

**USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT
DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY WRITING AND ONLINE
INTERACTION AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL:
A MIXED METHOD STUDY**

MUHAMMAD RASHID

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

MUHAMMAD RASHID

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BS	Bachelor of Science
CSS	Central Superior Service
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
IG	Idea Generating
IO	Idea Organizing
IC	Intellectual Convergence
ICT	Information Communication Technology
SMLL	Social Media Language Learning
MMR	Mixed Method Research
MALL	Mobile Assisted Language Learning
OCLT	Online Collaborative Learning Theory
OCL	Online Collaborative Learning
PTBB	Punjab Text Book Board
PC	Personal Computer
PET	Preliminary English Test
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
SNSs	Social networking Sites
SCT	Socio Cultural Theory
SCI	Student-Content Interaction
SSI	Student-Student Interaction

STI	Student-Teacher Interaction
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
ZAD	Zone of Actual Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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**MENGGUNAKAN MEDIA SOSIAL UNTUK MENYOKONG PENULISAN
ESEI DESKRIPTIF DAN INTERAKSI DALAM TALIAN DI PERINGKAT
SARJANA MUDA: KAJIAN KAEDAH CAMPURAN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian kaedah campuran ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat keberkesanan media sosial sebagai alat pengantara untuk menyokong (a) penulisan esei deskriptif dan (b) interaksi dalam talian di peringkat sarjana muda. Untuk menegaskan matlamat kajian, penyelidik memilih tiga kelas utuh BS semester keempat yang didaftarkan di Kolej Siswazah sektor awam di Punjab Selatan, Pakistan. Untuk mengesahkan kajian, kajian rintis telah disiapkan. Untuk mengumpul data kuantitatif dalam kajian utama, praujian, ujian pasca dan sembang teks daripada arkib dalam talian telah digunakan. Di samping itu, data kualitatif dikumpul melalui temu bual dan arkib dalam talian. Bagi analisis data kuantitatif bagi ujian pra dan ujian pasca ANOVA sehala, MANOVA dua hala, dan untuk analisis sembang, peratusan telah digunakan. Untuk analisis data kualitatif temu bual dan sembang teks, analisis tematik telah dilakukan. Keputusan kuantitatif keseluruhan mendedahkan bahawa kumpulan rawatan mengatasi kumpulan kawalan dari segi penulisan esei deskriptif. Walau bagaimanapun, analisis MANOVA menunjukkan bahawa rawatan itu berkesan dalam membangunkan kemahiran menulis esei deskriptif pelajar dari segi kandungan, organisasi dan bahasa. Dari segi kosa kata dan mekanik, ia membuahkan hasil yang bercanggah. Temu bual kualitatif pada subskala masing-masing menyokong dapatan kuantitatif. Respons temu bual pelajar menunjukkan bahawa mereka secara keseluruhannya meningkatkan kemahiran menulis esei deskriptif mereka. Selain itu, data temu bual mendedahkan beberapa tema yang muncul seperti interaksi, pembelajaran fleksibel, pembelajaran menyeronokkan,

pembelajaran bebas teragak-agak dan mod pembelajaran masa hadapan. Selain itu, analisis statistik ringkas sembang teks mendedahkan bahawa WhatsApp dan Messenger bertindak serupa berkenaan dengan memupuk interaksi pelajar-guru, pelajar-pelajar dan pelajar-kandungan. Walau bagaimanapun, WhatsApp menunjukkan bilangan frekuensi yang lebih besar daripada tiga jenis interaksi daripada Messenger. Analisis kualitatif lanjut sembang teks mendedahkan bahawa interaksi dalam talian di WhatsApp dan Messenger juga menyokong pembelajaran penulisan esei deskriptif pelajar dari segi kandungan, organisasi dan terutamanya tatabahasa (bahasa). Di samping itu, kajian semasa menyumbang kepada pembelajaran bahasa berbantu mudah alih dengan memberikan pemahaman lanjut tentang bagaimana media sosial boleh meningkatkan interaksi dalam talian dan pembelajaran bahasa asing, terutamanya penulisan esei deskriptif dalam konteks pendidikan sarjana muda, dan menyediakan pendidik dengan cadangan tentang cara untuk mereka bentuk tugas bahasa tertentu.

**USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY WRITING
AND ONLINE INTERACTION AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL: A MIXED
METHOD STUDY**

ABSTRACT

This mixed method study aims at investigating the effectiveness of social media as mediating tools to support (a) descriptive essay writing and (b) online interaction at undergraduate level. To substantiate the aim of the study, the researcher selected three intact classes of BS (Bachelor of Science) 4th semester enrolled in a public sector Graduate College in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. To validate the study, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. To collect quantitative data in the main study, pretest, posttest and online archives (WhatsApp & Messenger) were employed as tools. In addition to this, qualitative data was collected through interview and online archives (WhatsApp & Messenger). For quantitative data analysis of pretest and posttest one-way ANOVA, two-way MANOVA, and for chats analysis, percentage were applied. For qualitative data analysis of interview and text chats, a thematic analysis was performed. The overall quantitative results revealed that treatment groups outperformed the control group in terms of descriptive essay writing. In addition to this, MANOVA analysis demonstrated that the treatment was effective in developing learners' descriptive essay writing skill in terms of content, organization and language. However, multivariate comparison showed contradictory results in terms of vocabulary and mechanics. The qualitative interviews on respective subscales supported the quantitative findings. Students' interview responses indicated that overall they improved their descriptive essay writing skills. The interview data further revealed some emerging themes such as interaction, flexible learning, fun learning, hesitation

free learning and future learning modes. Moreover, simple statistical analysis of text chats revealed that WhatsApp and Messenger responded similar with respect to fostering student-teacher, student-student and student-content interaction. However, WhatsApp demonstrated a greater number of frequencies of three types of interaction than that of Messenger. Further qualitative analysis of text chats revealed that online interaction on WhatsApp and Messenger also supported students' learning of descriptive essay writing in terms of content, organization and especially grammar (language). In addition to this, the current study contributes to language learning by social media providing further understanding of how social media can enhance online interaction and foreign language learning, especially descriptive essay writing in the context of undergraduate education, and provides educators with recommendations on how to design specific language tasks.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the study

The abundant use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has modified enormously the life of 21st century individuals (Koksal & Firat, 2019; Perez & Nagata, 2019). It also has the potential to revolutionize education by complementing traditional education (Doumanis et al., 2018). Therefore, Integration of technology into instructional process has resulted in many benefits (Jamshidifarsani et al., 2018). A significant benefit of digital technology, for example, is cooperation and communication with fellow students (Awidi et al., 2019). Interactivity is another property of technology (Chen et al., 2019). That is, integration of ICT with traditional pedagogy is on the rise in the field of language teaching as it provides flexibility in learning in the way of tailored lessons (Arrosagaray et al., 2019; Isaac et al., 2019). With fast changing technology, the method that teachers create and employ to pass knowledge to students is also changing rapidly (Doumanis et al., 2018). To improve and support their instruction, teachers have been using technology since the dawn of time (Farjon et al., 2018). Since integration of technology tools in education has provided great potential to teachers and students in terms of improving quality of learning (Batanero et al., 2019), notable efforts have been made to incorporate them in the education system (Emran et al., 2018; Perez & Nagata, 2019). Therefore, ICT and its impact on students' performance has been a center of interest for the policy makers and academics (Ferraro, 2018).

With wide expansion of technology and omnipresence of the internet (Jahnke & Liebscher, 2019), mobile industry has incessantly flourished in the present era (Hoi, 2019). The extensive use of mobile technology has found its way in higher education resulting in a revolution in the teaching and learning practices (Crompton, 2019).

Ubiquity of mobile devices has made mobile learning and mobile pedagogies interesting because of their benefits and constraints for learning and teaching (Burden et al., 2019). Contrary to traditional educational technologies, mobile technology, with no real world location limitation, enables students to access learning content and learning guidance (Chung et al., 2019). Consequently, mobile technology has given birth to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) which has the potential to teach language (Ezra & Cohen, 2018). Thus, mobile learning has prompted both the learners and educators to investigate its features and examine its acceptance in education (Emran et al., 2018).

Against this backdrop of mobile innovation (Hoi, 2019) and a miraculous surge of technology in 21st century, the use of social media has also proliferated. The widespread use of social media has urged the academics to investigate its use as teaching and learning tool (Awidi et al., 2019). It has the potential to establish and maintain a meaningful interaction with others and likely is deemed to optimize academic performance (Datu et al., 2018). The huge explosion of social media and vast educational scholarly literature has given birth to its various and contested definitions (Manca, 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Therefore, the task of defining social media remains challenging due to its constant changing nature. Despite this, some scholars use social media in place of Web 2.0 or interchangeably with social software (Sobaih et al., 2016), others use it for new technologies and applications that enable users to create, communicate, share, collaborate, manage, publish and interact with the help of technology (Mao, 2014).

Concerning the uses of social media in education, Lau (2017) has enumerated the following benefits: (a) sharing of information and sources with students (b) gathering information (c) communicating personal interests with others (d) engaging students and comprehending their mental process to improve teaching methodology (e) developing

students interest in academic subjects (f) increasing collaboration among students (g) and providing access to material after class hours. Since, technology integrated social media have great potential for facilitating teaching and learning methodologies (Sung et al., 2016), they have ignited a considerable interest in educators, research scholars, teachers and policymakers to adopt it for teaching and learning gains (Lau, 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

With the ease of usage, explosion of Apps and rapid growth of social media, a plethora of studies have indicated the extensive use of social media in teaching language (Linda & Ri'aeni, 2018a). Factors investigated and explored in language teaching context include oral skill (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017), or writing skill (Ekmekci, 2017; Fithriani et al., 2019; Justina, 2016; Linda & Ri'aeni, 2018a; Rahmanita & Cahyono, 2018; Sari & Putri, 2019), vocabulary (Bensalem, 2018; Dehghan et al., 2017; Hassan Taj et al., 2017; Rahmanita & Cahyono, 2018), and writing (Kervin & Mantei, 2016; Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017; Stroble et al., 2018; Yamaç & Ulusoy, 2017).

Seen in theoretical perspectives, the integration of social media in teaching and learning of language is supported by socio cultural theories of learning as well as online collaborative learning theory. According to socio-cultural theory exponent e.g., Vygotsky (1992) ‘Practically speaking, the developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life, peer group interaction, and institutional contexts like schooling, organized social activities, and workplaces. Similarly, the focus of online collaborative learning theory is on collaborative learning, knowledge building and use of internet to reshape formal and informal education (Harasim, 2017). ‘The most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction and collaboration within social and material environment’ (Vanpatten & Jessica, 2015). Therefore, using social media for interaction

among learners has become a key element both in class and out of class (Sobaih et al., 2016).

Teaching writing skill through social media makes the arduous task of writing an enjoyable activity because these media provide the learners with opportunities of interaction and collaboration (Al-Rahmi and Zeki 2017). In addition, social media has tremendous potential of activating learners' involvement in the learning process (Andujar, 2016; Krutka et al., 2017). They perform better when working cooperatively than when working alone. Likewise, they learn better in a competitive environment which infuses in them an idea of better performance than at individual level (Arshad & Akram, 2018).

In Pakistan, students have been using android phones on massive scale. Every student uses some kind of social media tool either for socialization or for academic purposes (Khalid, 2017b). The increased use of social media in Pakistan needs be integrated with teaching and learning especially descriptive essay writing (Butt & Qaisar, 2017; Waqas et al., 2016; Zulfikar et al., 2018). More recently, the importance of social media or other technology tools for teaching has increased manifold after COVID-19 has brought disruptive changes in the social, health and economic landscape of the whole world including Pakistan with massive jolt to educational systems.

This massive outbreak of pandemic painted a bleak picture of both the students and educational institutions (Aucejo et al., 2020). About 600 million students have been affected worldwide by the closer of educational institutes (Goyal, 2020). It has dramatically transformed face to face education to online learning by cancelling all physical activities and forming a new normality in education (Tesar, 2020). In response to the potential and widespread outbreak of corona in Pakistan, an attempt was made to teach undergraduates through WhatsApp, YouTube and other meeting applications such

as Zoom, Google Meet, and WebEx. Therefore, it seems relevant to adopt social media for teaching speaking, listening, reading and writing in English.

The candidates' dissatisfactory writing is evident from the top most Central Superior Service (CSS) Exam results in Pakistan. Only 1.9% of the total CSS aspirants could pass 2020 exam (Cheema, 2022). The rest failed either in essay or in précis and composition in English. Therefore, students' achievement in terms of writing seems dissatisfactory, as stated by (Akbar et al., 2018; Farooq et al., 2020; Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015) though the students at a university or a graduate college are instructed on how to write various types of essays such as descriptive and argumentative and composition in their mid and final exams in the first four semesters of Bachelor of Science (BS) irrespective of the subject they are enrolled in. For teaching writing skill, lecture method, (Imtiaz, 2014) or grammar translation method (Haidar & Fang, 2019; Somani & Rizvi, 2018) has been pervasive in the public sector colleges of Punjab, Pakistan. In spite of emphasis on writing skill, results of these teaching methods are no more promising. Undergraduates lack proficiency in writing. They face lots of difficulties in writing (Bhatti & Memon, 2016; Elaish et al., 2019; Fareed et al., 2016). Therefore, traditional pedagogy needs to be integrated with a new methodology such as social media assisted teaching.

There is a large array of social media that have the potential to be employed in teaching writing. These tools include Instagram, Wikis, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Facebook, and so on. These are internet connected tools used to send and receive texts, videos, voice messages, documents in PDF format, photos, emoji, voice and video calls (Alshammari et al., 2017). Students and teachers use them for interaction. They can discuss and arrange online activities to improve language (La Hanisi et al., 2018). Moreover, students and teachers are ready to adopt social media tools to optimize

teaching and learning (Butt & Qaisar, 2017). The rationale of choosing WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger lies in the affordability of smart phones which have become popular due to low-price social bundles.

The potential of WhatsApp and Facebook to teach writing skill is already established. Studies such as (Annamalai, 2018; Annamalai & Jaganathan, 2017; Aziz & Khatimah, 2019; Dizon, 2016; Fithriani et al., 2019; Sakkir & Dollah, 2019) support the use of Facebook for writing skill. Similarly, the researchers like (Justina, 2016; Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016) employed WhatsApp as an instructional tool for teaching EFL writing to second language learners, (Suhaimi et al., 2019) adopted it for writing and collaborative writing and (Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019) used it for narrative writing. However, the potential of these tools to teach descriptive essay writing remains unexplored. The rationale of choosing descriptive essay writing lies in the availability of classes that gave consent to participate in the study and course content prescribed for the classes that participated in the study.

Against this background, the proposed study aims at examining the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as supporting tools for teaching descriptive essay writing skills. Both of these tools may help to improve descriptive essay writing of undergraduates enrolled in three Bachelor of Science (BS) classes that gave consent to participate in the study. Moreover, these tools seem appropriate to foster interaction between student-student, student-teacher and student content. These patterns of interaction in the online collaborative environment in the process of composing descriptive essay writing were identified and categorized based on the integrated model of interaction (Golonka et al. 2017 & Alghasab et al. 2019). In addition, these patterns of interaction were studied to find links between interaction and improvement of descriptive essay writing. Finally, experimental students' experiences were analyzed qualitatively.

The study has been conducted in the context of Pakistani urban undergraduate public sector college in Bahawalpur, Punjab within the premises of an EFL setting. So, a mixed method study seems the need of the time to gauge the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger in teaching descriptive essay writing and creating interaction that may lead to better performance in descriptive essay writing (Guraya et al., 2019). To this end, the use of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger may prove helpful in improving writing skills and fostering interaction that may help students learn descriptive essay writing skill.

1.2 Background of the study

In Pakistan, the use of technology has been encouraged by the National Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy enacted in 2012. Recently, while addressing at the launch of 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM), the federal minister of education asserted that though COVID-19 had affected the educational institution, it gave them ample time to focus on digital technologies (Reporter, 2020). As stipulated in the National IT policy, Pakistani Government accelerated its educational digitalization process by facilitating the learners with modern digital devices like laptops, tabs and internet connectivity to digitalize learning practice (Farhat & Dzakiria, 2017). The use of technology has been further reinforced with the current surge of technology, since a vast majority of Pakistanis, more specifically the youth, use some kind of social platform either to socialize, or have academic gains. According to a survey, 35% students use social sites for academic purposes (Khalid, 2017b). They prefer social media to traditional sources like television and newspaper (Iffat Ali & Yousaf, 2017). Therefore, to materialize the current academic needs, the catalyst to encourage the use of technology is social media to support learning of descriptive essay writing.

A growing body of research at local level indicates that various types of social media tools have facilitated students' learning. These studies show the impact of social media on students' academic performance as well as teachers' performance (Khan et al., 2017). The local researchers such as Arif and Kanwal (2016), Kauser and Awan (2019) found that social media tools have become effective means of communication in higher education. With large and diversified sampling of Pakistani university students, Abbas et al. (2019) have found that, in spite of some negative factors, social media offer many benefits like awareness, lecture sharing, easy communication, maintaining contacts, reducing stress, free access to books, improvement in social and communicative skills, increasing knowledge and enhancing confidence. Moreover, creativity, knowledge sharing, collaboration and interaction are some other acknowledged benefits of social media in Pakistani context (Arshad & Akram, 2018; Khan et al., 2017). Though social media is already being used by the teachers and educationists in Pakistan, it needs the call for a renewed attention for teaching English language in the ever-changing world.

More specifically, Facebook and WhatsApp have been extensively used and researched not only for writing, but also employed for interaction and collaboration in the virtual space in different contexts and countries. For example, (Annamalai, 2018; Annamalai & Jaganathan, 2017; Aziz & Khatimah, 2019; Dizon, 2016; Fithriani et al., 2019; Sakkir & Dollah, 2019) support the use of Facebook for writing skill. Similarly, the researchers like (Justina, 2016; Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016) employed WhatsApp as an instructional tool for teaching EFL writing to second language learners, (Suhaimi et al., 2019) adopted it for writing and collaborative writing and (Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019) used it for narrative writing. It has been adopted for studying peer interaction patterns in terms of cognitive and metacognitive processes by (Peeters, 2019), and for peer feedback and peer assessment by (Okumuş & Yurdakal, 2016; Septiawan, 2018). Despite the

building up of research in this area, the impact of social media on descriptive essay writing skill remains unclear yet. Moreover, little research has been done on how WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger can be used as additional tools to traditional pedagogy to foster interaction that may have impact on descriptive essay writing, and little evidence of online interaction gains across writing skill has been provided as regards its adoption.

Finally, since every student in Pakistan is using some kind of platform for either socializing or academic purposes, most of the students have account on WhatsApp, Facebook or any other app (Khalid, 2017a). According to Statista (2021), there are 46.9 million Facebook users, and 9.15 million users of WhatsApp in Pakistan. Moreover, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been emphasized in education policy of Pakistan (2018) to transfer new knowledge to students and prepare them for a workplace that heavily relies on ICT. Therefore, it is timely to investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, since these social media tools are very popular in Pakistan.

This background on the value of social media as learning tool provides us with a motivation and reference point to create WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger platforms to teach descriptive essay writing skills and foster online interaction among Pakistani EFL learners.

1.3 Research Problem

The statement of problem will be discussed from two different aspects such as.

- a) Writing incompetence b) lack of interaction.

To write in English has been the central point in teaching and learning worldwide (Bui & Kong, 2019). According to Beam and Williams (2015) writing skill is necessary for

academic achievement and success in life beyond school. However, the acquisition of writing skill is big challenge for the language learners in Pakistan (Ajmal, 2015). First, this is probably due to, as Fatima and Akbar (2017) assert, outdated system of assessment based on colonial set up. The class teachers mark and evaluate students' scripts in terms of proficiency, accuracy and quality by following holistic scale of marking. This approach does not highlight individual weak areas in students' writing. The teachers do not give evaluation of every single component such as content, vocabulary, grammar, organization and mechanics. Therefore, they cannot improve their writing skill though they study it for fourteen years. Second, it is due to the influence of traditional lecture-based teaching methodology (Samiullah, 2019a) that Pakistani learners face a lot of difficulties in writing, for instance, insufficient command over grammar, syntax, vocabulary, writing anxiety, lack of information and ideas, lack of practice, untrained teachers, weak structure, organization and noncompliance with the latest methodologies of teaching are some of the issues that contribute to the poor performance of students in writing (Bhatti & Memon, 2016; Elaish et al., 2019; Fareed et al., 2016; Gopang et al., 2018). These difficulties in writing may be attributed to the limited time allocated for lecture in public sector colleges where a teacher usually consumes 40 to 45 minutes in the class to deliver lecture on how to write various types of essays. This limited time does not allow the learners to practice essay writing in the classroom, and the teacher to personally attend the students' needs and interest. Therefore, they perform poorly in writing.

In addition, results of preliminary study also supported the research problem. As can be seen in the table (see Appendix N), the participants agreed that they were not proficient in writing skill and that there existed very little interaction between students-students and students-teachers in the physical classroom environment. So far as the research problem

(a) is concerned, most of the students agreed that writing was difficult and boring task. Most of the students agreed that grammar, organization and spellings were significant in the writing skill, but they felt demotivated and uninterested because they could not get enough time to practice this skill in the class. As for research problem (b), most of the students agreed that they did not have enough interaction with their fellows in the physical classroom environment. The classmates did not help one another in terms of content, vocabulary, organization and language while completing writing tasks. Similarly, mostly the students agreed that they had not enough time for discussion and interaction in the class because their teacher consumed maximum time in the classroom and did not provide them help in terms of language, vocabulary, organization and content while completing the writing tasks. Therefore, they did not feel easy while interacting with their teacher. Finally, most of the students agreed that their classroom environment was suitable for social media learning. Hence, there is dire need to change the teaching approach to writing.

From the past research, it is evident that lack of time for practice, rote learning and outdated mode of examination lead to EFL learners' poor performance in writing, though they study English language for fourteen years as compulsory subject (Samiullah, 2019b). The candidates' dissatisfactory essay writing is evident even in the top most Central Superior Service (CSS) Exam in Pakistan. Only 1.9% of the total CSS aspirants could pass 2020 exam (Cheema, 2022). The rest failed either in essay or in précis and composition in English. Therefore, students' achievement in terms of writing is dissatisfactory, as stated by (Akbar et al., 2018; Farooq et al., 2020; Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015) though the students at a university or a graduate college are instructed on how to write various types of essays such as descriptive and argumentative and composition in their mid and final exams in the first four semesters of Bachelor of Science (BS)

irrespective of the subject they are enrolled in. However, the researcher aimed to improve students' descriptive essay with the help of social media since it provides interactive environment which facilitates students to share content and ideas that could be useful in the description of anything, place or person. Finally, the researcher, having taught English at undergraduate level for eighteen years, also noticed that the Pakistani EFL learners could not reach the intended writing assessment objectives by the end of the course.

The second part of the research problem is interaction, more specifically student-student and student-teacher interaction, which is almost non-existent in public sector classrooms at college level in south Punjab. Since primary methodology of teaching English in Pakistan tends to focus on lecture method (Imtiaz, 2014), that is outdated and less interactive (Dayan & Bano, 2018) and that empowers teacher to consume maximum time (81.1%) resulting in a little interaction between teachers and students and among the peers (Ahmad et al., 2020; Inamullah & Hussain, 2008; Islam, 2019). Most of the students in the preliminary study reported that they did not have enough interaction with their fellows in the classroom. Their classmates did not help them in terms of content, vocabulary, organization and language while completing writing tasks. Similarly, majority of the students agreed that they had not enough time for discussion and interaction in the class. Moreover, teacher's strict behavior in the class leads to poor interactive environment (Iqbal et al., 2019) which is necessary for learning. The little peer interaction, as it is evident in (Tare et al., 2014), leads to poor writing skill. Driven by sociocultural theory, Alghasab et al. (2019) suggest that teacher's support is vital for students (teacher-student interaction) to develop language skills. That is, in a typical Pakistani EFL classroom where teacher utilizes maximum time, learners need exposure

to such an environment which gives them opportunity to share, discuss, interact and collaborate with their teacher, peers and material freely.

Despite the building up of research in this area, particularly in improving L2 writing (Justina, 2016; Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016; Ahmed, 2016; Alberth, 2019; Barrot, 2021a, 2021b; Kartal, 2019b; Noyan & Kocoglu, 2019; Saleh, 2019b), the impact of social media on descriptive essay writing remains unclear yet. Moreover, little research has been done on how social media tools such as YouTube, Wiki, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Facebook can be used as additional tools to traditional pedagogy to foster online interaction that may improve descriptive essay writing, and little evidence of online interaction gains across writing skill has been provided as regards its adoption.

To address the above research gaps, this study examines how social media tools can be used to support descriptive essay writing and foster online interaction that may also be helpful in supporting descriptive essay writing. In this study, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger were used as additional tools to the traditional pedagogy to teach descriptive essay writing to the undergraduates for a few reasons. First, they are popular yet an under-researched social media tools in Pakistani context. Since every student in Pakistan is using some kind of platform for either socializing or academic purposes, most of the students have account on WhatsApp, Facebook or any other app (Khalid, 2017a). According to Statista (2021), there are 46.9 million Facebook users, and 9.15 million users of WhatsApp in Pakistan. Second, several studies have reported effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook to teach vocabulary (Bensalem, 2018; Cetinkaya & Sütçü, 2018; Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Rahimi Esfahani, 2018; Jafari & Chalak, 2016) but no study has been found yet to report the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger in teaching writing, especially descriptive essay writing and fostering online interaction that may help the learners improve their descriptive essay writing. Finally,

these tools have several affordances that could potentially improve L2 learners' writing skills (Suhaimi, Mohamad, & Yamat, 2019; Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019). So, change in approaches to teaching writing as cited above is badly needed.

To bring changes, therefore, in the existing teaching approaches seems necessary to address our students' eroding writing skills. In the current scenario, where students are influenced by the technological tools such as mobile and computer, there is greater urgency for teachers to incorporate technology (social media) into the existing approaches of teaching (Rashid, 2017; Sultana & Zaki, 2015). Therefore, it can be stated confidently that learners need be engaged through these technological tools to learn writing to keep abreast to the expectations of today's world.

One way of incorporating mobile technology in learning language is through social media (Alsulami, 2018). Evidence from early studies (Ahmed, 2016; Alberth, 2019; Barrot, 2021a, 2021b; Kartal, 2019b; Noyan & Kocoglu, 2019; Saleh, 2019b) suggest that mobile technology (social media) offers teachers create a conducive environment for the students to have positive impact on developing their writing skills. However, the use of social media (WhatsApp & Messenger) to support descriptive essay writing skill and interaction in an online environment that may lead to better achievement level of descriptive writing skill, is scant so far as electronic standing literature on this topic is concerned, though there are numerous studies such as (Ahmed, 2016; Alberth, 2019; Barrot, 2021a, 2021b; Kartal, 2019b; Noyan & Kocoglu, 2019; Saleh, 2019b) that advocate the use of mobile assisted social media as means to aid writing skill. That is, learning writing through virtual platforms can be fruitful activity for students in terms of interaction because these offer them opportunities to have immediate exchanges of chats with their fellows, teachers and learning material which may support learning opportunities and provide positive learning experiences (Börekci &

Aydin, 2020). It seems therefore that WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger might be an effective way to be exploited to the fullest, as it is suggested by researchers such as (Hussain et al., 2018; Kauser & Awan, 2019; Waqas et al., 2016), to support writing skill (descriptive essay writing) and interaction (Balaman & Sert, 2017; Dizon, 2016; Peeters, 2015a, 2015b, 2018) and thus may be a possible way to improve dissatisfactory level of writing of the undergraduates in Pakistan. Since, almost every student in Pakistan is using some kind of platform for either socializing or academic purposes and most of the students have account on Facebook or are frequent users of WhatsApp (Khalid, 2017a), these social media tools seem better options to be used as addendum to the traditional pedagogy to improve descriptive writing of the undergraduates and create an environment where they have interaction with teacher, students and learning content.

So, it is timely to investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger in improving the descriptive essay writing of Pakistani EFL learners, and create an online environment where they have interaction with teacher, students and learning content, since it seems to be the first study of its kind in Pakistan according to the available electronic record. Moreover, writing skill enjoys a significant status as compared to other skills (for example listening, speaking and reading) of English language. Though to be proficient in writing is considered students' important trait to excel in an academic race and a passport to success, paradoxically, it is not so much taught, rehearsed or developed even if everyone is well informed about its significance in today's world (Ariana, 2010).

Finally, there is need to discover a systematic and effective approach to conduct writing lessons in line with the aims and objectives of the curriculum and at the same time utilize social media as a significant teaching platform. Since the current teaching approaches in Pakistan are not promising in terms of writing skill (Samiullah, 2019a),

they need be improved. Such a situation has propelled the researcher to integrate WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to the traditional instruction to support descriptive essay writing skills. These two platforms are expected to provide teachers and students an environment where they are able to interact with each other as well as the learning content at their own pace, locale and time outside the classroom. Thus, this embedded mixed method study based on pre-test, post-test, interview and online chats will hopefully make some contribution to the ever-increasing amount of research literature in the area of MALL and pedagogical practices.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of social media (WhatsApp & Facebook Messenger) tools on descriptive essay writing skills of undergraduates enrolled in a Government Graduate College in Punjab, Pakistan. It also aims to measure the impact of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger on fostering online interaction during the treatment. In addition, how interaction patterns are supportive in developing descriptive essay writing skill. The overall purpose of this study is translated into specific objectives of the study stated in the form of research questions.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this embedded mixed method study have been as follows.

RO1: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO1a: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing in terms of content of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO1b: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing in terms of organization of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO1c: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing in terms of vocabulary of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO1d: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing in terms of language of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO1e: To investigate the effectiveness of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger applications in improving the descriptive essay writing in terms of mechanics (spellings, punctuation etc.) of the undergraduates enrolled in a government college in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

RO2: To explore how the undergraduates experience the use of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as mediating tools to support

- a. Content
- b. Organization
- c. Vocabulary
- d. Language
- e. Mechanics

RO3: To investigate what differences do occur in the frequency of interaction between WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as mediating tools after intervention in terms of

- a. student-student interaction

- b. student-teacher interaction
- c. student-content interaction

RO4: To explore how the patterns of interaction are supportive in improving students' descriptive essay writing with respect to

- a. Content
- b. Organization
- c. Vocabulary
- d. Language
- e. Mechanics

1.6 Research questions

The following main and subsidiary research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference in the linear combination of descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group.

RQ1a: Is there any significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of content?

RQ1b: Is there any significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of organization?

RQ1c: Is there any significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of vocabulary?

RQ1d: Is there any significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of language?

RQ1e: Is there any significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of mechanics?

RQ2: How do the participants in the treatment groups experience WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as supporting tools for descriptive essay writing in terms of

- a. Content
- b. Organization
- c. Vocabulary
- d. Language
- e. Mechanics

RQ3: What differences do occur in the frequency of interaction between WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as mediating tools in terms of

- a. student-student interaction
- b. student-teacher interaction
- c. student-content interaction

RQ4: How patterns of interaction are supportive in improving students' descriptive essay writing with respect to

- a. Content
- b. Organization
- c. Vocabulary
- d. Language
- e. Mechanics

1.7 Hypothesis

The researcher used directional hypothesis in this research.

The hypothesis based on research questions of this study is as follows.

H1: There is significant difference in the linear combination of descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group.

H10: There is no significant difference in the linear combination of descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group.

H1a: There is significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of content.

H1a0: There is no significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of content.

H1b: There is significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of organization.

H1b0: There is no significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of organization.

H1c: There is significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of vocabulary.

H1c0: There is no significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of vocabulary.

H1d: There is significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of language.

H1d0: There is no significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of language.

H1e: There is significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of mechanics.

H1e0: There is no significant difference in descriptive essay writing pre-test and post-test mean scores between undergraduates who are in the treatment groups (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and those who are in the control group in terms of mechanics.

1.8 Rationale of the Study

The rationale of the current study is to create a social media assisted online learning platform and to investigate its effectiveness in supporting descriptive essay writing skill and online interaction as studies of this nature are scant in Pakistani context. More specifically it investigates if and how social media tools such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger may have an impact on learners' development of descriptive essay writing and create an interactive environment in a Government College in Southern Punjab, Pakistan.

As stated earlier, learning writing is a challenging task for Pakistani students due to lecture based pedagogy. One way to cope this challenge is integration of technology into the existing pedagogical approaches. According to Basith (2020) if technology is administered in the learning process, students are likely to be more motivated and less bored, more collaborative and less shy (Klimova & Pikhart, 2020). Thanks to the internet facilities at home and in the institutes that learners as well as teachers can contact each other whenever and wherever they want. Moreover, mobile technologies/devices offer flexibility, continuity, quick feedback, personalization, socialization, peer-teaching, self-evaluation, active participation and cultural authenticity in the learning process (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018).

Therefore, an investigation on how social media tools can be utilized in the Pakistani ESL/EFL classrooms is timely as (Azam, 2017), (Butt & Qaisar, 2017) and (Arshad & Akram, 2018) support the use of the internet and mobile technology to teach English at higher education level in Pakistani context. In addition to this, during

pandemic, all academic institutions in Pakistan were closed. After a break of three months, the teachers, on the direction of Higher Education Department, attempted to engage students through various platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Meet and Google classroom. Therefore, the use of social media tools such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger as mediating tools to teach descriptive essay writing has become indispensable after the outbreak of COVID 19 (Tesar, 2020).

Moreover, the research literature on Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and in particular, on social media (see chapter 2) indicates that many studies focused on descriptive analysis of English language and more specifically those focusing on writing skill dealt it generally. However, Barrot (2021a) suggested that future studies should carry out intervention studies that compare different online platforms such as Facebook, Google Drive and so on in different learning contexts to determine which of them is more viable platform. Further, quantitative data may be supplemented by qualitative data to explore student and teachers' experiences. Similarly, Minalla (2018) observed that WhatsApp platform should be used for more interactive teaching and learning processes. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the development of descriptive essay writing (instead of writing skill in general) and the creation of interactive environment supported by the use of social media tools such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger and it is intended to inform Social Media Language Learning (SMLL) practices into undergraduate EFL classroom, considering also the limited research in this field in Pakistan.

With these premises, a mixed method research based on intervention, interviews and online chats is expected to contribute potentially to the growing pool of research in the area of online writing and pedagogical practices.

1.9 Significance of the Study

Why it is significant to conduct an intervention study in the social media environment is perhaps motivated and supported by various previous studies, for example (Ali et al., 2018; Prasojo et al., 2018; Barrot, 2021a) recommend more in-depth research to incorporate social media in the learning process. These studies support the use social media in teaching writing skill.

The use of social media (WhatsApp & Facebook Messenger) in teaching writing may help the teachers and practitioners of English Language in Pakistan to consider it as a promising methodology to improve students' English language skills like speaking, writing, listening and reading. The teachers, who are skeptical about the use of social media in teaching and learning process, may reflect on the use of mobile technology in teaching process. Since, social media provides a platform to teachers and students for interaction, the teachers may think of its usage while planning for their lesson. Thus, it is expected to offer guidelines for the use of a more viable alternative to the traditional method of teaching writing skill.

The findings of this study may also prove a pedagogical model for training institutes and Higher Education Department in Punjab, which has initiated a new project with the name of induction training for new selectees as well as for in-service lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors and has linked this training with their promotion. The training institutes for pre service and in-service training may think of incorporating social media in the training of newly inducted lecturers. Thus, future teachers especially language teachers hopefully will be more confident and successful in their classrooms environment.

The descriptive essay writing environment created in this study can also be considered by textbook publishers. The Punjab Text Book Board (PTBB) and curriculum