilities (Graham & Perin, 2007). The use of technology in writing creates a conducive atmosphere for learning since it encourages communication between students and teachers (Siragusa et al., 2007). The results of these studies indicated that the use of an appropriate platform, the expertise of teachers, and peer support are beneficial to learning English (Wilhelm & Pei, 2008), and they suggested further research be done to address the difficulties students face when it comes to academic writing.

The review of literature also found studies on teachers' role in ESL writing and technology that have been extensively researched. However, it does not situate teachers as part of a more extensive aid in students' learning as the studies are mostly on a singular factor. Hence in this study, the researcher found it vital to look at teacher's role in a connected network for the low proficiency students' in a mobile learning environment. Therefore, it is important to study on the roles of teachers and the students' in learning writing skills (Syafri et al., 2020) due to the challenges faced in ESL writing (Hafifah, 2020). Generally, these studies agreed that technology improved ESL writing ability, and students enjoyed learning writing via an online platform (Green, 2019), which resulted in better performance (Chen et al., 2019). Due to this, the teachers' perceptions of mobile technology for ESL writing (Azlan &

Yunus, 2020) and teachers' preferred form of technology for ESL writing lessons (Green, 2019; La Hanisi et al., 2018) in aiding the low proficiency ESL students in their argumentative writing was further analyzed in this study.

In addition, taking into account some of the unique importance of understanding the factors in aiding low proficiency students in ESL writing, especially in overcoming writing problems, Ezza (2010) found that un-updated methodology and resources caused the writing problems. The study revealed that the English Departments across three universities used "approaches and materials characteristics of the 1940 and 1950s" (p.1) mainly of product-based writing approach with less or least focus on process-oriented or genre-oriented writing approach. Hence, the researcher adapts the process-genre approach in this study.

In terms of theories, Social Constructivism, ZPD and Cognitivism have been employed in studies on technology-integrated language teaching and learning. The Social Constructivist theory (Vygostsky, 1978) has much more room for a collaborative, active and learner centered learning as it has an effect on writing in respect to the cognitive processes which learners experience. Namely, while writing, a student has to think more carefully about what is going to be written and the social conditions in which the student experiences; thus, students construct new information based on the prior knowledge, and it also deals with learning environments that help students to have better understanding of concepts. In addition, Lim (2002) considers that technology has an inevitable role in the socio-cultural setting of any curriculum by referring to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-constructivist approach to cognition through Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) states that individual actions are facilitated by tools. From this view, it is understood that learning is based not only on cognition, but also on the tools that interfere or mediate in the process of collaborative learning.

Hence, the researcher had selected the theories that are appropriate for this study to investigates the impact of mobile technology via WhatsApp, peer interaction and teacher's role on ESL argumentative writing among students who are enrolled in the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation's Preparatory English Course for low proficiency level in Universiti Sains Malaysia. It has led the researcher, in this case, to look specifically at the development of the low proficiency students in relation to the determinants in a WhatsApp platform.

However, despite its rapid growth, online learning is still in its early stages of development, according to Bali and Liu (2018). Since students' perceptions and attitudes are crucial to motivation and learning, developers and providers of online learning need to better understand how students perceive and respond to elements of new technology. They also need to know how to apply these approaches to enhance learning. Previous studies focused on perceptions which may not encapsulate the students' and teachers' whole experience. Therefore, it is wise for the researcher to use WhatsApp to aid the ESL low proficiency students in their argumentative writing ability and understand the teachers' and students' experience with the tool.

Previous studies mentioned above, investigated the cause and effect of the factors that aid low proficiency ESL students (Green, 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Syafri et al., 2020) . It is important to look at the influence of these three factors to examine the holistic review, unlike standalone research techniques, as it gives the researcher a perspective to gain more in-depth, elaborated findings of the phenomenon about the factors that affect L2 writing since other studies were on questionnaire and interview basis. Hence, in this case study, the researcher established the connection between the mobile technology, peer interaction and teacher's role in the context of L2 argumentative writing.

1.4 Research Objectives

This case study employs the qualitative approach in data collection to ascertain the impact of WhatsApp on ESL argumentative writing, students' and teachers' experiences and the impact of the factors for ESL university students in enhancing their writing ability through WhatsApp.

The research objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the performance of low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing.
2. To examine the impact of WhatsApp discussion activity on low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing.
3. To examine the impact of peer interaction on WhatsApp discussion on low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing ability.
4. To examine the roles that teachers play on WhatsApp discussion that impact on low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing ability.
5. To examine low proficiency ESL university students' and teachers' experience of using WhatsApp in argumentative writing.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions are explored in this chapter in an effort to address the research objectives:

1. How do the low proficiency ESL university students perform in their argumentative writing?

2. How do WhatsApp discussion activities impact low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing?
3. How does peer interaction on WhatsApp discussion impact low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing ability?
4. How do the roles that teachers play on WhatsApp discussion impact the low proficiency ESL university students' argumentative writing ability?
5. What are the low proficiency ESL university students' and teachers' experiences of using WhatsApp in argumentative writing?

1.6 Significance of the Study

In the new normal of education, the unique challenges that mobile learning technologies pose are understanding and adjusting teaching to accommodate low proficiency students. More proactive initiatives are required to be included and implemented for mobile technology in general. It is crucial to find ways to integrate this mobile technology into writing exercises to expand the students' conceptions of what it means to improve their ability to use their devices to their advantage.

With the rapid and vast usage of educational technologies in ESL at the university level, this research focuses on how various factors are significant in aiding ESL argumentative writing, especially for low proficiency students. Researchers interested in ESL writing, especially students with low proficiency, may find this study helpful. The study's importance is mostly derived from the value of ESL writing in higher education. The researcher is hopeful that the results and pedagogical consequences of this study lead to potential future advancements in the teaching and

learning of writing skills. The educational implications could offer guidance on how to carry out group writing assignments on a more general level.

There have yet to be enough studies done to determine how different factors affect ESL writers' abilities, according to the available literature. Closing this gap and producing actual data about the value of ESL writing proficiency is the aim of this study. This study provides the information regarding the ESL argumentative writing environment that is useful to English instructors and other stakeholders who are interested in comprehending the aspects that influence students' ESL argumentative writing especially to the low proficiency students in argumentative writing. The results and pedagogical ramifications of this study enable to add new knowledge that is useful for learning and teaching writing in the future, especially for students with low proficiency as it aided them in their argumentative ability. The findings from this case study proves that even low proficiency students were able to increase their writing ability tremendously when given the right tool. Hence, this study serves as a basis for many elements and an adaptable foundation to every aspects of learning.

The results of this study is also be useful to several language committees in Malaysia that make policy choices at the ministerial, university, and college levels. The findings provides valuable recommendations about the network of factors that supports learning. Continuous effort should be made to assure students' competency quality in language learning by researching the field of English language learning in order to understand better the phenomenon and various situations that could influence the students while learning, the language context as well as all the factors that shape the students' lifelong learning. In this study, the researcher look at brainstorming, sharing ideas and the recognition of the students' own ability to contribute to the development of their writing by adapting the process-genre approach. The Higher

Education Ministry and the stakeholders receive pertinent information from this study to enable them to create policies and make educated decisions regarding the usage of mobile technologies in the ESL classroom to benefit the low proficiency students.

This is in line with the strategy to raise the Malaysian education profile and provide opportunities to introduce innovative pedagogies, research collaboration and output (Cheong et al., 2016). Moreover, this study will help the stakeholders to access the integration of mobile technology in ESL argumentative writing, as this is the current need in the new norm of the education scenario by creating a platform of interaction to aid more low proficiency students in their ESL writing ability. Thus, it offers future direction to the decision-makers to incorporate mobile technology in specific areas of education and learning after the researcher accumulates the data on the influence of the factors that aid ESL writing ability. This study can be help researchers who are concerned with ESL writing and assist educators in overcoming writing problems among ESL low proficiency students. Notably, the significance of the study is driven by the importance of academic English writing in higher education.

Finally, by addressing a research need, this findings from this study added to the body of literature in the uncharted waters of Malaysian education dealing with the new normal. With much anticipation, the researcher hopes that this study will offer valuable information as mobile technology has yet to be fully implemented in Malaysia's English language teaching and learning.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study acknowledges the following limitations.

1. This study only includes thirteen students from a Preparatory English Course for low proficiency students in one of the public university in Malaysia as this is a case study that the researcher did to get in-depth findings. The low proficiency students were chosen based on their MUET writing scores that was below 45 from two groups which were the humanities and social sciences groups as students at various levels can result in different data and findings.
2. WhatsApp discussion was the focus of the interaction between the low proficiency students and the teachers. As a mobile technology, WhatsApp is considered a factor that may influence students' L2 writing.
3. The result may differ if the researcher chooses a different teaching tool to conduct the study in this case study.
4. This study was only conducted in ten weeks – eight weeks of WhatsApp discussion and two weeks of interview. The whole semester was fourteen weeks. The researcher took the first four weeks to finalize the number of students in this study. This study was not intended to burden the students but to aid. Hence, an extended period of study may yield different results.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions used throughout.

***Argumentative Writing*:** An argumentative writing is a type of essay that presents arguments about both sides of an issue. It could be that both sides are presented equally balanced, or it could be that one side is presented more forcefully than the other. Based on this study, an argumentative writing, consist of an introduction, thesis statement, counter-argument and conclusion. This genre of writing requires the students to investigate a topic, collect, generate, and evaluate evidence, and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner.

***ESL Writing Ability*:** Writing is an exclusively human activity (Li et al., 2019), and in this study, it is accomplished with the aid of technology As such, language students need to communicate their thoughts and feelings when they engage in writing and speaking activity. In this study, the writing ability required by L2 students necessitates that they learn these linguistic elements deliberately and consciously through teaching or proper supervision. Writing ability in this research can be defined as the manner in which the students are able to write their thoughts, ideas and opinions. It focuses on what the students can produce in their argumentative writing after sharing ideas with the support of other factors on WhatsApp.

Low Proficiency Students: Low proficiency students generate writing examples that are shorter, less cohesive, and less polished, which forces the instructor to find strategies to modify the classroom setting and the way they teach. These are the issues that teachers commonly mention, as well as those that students frequently encounter. Concerns about L2 students with low proficiency are similar (Cumming, 1990; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Therefore, in this study, the low proficiency students

were chosen according to the MUET writing scores. Ten students from social sciences and three art students had the lowest scores in two different classes of LMT100, which were below 45. The highest score for writing component in the MUET is 90. These selected students were trained to explore brainstorming and discussion to improve their argumentative writing ability.

***Mobile Technology*:** Mobile technology is a technology that follows the user wherever he or she goes (Ahmad, 2020). It comprises of portable two-way communications devices, computer devices, and the networking technology that connects them (Mobinizad, 2018). Currently, mobile technology is characterised by internet-enabled gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and watches. Teachers and students alike have been impacted by the extraordinary growth and quick transition in information and telecommunications technologies, which is referred to as mobile technology (Ahmad, 2020). In this study, instead of the traditional language learning methods often regarded as uninteresting and repetitive, mobile technology has paved the way for the learning of language from across the world as a new teaching tool (Mobinizad, 2018). In addition, mobile technology is one of the three factors in ESL argumentative writing ability using WhatsApp as a medium (Ahmad, 2020). Hence, this factor has made a global impact in the educational environments as an alternative to traditional learning language teaching.

***Peer Interaction*:** Peer interaction refers to the process by which students become engaged, and effective participants in the process of learning (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). In this study, peer interaction refers to a factor that describes an approach to interaction and collaboration between students in a shared environment. It is a type of cooperative learning that raises the quality of the interactivity between students and, ideally, results in a number of positive learning outcomes. Specifically

for this study, the environment of argumentative writing is WhatsApp, as the students shared a platform to aid them in inspiring each other and interacting.

***Process-Genre Approach*:** Badger and White (2000) propose an efficient writing technique combining the concepts or perspectives of approaches to product, process and genre, calling it a process-genre approach to writing. The principles of the process-genre approach in argumentative writing involved the students expressing their opinion on given topics in WhatsApp. In this study, the context in which writing happens and specifically the purpose of writing was further elaborated. Hence, the writing development skills in the use of language by drawing out the ability of the students and providing feedback to the students was collected to answer the research questions.

***Teacher's Role*:** A teacher's fundamental function is to convey classroom instruction so that students can effectively learn (Woodrow, 2017).Teachers' role is to assist students in learning by transferring knowledge and creating an environment in which students can and will learn efficiently. However, teacher's role play a variety of functions that differ from culture to society and from educational level to educational level (Elbers & Streefland, 2000). Teachers contribute significantly to assist their students in fostering autonomy in learning in general and specifically in language learning, as investigated in this study. In this study, teachers are identified based on their role as an educator to the students under their charge as they set the tone of the learning environment as well as act as a mentor and role models for the students by asking questions and prompting the low proficiency students in sharing ideas in the WhatsApp group.

***WhatsApp*:** WhatsApp, an online messaging service that replaces SMS text messaging was launched in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum. It is an exclusively owned instant messaging service by Facebook, used by all major smartphones. It is an application free from advertisements and managed by WhatsApp Inc. In this study, WhatsApp is a network in collaborative learning environments as it introduces the students to a tool to boost their writing ability. The researcher chose WhatsApp for this study because it is the most prevalent application accessible to ESL university students (Madge et al., 2019).

1.9 Summary

The study's background, problem statement, objectives, and research questions are all described in this chapter. The purpose, significance, and limitations of the study, as well as the definitions of key terms, are also detailed. This chapter through its objectives and research questions aims to examine the significant of the three factors which are mobile technology, peer interaction and teacher's role in ESL low proficiency students' argumentative writing ability. This study seeks to examine the importance of the factors as a group in the students learning experience using WhatsApp as a tool.

Chapter 2 records in detail the literature review that has enhanced the researcher's knowledge in and understanding of this field.

1.10 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is segmented into five chapters. Chapter One presents the introductory part of the thesis by highlighting the background and problem statement of the study. This chapter moves forward by enlisting five research objectives and five

research questions that ground the journey of this study. Other than that, this chapter also clarifies the scope and significance of the study. This chapter ends by highlighting the definition of key terms used.

Chapter Two highlights the overall literature review of the study and discusses on the language learning ESL classrooms and the impact of the factors influence ESL low proficiency writing ability. Next, this chapter highlighted on digitalisation of writing pedagogy, social media tools in writing activities, writing approaches to learning, the rise of online education and language learning and a conceptualisation of mobile learning. This chapter also emphasised theories that support the ESL low proficiency argumentative writing ability and the frameworks that embodies the specific direction this study undertaken.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology applied in this study. This chapter explains the research philosophy in a case study, qualitative research design and the clarification on the adoption of the semi-structured in-depth interview, WhatsApp discussion and observation as a data collection method. Then, this chapter addresses the participants, the selection criteria, the sample size and the sampling techniques used in reaching these participants. This chapter ends by describing the data collection process and data analysis of the study.

Chapter Four disclosed the qualitative findings attained from the participants of this study. These qualitative findings were presented based on five research objectives as highlighted earlier in Chapter One and the thematic findings were supported by the findings from the participants.

Chapter Five highlights the study's key findings and confirms or refutes the attainment of the research objectives. This chapter also indicates the significance of the key findings, interprets and justifies the critical findings by reference to previous studies. This chapter ends by highlighting the recommendations and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses numerous studies that concentrate on the use of three factors (mobile technology, peer interaction and teacher's role) in ESL argumentative writing. This is followed by an explanation of how the factors have been selected to be included in this study.

This chapter discusses the writing issues of students that influence the ESL low proficiency university students argumentative writing ability. Besides, bearing in mind the development in digital technology, this chapter highlights on the reason WhatsApp is the chosen platform for this study. A thorough discussion founded on the outcomes derived from various related studies that examined the importance of each factor addressed. Based on the review of currently available literature, the impact from integrating the three factors in aiding the low proficiency argumentative writing ability, the experiences of the students and teachers, and the contribution of WhatsApp discussion to ESL argumentative writing is not well studied. The theoretical and conceptual framework used in this study will conclude this chapter.

2.2 Definition of Writing

Writing may be primarily described as visualising language using a collection of symbols to denote phonological awareness, punctuation, and numbers (Florian, 1996). A compelling piece of writing demands several characteristics such as highly organised ideas and information; a high level of accurateness to avoid possible ambiguities, the utilisation of highly sophisticated grammatical devices aimed at

creating focus and prominence as well as a meticulous selection of vocabularies, sentence structures and grammatical forms (Hedge, 1988). According to the McMillan Encyclopedia (1986, p. 1317), "writing is conceived as the recording of human communication, using signs or symbols to represent the spoken words". Writing is also functionally described "as a curiously solitary form of communication, addressed to an absent and often unknown reader" (Peters, 1986, p.169). The elimination of unrelated and loosely related information that does not serve the topic will also result in an outstanding piece of writing.

Presently, with the advance in technology and technological tools, traditional paper-and-pencil writing is supplemented by electronic writing. This inevitably redefines traditional writing (Jose & Abidin, 2015). Stefan (2006) defines electronic writing as any form of writing that takes advantage of the options provided by the digital platform such as the Internet or any related interactive programs in their creation and presentation. Wolff (2013) suggests that more attention needs to be paid by academics and educators to the interactivity that is built into and made possible by information and communication platforms, as well as the fact that effective writing using these media necessitates a set of engaging interactive behaviours. According to him, what is learnt about these practices has the potential to transform one's understanding of writing and the teaching of writing within and outside of online platforms.

2.3 Writing in the Language Learning ESL Classrooms

The prominence of the English language as a mandatory subject in school and as a medium of instruction in English medium schools shaped the foundation of Malaysia's pre-independence education system (Pandian, 2001, as cited in Chow,

2007). In learning or teaching a second language, one cannot sidestep the four essential skills, which are speaking, reading, writing, and listening, which form the essential language components. Over the past years, experts and researchers all over the world have investigated literature and studies on writing. Writing is a challenging and complex language skill to acquire and master (Adas & Bakir, 2013). Particularly when learning to write in a second language, good writing necessitates meticulous attention to detail and ongoing practice.

Writing is an indispensable tool for learning because it enhances students' ability to acquire concepts and ideas (Chow, 2007). However, lower proficiency in the English language is the leading reason why ESL students face difficulties in carrying out their writing tasks as they face complications, which include cultural and linguistic problems (Musa et al., 2012). Adas and Bakir (2013) examined the writing issues that ESL students face and discovered that the main issues were a lack of English vocabulary and creativity in writing, both of which impeded effectiveness. Maros et al. (2007, as cited in Musa et al., 2012) found that among the 120 Malaysian secondary school students that they researched in three localities were hindered from achieving English literacy by Bahasa Malaysia interference. According to studies on English language instruction in Malaysian schools, interference from the native tongue (Bahasa Malaysia) is a contributing factor.

In another study by Hourani and Randall (2008), the most prevalent grammatical errors found in the English essay writing of the students were caused by interlingua and intralingual factors related to inadequate grammar competency. Interlingua errors are caused by the learners' native language or thinking in their mother tongue (Bhela, 1999). Meanwhile, intralingual refers to language confusion, particularly the structure of a newly acquired language (Scovel, 2001). Hence, the