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WHATSAP AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING AMONG ESL STUDENTS

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**Abstract**

The present paper investigates the use of WhatsApp in developing students' writing skills among the professional undergraduates. Some of the most used social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Telegram and Whatsapp so on so forth. However, WhatsApp is one of the most used apps in the world by many sections of the society particularly students. The sample of the study was ten professional students who were studying third year engineering program. As part of the study, a discussion group was created in WhatsApp, where the students get an opportunity to interact with the teacher and their peers with each other. Then, the students receive instant feedback on their writing in the group. When the students take part in writing activity in this group, they are required to put more efforts while writing to make it comprehensible by focusing on correct grammar and using a variety of sentences to make it more effective. It was found that the use of WhatsApp outside the classroom as a

learning tool would help the learners to improve their writing skills and it also aided them to spend more amount of their time on doing home work, and it would also aid to minimal their mistakes in their write ups. It was also found that majority of the students participated in writing activities enthusiastically and interestingly using the WhatsApp to complete their assignment in/on time. It is concluded that the students' writing skills have improved significantly when the WhatsApp was incorporated in teaching academic writing.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, WhatsApp Messenger, Academic Writing, Social Networking Sites, Writing.

**Introduction**

In this smart phone era, social networking sites have become part and parcel of all the professionals' routine as well as the masses can also easily accessible them throughout the world.

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Everyone started using these sites frequently in their daily lives. To many it is used as a mode of entertainment and to improve their skills. On the other hand, it can also be used in and outside of the ESL classrooms as a language learning instrument. By creating a discussion group in these sites, the teachers would provide an opportunity to interact and engage in multi-level communication with their peers at the same time, by improving their written communication. The students may produce written compositions with a greater level of complexity to leave an impression among their peers; they also would receive a very quick feedback from their peers and the teacher. It helps to minimal their mistakes and expresses their views and opinions comfortably in writing regularly not to be done in spoken form.

Writing is one of the difficult and challenging language skills that demand students to think deeply and express their thoughts and ideas in the form of sentences. Based on the observation, it was found that professional undergraduate students encountered problems in their writing skills. This is due to difficulties in organizing the text, constructing past sentences, and lack of vocabulary knowledge while drafting a text. Teachers of English today face the biggest challenges in the classroom is that to provide students with opportunities and how to engage them in order to take part in writing activity.

Writing activity forces students to concentrate on the language. According to Alharahsheh (2015), writing is a process of producing thoughts through several metacognitive processes (p.32). To make writing to be interesting, students are required to participate actively.

**Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites are places where people can exchange information about self and about others to maintain and keep contact with friends, members of family and interact with new people. These sites are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WeChat, Telegram, WhatsApp so on so forth. Currently, most of the students have advanced gadgets with them and they have access to internet in one or the other form for browsing information. With the use of technology, the learning has become more interesting and effective to the learners by making a clear change from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. It plays a vital role in addressing the needs of the learner (Kondal, 2015).

WhatsApp Messenger or simply WhatsApp is a Voice over IP (VOIP) service owned by Facebook. Whatsapp in his website stated that (Feb, 2020), it is actively used by more than 2 billion people worldwide. This made WhatsApp far ahead of all other messaging apps such as Facebook, WeChaat, Viber and Telegran in terms of user numbers. WhatsApp is used

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as a tool to facilitate learning through creating a group where the students can chose cooperative learning as a technique.

Some of the previous studies had explored the use of WhatsApp in the classroom for improving language skills. Annamalai (2019) study investigated the use of WhatsApp chat group as a platform for extending learning in a blending learning classroom with undergraduates. The study revealed that majority of students expressed their preference as WhatsApp for learning. In another study, Salikin and Tahir (2017) found out that where or not the use of whatsapp improves the EFL students' writing skill particularly in writing a descriptive text. The result indicated a significant improvement in students' performance while teaching using Facebook and WhatsApp. In other research, Fattah (2015) identified the effectiveness use of WhatsApp for developing students writing skills. It was found that the students who had taught using WhatsApp had positive effect on their writing skills especially on the sentence structures. Another research by Alsaleem (2013), it examined the effect of WhatsApp on students writing achievement. The study revealed at the end, a significant improvement on students' writing skills.

The computer mediated communication can create a unique learning environment that has been removed many obstacles for students to participate actively. So that

students can access their online classrooms anytime, anywhere (Wu & Starr, 2003, p.687). However, the use of online discussion offers moderately new possibilities through which the learner can get a dynamic role in the learning process (Larkin-Hein). According to Althaus (1997), online discussions encourage more students keeping them in an intellectual environment that aids active, thoughtful and equal participation from all the corners (p.158). Thomas (2002) study revealed that online discussion forums promote high level of cognitive engagement and critical thinking among the learners.

According to Cohavi (2013), as a means of communication from individuals or groups, WhatsApp consists of a variety of functions such as text messages, attached images, audio files, video files, and links to web addresses (p.218). It is updated frequently to incorporate various features in it time to time that encourage teacher and students to develop their language skills particularly writing apart from classroom context.

The objective of the study is to examine the effectiveness of WhatsApp on developing students' writing skills at professional undergraduate level.

**Methodology Sample**

Ten professional students were formed the sample for the present study. All the students participated in the study on their own interest for improving their

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academic writing skills. They all are studying III B.Tech in a professional college.

Procedure

Initially, the researcher turned teacher created a WhatsApp group and added all students who have given their consent for participating in the study. The experiment was conducted for a period of one month through the online mode. For every week, there would be a question posted in the group for discussion/for writing practice. After completion of their write ups, every individual had to give feedback on their peer's write ups by making in the form of comments wherever necessary for the development of writing skills. The teacher wherever required posted frequently made mistakes in the group with possible solutions. After one month, there was an informal discussion with the students to explore their views about the group. In the first week, all the students participated very enthusiastically posing their responses for the question provided in the discussion group. The common feedback was offered on the group and individual feedback also was provided to the needy students for the improvement their academic writing.

Results

There was a positive impact in students' performance post experiment. The students who participated and did not take part in the study exhibited significant difference in the students' written performance.

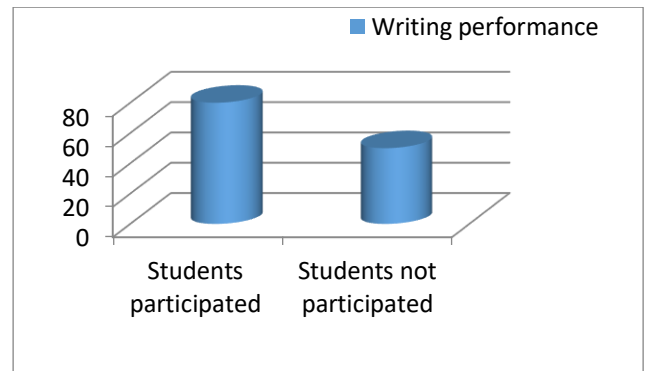


Figure 1: Students written performance that participated and not participated

The students performed well in their writing activity when compared to the students who did not participate in the study

As part of the study, the researcher measured the number of words used for drafting a paragraph and also calculated on the scale of four aspects such as spelling mistakes, punctuation marks, grammatical mistakes and use of discourse markers. Later the write ups were calculated based on the inputs

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S.No	No. of words in a paragraph	Spelling mistakes	Punctuation marks	Grammatical mistakes	Use of discourse markers
1	260	9	20	53	68
2	248	12	15	43	51
3	253	8	11	35	62
4	275	10	12	43	68
5	264	9	14	42	61
6	241	14	12	39	57
7	283	17	19	28	71
8	234	15	28	36	57
9	271	14	34	39	70
10	264	10	17	34	67
<b>Total</b>	2593	118	182	392	632
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2593/10=259.3</b>	<b>118/10=11.8</b>	<b>182/10=18.2</b>	<b>392/10=39.2</b>	<b>632/10=63.2</b>

Table 1: No. of words in the paragraphs and different aspects with means

The length of paragraph ranged between 234 – 283 words. Three of ten subjects produced less than 250 words in their paragraph in contrary to those of remaining seven subjects who produced more than 260. The mean of the paragraph is 259.3 words. The range of spelling mistakes, punctuation marks, grammatical mistakes and use of discourse markers were

11.8, 18.2, 39.2 and 63.2 respectively which are presented on table: 1.

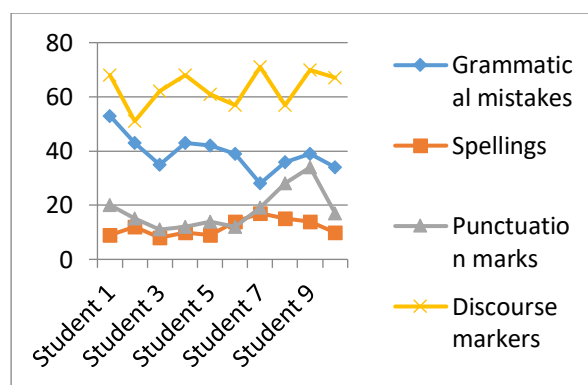
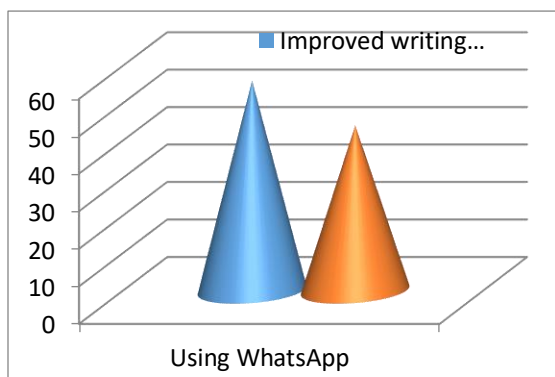


Figure 2: Students performance in writing aspects

The figure 2 exhibited the performance in the four aspects of students.

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Post fortnight, there is a significant change in the scores of students in the paragraph writing and in the aspects mentioned.



**Figure 3:** Use of WhatsApp improved writing skills of the students

It was found in the figure 3 that 56% of the students with the use of any one of the social networking sites improved their writing skills whereas 44 % of the students who did not use any kind of social networking sites hence they writing did improved significantly.

Many students have stated that they write their posts in MS Word initially to check for grammar and spelling before posting them in group. It also allows time for learners to reflect in-depth about their topic and compose their thoughts during the discussion. It aids students develop their writing skills. Students get an opportunity to observe other’s writing in the group, then they will improve writing performance.

The learners expressed that the use of WhatsApp is easy to interact with the instructor. It is easy to use with more convenience, less pressure, flexibility of time and space. They can express their views or opinions or experiences clearly without any hesitation. It helps them to connect and interact with the peers and the instructor.

It was stated that the students need more feedback from the instructor on the work. Sometimes, it is difficult to log in for the participation in the online group. They also stated that they require more clear rules and format for/during the discussion beforehand.

**Discussion**

It is found that most of the students’ made grammatical mistakes in the first week of the study; this was done due to their colloquial language used in academic writing which was not acceptable in the formal setting. Similar mistakes observed in other aspects such as spellings, punctuation and discourse markers.

The students received feedback from the peer group separately, and they might have had cross interaction with the peer group without any inhibitions in English. Common feedback was also provided to all the participants in the areas of grammar, spelling, punctuation and the use of discourse markers. After receiving the feedback, the students exhibited

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improvement drastically in the mentioned areas. The students expressed motivation to learn from their mistakes rather than simply observing them.

Some students did not want post their responses on the first page because they felt embarrassed to do so. They were hesitant and worried about their responses compared to the peer group responses. For overcoming the excitement, the participants were provided sample answer to the question so that the students can follow it. Many students responded on their mistakes stated that mistakes were made unconsciously. Some other students were reluctant to comment on other students' responses.

**Limitations Of The Study**

The finding of the study was limited for generalizations because only one social networking site, WhatsApp was used in the present study excluding other social networking sites. The study is restricted to ten professional students only in a professional college.

**Conclusion**

It is found that by creating a discussion group in social networking site and providing students with various questions to respond in these groups with a high level of interest topics which may demand more grammatical complexity in their writing compositions can be achieved. The study exhibited very significant transformation in grammar, punctuation,

discourse markers and spelling as well grammatical complexity of the students' writings. The students started using English for informal communication and involved in their own language learning. It was found that the participation of students in the discussion group drastically dwindled from the day one to the last day. The written performance of learners was significantly improved at the end of the study. Even the students found that the time frame for the study was about one month especially in the weekends. To obtain more accurate results and improvement in students' writing the discussion group would be required for more active participation of students for an indefinite time.

WhatsApp is useful tool for teaching writing skills that provides students with opportunities for practicing writing skills in 24 hours for free. They can get support and help from other students anytime. Students feel confident, independent as well as had a positive attitude to develop their writing skills.

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