

## *Using Whats App for Developing Collaborative Writing among English Majors at MUST*

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### **Abstract:**

**T**he aim of this study was to develop collaborative writing using the Whats Apps among 3<sup>rd</sup> year English majors at Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST) in Fall 2017 semester. The problem of the study was that 3<sup>rd</sup> year English majors were not motivated enough in the writing class and had difficulty in communicating through writing with each other during the limited time of the class. So, the idea of using Whats

Apps for developing writing skills was necessary especially that there is Wi Fi available at MUST. The researcher used the quasi- experimental design with two groups, experimental and control. Two instruments were used; a pre/ post collaborative writing skills test, and a reflection sheet. The results of the reflection sheet showed that 3<sup>rd</sup> year English majors did not use the Whats App in learning any language skill before and that they were satisfied with using it in the writing class. The writing skills test revealed that using Whats App was effective in developing collaborative writing among the participants in the study. Also, the results of the reflection sheet proved that the students of the experimental group were satisfied with using Whats App for developing collaborative writing.

**Keywords:** *(Using of Whats Apps, Collaborative Writing, English Majors, MUST)*

### **Introduction**

The development of technology has affected all spheres of life. In the educational field, the teaching and learning processes are moving from regular face to face instruction in the real classroom to long distance instruction in a virtual classroom. Most of schools and other learning institutions adopt the technological devices using computers, tablets, and smart phones. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is considered as a future movement which can assist lifelong

education where learning can be anywhere and everywhere (Khubyari, 2016).

Several studies on Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) report that mobile instruction proved to be effective in improving high school students' language skills. (Fattah, 2015; Hazaea; Al-Zubi, 2016; Mistar, 2016; Khubyari, 2016). Some studies indicated that Whats App could be effective in enhancing the students' language skills, motivation, and rapport especially to adolescent learners. The characteristics of adolescent learners challenge teachers to find strategies that engage and motivate their students.

Collaborative learning is an instructional method in which EFL students could work together in small groups to complete a project, task, problem or any other activity, while teachers act as monitors or facilitators. This method works to reinforce a student's own learning as well as fellow group members. Cooperative learning was developed as a means to reduce competition in American schools, which was considered as a negative component of the education system. It was suggested that instead of encouraging competition in the academic settings, schools should introduce a more collaborative approach to teaching.

Slavin (1994) introduced collaborative learning as student-team learning that include instructional programs in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content. He suggested that collaborative learning has the potential to capitalize on " developmental characteristics of adolescents in order to connect their peer orientation, enthusiasm, activity, and craving for independence within a safe structure.

Collin ; Garci(2007)commented that there are various methods for employing collaborative learning techniques into EFL classes of all subject areas and grade levels. Collaborative learning also requires all students to work together and to be responsible for each other's learning. Holt; Chips; Wallace (1991)

recognized the possible benefits of co-operative learning in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. They suggested that English language learners (ELL) need “ the greatest amount of time possible for understanding and using the English language in a low-risk setting in order to reach the language proficiency of their peers.

By utilizing collaborative learning groups, EFL teachers offer ELLs the opportunity to interact with students who are proficient in English language skills. Moreover, because ELLs are not usually provided with content area-classes taught in their primary language , they often have difficulty in understanding academic materials. Collaborative learning groups enable EFL students to work in a team with other students who have already gained proficiency with the language. This dynamic group not only provides a supportive environment for learning new content and acquiring English language skills, but also helps to foster friendship and social development.

Considering the effectiveness of mobile learning in the English language classroom, it is interesting to dig the potentials of using the most popular instant messenger (Whats App) in English language skills teaching. While mobile technologies are mostly suitable for listening, speaking, and reading skills, it is also important to explore the optimization of mobile technology especially for teaching and learning writing skills (Sussex, 2012). EFL teachers and lecturers can find difficulty in training the English majors on collaborative writing during the regular time of the writing class. So, using a modern application for sending the parts the writing a text among the group members can help in this respect.

### **Statement of the problem**

The problem of the study was that 3rd year English majors have difficulty in the writing class. They have difficulty in communicating through writing with each other during the limited time of the class. So, given the difficulties students encounter in the writing class and the available Wi-Fi at MUST,

the current study attempted to use Whats App to help them develop collaborative writing.

### **Questions of the Study**

1. To what extent are 3rd year English majors efficient in collaborative writing?
2. How can mobile phone technology be used to develop collaborative writing among 3rd year English majors at MUST?
3. How is the proposed course based on using the Whats App effective in developing collaborative writing among 3rd year English majors at Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST)?

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

To achieve the aim of the study, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the post administration of the Collaborative Writing skills test in favour of the experimental group.
2. The suggested course based on using the Whats App was effective in developing Collaborative Writing skills sub-skills among the experimental group students.
3. The suggested course was effective in raising the experimental group students' satisfaction of the course based on Whats App.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study is delimited to:

1. Seven of the collaborative writing skills including brainstorming, group drafting, teacher's feedback, starter, quick writing, peer feedback, Final Checking.
2. 3rd year English majors enrolled in the course (Lang 120) in Fall 2017 semester in the English department at the College of Foreign Languages and Translation, MUST.

## Review of Literature

Current researches on writing have proved that collaborative writing assignments and peer editing conducted in pairs or small groups, can have abundant affective benefits for the EFL learners. Tasks involved in collaborative writing can enhance student interaction in the EFL classroom, lower the anxiety associated with completing tasks alone and raise students' self-confidence (Connor; Asenavage, 1994)

Students in collaborative writing tasks are asked to utilize a range of social skills that can help promote a sense of accountability, cooperation, and community. Several authors (e.g. Dekeyser, 2007; Dobao, 2012; Hedgcock, 1992) added that efforts in collaborative writing can increase motivation, risk-taking and tolerance among learners. Kuiken and Vedder (2002) noted that those tasks can maximize student interaction in the target language. As for improvement in writing, the process of peer writing and editing could be effective in raising the EFL students' awareness of important organizational and syntactical elements that they otherwise might not notice on their own. As noted in Nassaji; Tian, 2010; Swain, 2010; Storch, 2005; 2001 peer- editing leads to more meaningful outcomes , as they are usually advanced in vocabulary, organization, and content. Studies conducted by (Wigglesworth, 2012; Williams, 2012; Storch , 2005) revealed that advanced EFL learners' Collaborative essay grades were higher than those done independently and tended to have greater grammatical accuracy. The reason for the higher grades might be that collaborative process could lead to more productive feedback sessions (Murphy; Jacobs, 2000). Collaborative process could have the results of producing writers who are more independent.

## The Common Aspects of Collaborative Learning

Dulplax (2006) introduced some common characteristics of collaborative learning. These are as follows:

- **Teacher supervision:** The teacher's main role in collaborative learning is to guide the group activity to ensure that students are not turning too far of the task.

The instructor or lecturer should also be available for the participants to answer the students' questions and guide discussion if necessary.

- **Mixed (Heterogeneous) groups** where the instructor attempts to formulate groups of diverse ability levels and backgrounds.
- **Positive Interdependence:**By setting group goals and working towards a reward or a final learning outcome.
- **Face- to- face interaction:** Students are encouraged to use verbal and non-verbal communication to solve problems and explain learning material.
- **Individual accountability:**Students are responsible for their tasks and for assisting the whole group meeting learning goals. This accountability is enforced through student rules.
- **Social Skills:**The instructor / or lecturer needs to establish rules so that all students are considerate, speak in an appropriate manner to the classroom setting, and utilize their time wisely during group interaction.
- **Group Processing:**Students write their reflections on how the group functioned during different tasks.
- **Evaluation:**All activities involved should include both individual and group assessment.

Some teachers tend to avoid writing in class, perhaps feeling that it is something which learners do individually and in silence, it is better done as homework.

However, when writing is done as a collaborative activity, it can have many benefits as a group speaking activity. Discussing the writing process obviously provides more opportunities for learners to interact in English which is a benefit in itself. It can also help learners to develop their communicative ability by forcing the negotiation of meaning. As learners try to express their ideas to each other, they will have to clarify, rephrase, and do some other tasks.

The process should also help them to actually develop their ideas. Working with others can provide the opportunity for learners to work at a level slightly above their usual capacity, as co-operating with others who know a little more can enhance achievement. Collaborative writing has been shown to lower anxiety and foster self-confidence, compared with completing tasks individually. (Colina, 2007)

Researches on collaborative writing proved that texts produced by pairs in collaborative writing were shorter than those produced individually, but that they were better in terms of task completion, grammatical accuracy, and density. It appeared that the process of working together meant that learners were giving each other useful comments as they went along, and this means producing more accurate and complex text. (ELT- resourceful, 2013).

Several studies reported that Whats Apps proved to be effective to enhance the students' language skills, motivation and rapport .Whats App is popular as an instant messaging application for various devices and ages. It was invented by Jan Koum and Brian Acton in 2009, started booming since 2010 and used by more than 350 millions user in 2013 ( Cohavi, 2013). The users could increase in the last three years up to 2016. This free of charge application is preferred by the market because of the flexibility and useful features to text, to call, and to send video and audio, links, location, document, pictures, etc. EFL learning institutions are recently interested in using Whats App as an instructional tool to develop students' language skills and motivation.

In his study, Fatah (2015) explained that his experimental study on the use of Whats App messenger to develop his students' "writing program" had a six day writing process where on the first day the students had a pre-writing stage to generate ideas about the topic .On the second day, the students brainstormed ideas and started drafting. On the third day, the students reviewed and conducted peer correction. On the fourth and fifth days, the students edited their draft in the Whats App.

Finally, the students published their draft on the sixth day. The findings of this study revealed that there is significant improvement on the students writing quality. The students felt free to express their ideas and felt happy to correct and edit their peer writings. Whats App helps the students to learn language better and enhances their English proficiency: the use of Whats App should be encouraged to improve the collaboration between high and low achievers students (Mistar, 2016). The flexibility of Whats App is considered a potential to bridge the diversity of learning needs through circular writing (Fatah, 2015 and collaborative writing. Students work together in a group to produce a piece of writing (Harmer, 2007).

Another experimental study conducted by Khubyari (2016) showed the impact of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on EFL learners' classroom rapport. The participants were intermediate level adolescents' female students. The researcher treated the students in a similar way during the course by sending them the course content and giving them the opportunity to practise through mobile phone. The researcher provided mobile phones during the study for students who do not have personal mobile phones. This study did not mention the application name used for sending text messages to the students. The findings proved that regular and immediate text messages can establish rapport between the teacher and the students. The idea of sending a regular and immediate text is applicable and possible to Whats App. Harmer (2007) reported that students' motivation depends on their perception of what the teacher thinks and treats them; good rapport between teachers and students can bring the positive , enjoyable, and respectful relationship.

Review on literature using MALL introduced mobile learning as a strategy that could have both advantages and challenges. Mobile learning facilitates social interaction, data exchanging and collaboration with other learners (Chinnery, 2006). Sa'aleek(2014) summarizes that mobile technology effectively enhances learning the language skills due to some



features such as accessibility, interactivity, immediacy, and permanency. Chinnery (2006) identified some of the challenges of MALL such as reduced screen sized, limited audiovisual quality, virtual keyboarding, one finger data entry, and limited power.

### **Suggested Activities for Teaching Writing to EFL Learners/English Majors**

It is important to highlight the various processes of writing before presenting the strategies of teaching writing. Harmer (2002) listed the processes of writing as: 1. Drafting, 2. Structuring, 3. Reviewing, 4. Focusing, generating ideas, and evaluation. Other scholars such as O'Malley; Pierce (1996) divided the writing process into three steps; prewriting, writing, and post writing. Richards (2015) suggested some activities in each step:

1. **Prewriting activities:** journals, brainstorming, free association, values clarification, word mapping, ranking activities, quick writing, and information gathering.
2. **Writing (drafting) activities :** strategic questioning, timed-focused writing, elaboration exercise, reduction exercise, jumbled paragraph, jumbled essay, writing thesis statement, quick writing, mind mapping, and group drafting.
3. **Post writing activities:** peer feedback, group correction, rewriting, revising, teacher feedback and final draft.
4. Collaborative writing activities in the classroom are identified into several types. Brown (2001) introduced those types as: imitative writing, intensive writing, self-writing, display writing, and real writing. The principles for designing writing techniques are incorporated practices of a "good writer". Sausanti; Tarmuji(2016) suggested some guidelines for EFL instructors or lecturers who are going to use Whats App in EFL classes. Before using Whats App group for teaching and learning writing, there are three important classroom preparation activities.

Firstly, creating Whats App group. The name for the group and the icon are set together in the class. The students, in turn in a regular time, update the group icon using motivating pictures and English words or phrases. Secondly, setting up rules; for example every student should be active in posting and texting. Thirdly, building a positive attitude towards technology and being familiar with the application. Becoming familiar with the technology, the group leads to the development of online sense community which can help the students feel free to express text ideas. As a result, good rapport between the students and teachers is being developed and consequently leads to having a better learning atmosphere (Khubyari, 2016). By the time both students and teachers become familiar with WhatsApp and feel comfortable to communicate using the App, the activities can be started.

## Method

### Participants of the study

The participants included (68) 3rd year English majors at Misr University for Science & Technology (MUST), Egypt. The study included two study groups (Control and Experimental) in Fall 2017 semester. The study used the quasi-experimental design. **To verify that the two groups are equivalent in their entry level in the writing skills, the following pre-testing statistics was done**

*Table(1) Presenting Statistics*

Group	N	M	S.D.	D.F.	T value	Sig. at 0.05
Experimental	25	5.32	2.824	46	0.687	Not sig.
Control	23	4.78	2.575			

### Instruments of the Study

The study used two instruments: a pre/ post achievement test and a reflection sheet.

### A Pre/ Post Writing Skills Test

The achievement Test that was administered to 3rd year English majors at MUST consisted of three main parts; 1, Pre-

writing; 2. Writing ; 3. Post-writing. It was designed to assess both the control and the experimental groups' collaborative writing using Whats App. The total score of the test was (75). Each of the three sections was scored out of (25) marks. The test lasted for (2) hours. The test was administered pre/ and post the treatment of the suggested course.

### **Validity of the Writing Skills Test**

To ensure the validity of the writing skills test, the first version of the test was presented to a panel of jury members. Their suggestions were put into consideration. The 1<sup>st</sup> version of the test (Appendix: 2) included three main sections. The jury suggested that one more section be added and some questions be changed that seemed to be irrelevant to the suggested course for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, the researcher considered their suggestions and prepared the modified version of the test, version 2 (Appendix: 3). Then, the test was administered pre/ post to the participants of the study.

### **Reliability of the Test**

The final version of the test was administered to (35) 3<sup>rd</sup> year English majors at MUST (not included in the main treatment of the study). Cronback's Alpha (Pane, 1997) was used to calculate the reliability coefficient of the test. The calculated coefficient was 0.86. Thus, the writing skills test was reliable to be used in assessing the efficiency of 1<sup>st</sup> year English majors' collaborative writing at MUST.

### **A Reflection Sheet**

The sheet was administered to the experimental group who studied the proposed course based on using Whats App for developing collaborative writing by the end of the course to write their own reflections towards the proposed course concerning main dimensions : the methodology, the content, the application used, the lecturer, and the evaluation. The sheet was given to a panel of jurors to test its validity and it was approved by the panel who suggested adding the application dimension.

## The Treatment

### An Example Session

#### Objectives of the session

By the end of this session, English majors will be able to:

- Create whats App group and name it collaborative writing.
- Name the group and the icon used to represent it
- Update the group icon using motivating picture and English word or phrases.

#### 1-Briefing ( Direct instruction)

The lecturer introduced what is meant by collaborative writing, and its main steps, how to employ WhatsApp to learn collaborative writing.

#### 2-Practice

The researcher asked the experimental group to create a Whats App group and call it Collaborative writing using stimulating pictures and English word phrases.

#### 3-Evaluation

By the end of the session, the researcher logged in the group to check the tasks done by the students.

## Results and Discussion

**Hypothesis one:** There are no statistical differences between the control and the experimental groups in the pre collaborative writing achievement test.

**Hypothesis One:** “There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the overall post administration of the Collaborative Writing skills test in favour of the experimental group”.

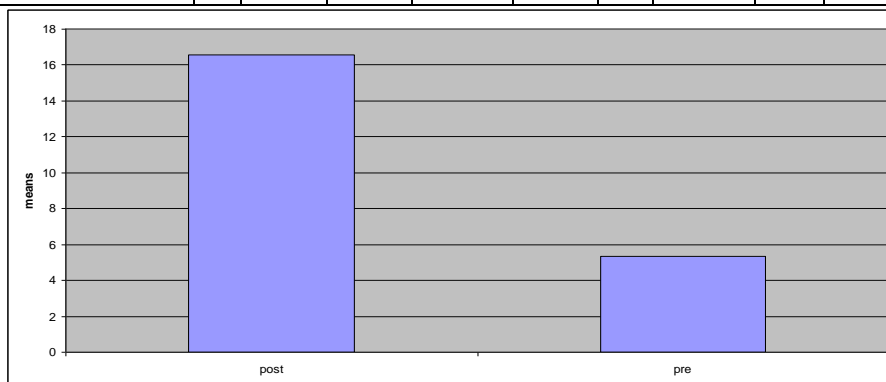
*Table (2) Experimental and Control in the post-Test of the Writing skills test*

Group	N	M	S.D.	D.F.	T value	Sig. at 0.05	Effect size
Experimental	25	16.56	2.022	46	16.392	Sig.	4.83
Control	23	5.43	2.660				

**Hypothesis Two:**“The suggested course based on usingWhats App was effective in developing Collaborative Writing skills and sub- skills among the experimental group students”.

**Table (3) The Experimental group in the pre/ post in the Collaborative Writing Test**

Administration of Exp Gr	N	M	S.D	Paired differences		D.F	't' value	Sig. at 0.05	Effect size
				M	s				
post	25	16.56	2.022	11.240	2.385	24	23.560	Sig.	9.62
pre	25	5.32	2.824						



**Fig. 1. The Effectiveness of The proposed program on the Experimental Group using pillars**

**Hypothesis Three:** “The suggested course was effective in raising the experimental group students’ satisfaction of the course based on using Whats App”.

The results of the reflection sheet and that of the writing skills test shown in tables (2; 3) and figure(1) proved that the suggested course based on using Whats App was effective. It is clear that there are statistical differences between the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group. The effect size was more than 0.8 where it reached to 4.83 which indicated that the proposed course proved to be effective in developing the collaborative writing among the study group.

## Discussion

Results of the current study revealed that using Whats Apps was effective in developing English majors' collaborative writing skills and sub- skills, motivation and rapport. Many activities can be prepared by the lecturer and extended beyond the classroom where students linked to Wi-Fi which was available at MUST. Responses reflected the vital interaction and the easiness as ensured by the use of the Whats App group as one of the students reported that the course several tasks and activities that were facilitated by the class interaction through the Whats App. Most of the participants found using Whats App in the collaborative writing class beneficial and enjoyable as it helped them to enhance their writing skills because of the relaxed and tense-free environment of the class as some of them called it an enjoyable and interesting course. Other students reported that the lecturer was very professional and helpful to classmates. Some responses reflected the benefits and usefulness of Whats App collaboration, and the advantage of establishing rapport among the participants of the study group and the lecturer/ researcher. These results were consistent with other studies including Awada ,2016 , Mulligan and Garofalo ( 2011) and Sausanti and Tarmuji (2016).

## Conclusions, Suggestions for further research

This study attempted to develop collaborative writing among 3rd English majors at Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST) in Egypt through using a proposed course based on using Whats App. The findings of the current study have significant implications for learners, instructors, and teacher educators in the field of TEFL in particular and education in general. Instructors are advised to train their learners on how to use modern technology and especially the mobile and its applications as a learning tool to help them to be efficient writers.

This study provided evidence for the benefits of using Whats App in learning one of the language skills; collaborative writing. Most of EFL students who had writing problems were

provided with tools they have been trained on to write collaboratively through learning groups. The results of the current study proved that collaborative writing could be developed through using Whats App and to apply it to different learning tasks on writing.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

- Further studies can be carried out in other language skills; reading, listening or speaking.
- Conducting other researches based on other applications of mobile assisted language learning (MALL) to develop other types of writing; critical writing, argumentative writing, creative writing.
- Conducting a comparative study on gender effect in Whats App in teaching writing.
- Carrying out a study on developing secondary school students' writing skills using modern technology ( the internet, the mobile phone, etc)

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