



## **The Effect of "WhatsApp" Electronic Dialogue Journaling on Improving Writing Vocabulary Word Choice and Voice of EFL Undergraduate Saudi Students**

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### **Abstract**

Electronic journaling is a new tool for writing skill improvement. The current study attempts to determine whether WhatsApp electronic journaling as a new application in smart phones has a significant effect on writing vocabulary word choice and voice of undergraduate Saudi students. In this quantitative, quasi-experimental study, data are gathered using a pretest-posttest design using a sample of 30 EFL undergraduate female students in Languages and Translation College at Allmam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia. A rubric is used to score a writing sample from each student before and after treatment, and significance is measured using Kruskal-Wallis, Friedman, and the Wilcoxon tests. In this action research, Saudi undergraduate English students are required to post their reflective comments on different topics to their group which was created through WhatsApp. The students react well to the discussions through their dialogue journaling. They treat it as if it were play rather than class work; however, at the end of the experiment, the students know more about the writing processes of one another and their use of words is improved. This sense of enjoyment allows for the students to use WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling as a tool for learning. Results indicate a significant difference between the overall writing scores of the pretest and posttest of the students that journaled. In addition, examination of individual item scores reveals that there are statistically significant improvements in vocabulary word choice and voice as two critically important writing factors. The study can raise a positive social change by helping teachers understand the prospective benefits of WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling to improve the vocabulary word choice and voice writing skills of their students.

**Keywords:** WhatsApp, journaling, EFL Saudi students, improving, writing, voice, choice

## Introduction

Writing is a complex activity, and as students enter the workforce, they will be asked to convey ideas and information in a clear manner. This increase in writing importance as well as the eventual writing skill development will allow the students to graduate with a skill that will benefit them for life (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007).

It is difficult to teach writing without using direct instruction (Walker, Shippen, Alberto, Houchins, & Cihak, 2005). Even with direct instruction, writing requires that students draw on many skills at the same time. The student must write, think and compose, all the while using proper grammar and spelling (Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, Galbraith, & van den Bergh, 2007). Some students are successful writers while others struggle with the written word (Penrod, 2007).

Journaling, using a pencil and paper, has been an approach used by teachers to allow students a place for reflection in order to improve their writing (Dyment & O'Connell, 2008). Many teachers use paper and pencil journaling in their classroom (Dunlap, 2006). This traditional journaling technique includes giving the students a topic and allowing 5 to 10 minutes to write on the topic.

As the Internet has grown, students have access to resources through email and other communications tools like social network sites and apps for smart phones (Fogg, 2010). With the commercial advent of the Internet and new generation of cell phones in the late 2000's, technologies such as BBM BlackBerry Messages and WhatsApp messages have achieved increasing prevalence in societies. These types of messaging technologies are widely used among undergraduate students today (Lenhart, 2007).

From the researcher's teaching experience in one of Saudi Universities this semester, she noticed that many of the female students have abandoned their text messaging plans in favor of WhatsApp since as most of them have smart phones (personal note). WhatsApp is a free messenger application that works across multiple platforms (iPhone, Android, Blackberry, and Windows Phone) (Fogg, 2010). Instead of sending texts via messaging plan, students use WhatsApp to send messages and photos over data plan or WiFi network. In addition, they can also send multimedia messages such as photos, videos, audios...as well through the app.

Between WhatsApp and how many students now have smart phones, the researcher decided to use this app in improving the English Writing skills of Saudi undergraduate students in Languages and Translation College at Allmam University. Through focusing on using WhatsApp application, the researcher believes that this would help the students to become better writers which both parents and students believe is important to their future careers. Magrath (2003) stated that "writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many". To achieve this goal of increasing writing skills, WhatsApp electronic journaling was examined as a method to help the students develop their writing skills.

The current study was an attempt to discover the effect of WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling on writing development of Saudi undergraduate students. The findings of this study would help to determine whether this activity should be recommended as an activity that promote improved writing skills as marked in a rubric specifically scoring vocabulary choice, and voice.

## **What Is a Dialogue Journal?**

A dialogue journal is a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate on a regular basis. Students write as much as they choose and the teacher writes back responding to students' questions and comments, introducing new topics, or asking questions (Dunlap, 2006). The teacher is actively participating in the interchange, rather than an evaluator who corrects or comments on the student's writing. The first documented use of dialogue journals was with sixth grade students, both native and nonnative English speakers, in California (Peyton & Staton, 1993).

## **What is WhatsApp?**

WhatsApp is an application available on the new generation of smart phones like iPhone, Android, Blackberry and Nokia mobile phones that allows users to send text messages to each other for free. Users are not charged for a text sent through WhatsApp (Hindu, 2011). This is because WhatsApp sends messages through an internet data connection. WhatsApp supports many different message types, from simple text to pictures to audio files and videos.

## **Academic Effects of WhatsApp Messaging**

While most educationalists recognize that WhatsApp messages are widely used by undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia, there seem to be two distinct opinions of its effect on student academics. There are those who see the use of so-called "Internet English" as a breakdown of the English language; some teachers see the creeping abbreviations as part of a continuing assault of technology on formal written English. Conversely, there are those who regard this same "Internet English" not only as an example of how language is constantly developing and changing, but also as a type of literacy in and of itself, which can be capitalized on to engage students in more traditional learning.

Some educators take electronic messaging usage as a more positive trend, and revel in how comfortable today's students are with writing, and how much easier it is for them to get words on a page (or, more often, screen). Barbara Bass, director of the Maryland Writing Project, points out "For a while, people were not writing anything. Now, people are actually seeing words on phone screens. And that's good" (Helderman, 2003). Linhart (2007) stated that instant messaging and e-mail are creating a new generation of teenage writers, accustomed to translating their every thought and feeling into words. They write more than any generation has since the days when telephone calls were rare.

Other educators even see the pervasiveness of the frequently-changing electronic messages terminology as an opportunity to teach students about language evolution. Erika Karres, a teacher educator, "shows students how English has evolved since Shakespeare's time" (Lee, 2002,).

## **WhatsApp Messaging and Writing?**

One of the most interesting things about WhatsApp messaging and other popular technologies (text messaging, video games, etc.) is that they are potential learning tools (Dearstyne, 2011 Brown-Owens, Eason, & Lader, 2003). They can be bound by educationalists

to help students learn school-related content, as is shown by teachers who "encourage students to use messaging shorthand to spark their thinking processes" (Lee, 2002).

With this said, students have trouble seeing the distinction between formal and informal writing, and consequently use informal message abbreviations in more formal writing situations (Brown-Owens, Eason, & Lader, 2003). However, this problem is not unsolvable; students can be taught both to understand what constitutes correct language, and also to know when different types of language are appropriate to use (Helderman, 2003.)

Joylyn Hannahs, an English teacher, told her students that "if they turned in papers written like mobile messages, their grades would suffer" (Helderman, 2003.) Her threat worked. Students no longer make those same mistakes, indicating that students can learn the appropriateness of language in different situations. Some educators believe that this type of language misuse is the fault of the students. Obviously there are cases where this is true, as well as cases where it is not. However, regardless of the situation, teachers can work to ensure that students develop a sense of audience when writing.

To take the benefit of adapting literateness education to the truth that electronic messaging is the prevailing mode of written communication in the lives of many undergraduate students, educationalists are to combine writing, electronic journals as they may improve students' writing skills (Raab, 2007). Teachers realize that when students are excited about their writing they will take more care with the final product (Rowen, 2005).

New communicative applications such as WhatsApp should not be used just for the sake of wasting time and chatting. There has to be a goal that the teacher is trying to reach. It may help students in improving their writing products in a delightful way.

## **Problem Statement**

Educators have started to notice the new technologies and explore their effects on student behavior and performance. While there is supporting evidence to suggest that these technologies have a large influence on the social development of adolescents, an even more pertinent issue for classroom teachers is what effects these technologies have on the academic development of young people (Fogg, 2010).

As the researcher is a university professor at one of Saudi universities, she noticed that more and more undergraduate students are using smart phones and WhatsApp applications in their writings in Saudi Arabia. The researcher felt that there was a need for a study on the effects of WhatsApp electronic journaling on students' writing achievement to find out if it would improve the writing skills of undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia. In this research, the researcher examined how EFL undergraduate Saudi students' use of WhatsApp technical applications in English dialogue journals improves their writing vocabulary, word choice and voice.

## **Research Question**

The current research attempted to answer the following question: For students that use WhatsApp electronic journaling, is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores on the development of two specific writing skills: vocabulary word choice and voice? To answer this question, a Friedman's test of mean ranks and a Wilcoxon nonparametric test on the

posttest scores were computed using SPSS, v. 13. In addition, the mean scores of the rubric were compared.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Journaling:** The act of a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly, etc., depending on the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course (Cisero, 2006). **Reflection:** The act of thinking about a concept to better understand that concept (Dunlap, 2006). **Writing prompt:** A specific topic assigned for students to write about (Pike-Baky, 2005). **WhatsApp:** A proprietary, cross-platform instant messaging application for smart phones. In addition to text messaging, users can send each other images, video, and audio media messages. The client software is available for: Android; BlackBerry OS, iOS; Series 40, Symbian (S60); and, Windows Phone. **Web 2.0:** A term referring to a group of applications that can be used by accessing the Internet and allowing the user to read content as well as produce or reply to the content.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study brings to light the use of smart mobile phones and applications on these phones such as WhatsApp for tasks like journaling and their effect on writing skills development in an educational setting. The study looks specifically at female Saudi undergraduate English students. It also looks at writing skills as evidenced by a modified rubric including vocabulary word choice and voice. This is significant because it informs teachers about the use of these tools in education. Teachers have long been using journaling as a tool in writing skill development (Dunlap, 2006).

With the addition of the new technical generation of smart mobile phones, teachers need to be informed about the possible uses of these tools in the classroom. If it is found that journaling has a positive effect on the development of particular writing skills, then the addition of this activity will help students to improve their writing abilities.

This study may have an effect on social change by helping university EFL instructors increase the writing skills of their students. Even more, university instructors need to know if certain writing skills can be enhanced by using WhatsApp electronic journals for undergraduate students.

### **Literature Review**

This review of literature begins with a short history of writing and journaling, and their impact on the writing process. It will continue with the review of the theoretical framework of Siemens's 2005 connectivism and research on electronic journaling as a tool that may help students become better writers.

In the beginning of the 20th century, writing became a phenomenon that needed to be measured. The measurement was not on the content of the writing but on the handwriting that produced it (Yancey, 2009). As people become skilled at word processing, handwriting is evolving out of the picture. The use of computers is slowly replacing writing as the main mode of communications (Ardilla, 2004).

With the invention of computers, the options are different than when writing was first taught. Both journaling and sending messages through emails or mobile devices are used to communicate with the written word. Journaling has been used in different formats since the Greek and Roman rhetorical education (Autrey, 1987). Rohman (1965) published and recommended journaling as a tool for the prewriting process. Rohman found that students found the journal the most useful of any tools that were allowed. He gave the students the choice of keeping a journal, practicing mediation, or composing an analogy. Journaling was viewed as successful because the students were pleased that the journal helped them to develop voice. As people become skilled at word processing, handwriting is devolving out of the picture. The use of computers and mobile phones are slowly replacing hand writing as the main mode of communications (Ardilla, 2004). Online bulletin boards and chat rooms, email, text messages, and chatting apps are all means of composing and communicating written messages while on a computer and smart phone rather than using pencil and paper. This allows people to compose and also to participate as an audience.

Yancey (2009) stated that the 21st century will be known as a new era in writing where people who compose are not necessarily taught through formal instruction, but rather they will use a process called co-apprenticeship in which the students write authentic texts and are evaluated by peers rather than instructors. This is the essence of WhatsApp electronic journaling.

Actually, Lenhart (2007) emphasized the previous idea in his report " the Internet and Teens" .He claimed that teenagers appreciate the ability to revise and edit more easily on a computer and a smart phone than with paper and pencil, but they see no correlation between using a computer or a smart phone and the quality of their composition writing. This is the concern of the educators who are encouraging the use of technology in their students' learning. It is essential to care about quality as well as quantity in the written pieces.

To add, Dearstyne (2011) indicated that smart phone applications can spark creativity as they appeal to the next generation. Moreover, WhatsApp can be useful for communicating. It is a community building tool for students who might be physically isolated for some other reason. In addition, Yancey (2009) suggested that the study of writing needs to be restored in three steps. First, teachers should use newer technologies to increase writing skills. The second step is to design a new model for a writing curriculum. The last step includes creating new models for teaching that allow the students to communicate using all available technologies both inside and outside the traditional classroom. This is the spirit of teaching development either in writing or other language skills.

On the same hand; Solomon and Schrum (2007), emphasized that smart phones allow for a dialogue between reader and writer. They also encourage a community to be built between the readers and the writer. WhatsApp journaling is a way to communicate to an authentic audience. Furthermore, as students are journaling, they learn from writing about issues as well as from the people who respond to their messages. WhatsApp provides a fresh insight that will help to foster knowledge and information sharing.

In fact, Journaling has been used in different formats since the Greek and Roman rhetorical education (Autrey, 1987). Rohman (1965) published and recommended journaling as a tool for the prewriting process. Rohman found that students found the journal the most useful of any tools that were allowed. He gave the students the choice of keeping a journal, practicing mediation, or composing an analogy. Journaling was viewed as successful because the students were pleased that the journal helped them to develop voice.

Journaling is a culminating writing activity after reading or making a decision about any topic (Lenhart,2007). He said that the process reflects lifelong learning and that electronic journaling reflects the way that people who are not in school learn.

Ramaswami (2009) conducted a study to see if electronic journaling could improve writing skills as a result of writing more frequently. Using five teachers, the study looked at technology and its effect on student achievement. The students used the electronic journal while working to elaborate the arguments for the paper. The results showed that the students who used electronic journaling felt better about their writing and 74% of the students believed that journaling helped them to articulate their ideas better.

Working with community college students and faculty, Glass and Spiegelman (2010) created a phone course group that allowed the students to converse via telephone with one another as well as the instructors. The course group that they established allowed the students to become experts in one aspect of the course. The group was used at one point to generate a spontaneous discussion. Using the phone group allowed the students a place to communicate with each other in a place other than the classroom. After observing the students for an entire year it was found that students preferred the phone course group to individual discussions mostly because of the communications aspect of the course group. The researchers found that the phone course group allowed the students to be more actively involved in the learning process.

In a case study, Siemens (2009) found that students who were journaling in English felt more confident using the language in writing. Using a pilot study approach, the 16 students enrolled in intermediate college-level English participated in two different electronic journals, a personal one, and a community one. The community journal was led by the instructor for 3 weeks and then the students took turns leading the discussion. Data from this survey confirmed the writers find communicating through cyberspace more motivating than traditional writing with paper and a pencil. The number of words that the students wrote was higher than what was required of them. The students commented that the stress was less when writing in an electronic journal than in a traditional writing assignment.

In an English classroom, Kajder and Bull (2004), worked with a teacher who decided to use electronic journaling in her classroom as a personal journal for students. Students wrote more in the electronic journal than they wrote when they used a paper and pencil journal. They enjoyed the speed and ease of typing.

As a final point, after reading and revising the related literature, the researcher concluded that there were a lot of previous studies which explored the utility of using the dialogue journal in the writing teaching process. One of them was on using the electronic dialogue journaling through using the computer. However, the previous studies dealt with teaching writing as a whole skill without focusing on the separate skills of writing such as vocabulary word choice and voice.

In addition, in the previous studies the dialogue journaling was conducted either through electronic mails (e-mails) which need a computer and internet access, or a paper and pencil, while the present study was conducted through an easy access, free application which is used easily in students' everyday life. WhatsApp is one of the most popular social media's applications in Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, the researcher realized that there was a shortage in studies, which investigated the effect of electronic applications. These applications are widely used nowadays

through the new generation of smart phones in the World in general and in the Arab World in particular, especially in teaching English Writing.

Eventually, based on the findings and recommendations of the previous researches, the researcher attempted to find out the effect of WhatsApp electronic journaling on improving the vocabulary word choice and voice writing skills of Saudi undergraduate students at Al Imam University. The results of the current study may serve as an evidence of the effectiveness of new chat applications in smart phones as teaching and learning tools.

### **Theoretical Base**

Siemens (2006) is the author of a learning theory called connectivism. According to Siemens, when students use digital tools to connect, students are able to “reflect on dialogue about, and internalize content in order to learn.” This connection helped students develop the ability to create new knowledge at any point in time. Technology allowed for students to connect to each other.

On the other hand, journals were not used for connecting in the same pattern although Siemens did highlight the ability to organize knowledge as a characteristic of connectivism. Using a journal to reflect, internalize, and process knowledge allowed the student to progress to the personalization stage in the Knowledge Flow Cycle (Siemens, 2006). Journaling, as a method of writing, allowed different means of connecting which allowed the students to collaborate and learn from each other. Learning and knowledge are related to the connections between people with digital resources (Siemens, 2005).

Connectivism is the theory that acknowledges that learning is no longer an individual activity, but rather a process that allows for students to flourish in the digital era (Siemens, 2005). (Siemens and Tittenberger, 2009) also offers that the capacity to connect to others and form networks will become more important as the influx of information continues to increase.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in the Translation and Languages College in a female branch of an Islamic University with a population of more than 2000 students in the capital city of Saudi Arabia. English undergraduate students are studying writing skills in the eight levels of their study at university. They started at a basic writing level and proceed to writing a research paper. The Faculty uses high quality writing textbooks from Oxford University Press (Oshima, Alice et al., Writing Academic English 4th ed. Longman, 2006).

At the time of the study, there were twenty English Ph.D and MA holders comprising the faculty who taught writing skills in the college. Students were divided into ten different writing sections with each class having approximately 30 students each.

In this quantitative, quasi-experimental study, one English writing class (level five) was chosen randomly to electronically journal daily for a six-week period of time for a total of 30 entries using the WhatsApp application. No feedback was given on the journaling. The study was quantitative because the scores of the students on the rubric that was used to score their writing were compared. It was quasi-experimental because a computer assigned the students, but they are all English undergraduate students, so placement was not entirely random. Pretest and posttest measures of scores on writing topics were collected and assessed by two English

teachers that do not teach these undergraduate English students, using a rubric developed by Read Write Think and the National Council of Teachers of English.

A writing topic was assigned to the students on the first day of the study. This topic was scored using the rubric. At the end of six weeks, the students wrote again using another writing topic (See appendix A) and it was scored using the same rubric by the same two teachers. The rubric contained the categories organization, content vocabulary/word choice, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions (mechanics). The researcher modified it to measure the vocabulary word choice and voice only (See appendix B). The scores of the two evaluators were used as a benchmark for the final writing assessment. Additionally, each section of the rubric was scored separately so that the researcher could determine if any of the writing skills had improved. The scores and the data from the rubric allowed the researcher to determine whether or not the scores had improved since the students began WhatsApp journaling using a Wilcoxon test and a Friedman's test comparing mean ranks.

Since the study included groups that were nonequivalent, the use of a pretest and a posttest made the quasi-experimental approach valid. Using both a beginning test and an ending test allowed the researcher to look at the difference in scores based on each individual (Gibbons & Herman, 1997).

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

Two writing tests were used in the study; a pretest and a posttest. They were designed by the researcher. The rubric that was used and modified was developed by the National Council of the Teachers of English. The students who were journaling used the WhatsApp application which was downloaded for free to their smart phones. Since two teachers assessed the writing prompts, a Pearson Correlation coefficient testing for inter-rater reliability was used to assess the consistency of the scores of the two assessors.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

On the first day of the study, the students spent 45 minutes responding to a writing prompt. The researcher coded the papers based on which class they were in. This group of papers was given to two teachers to score using the rubric. During each school day thereafter for six weeks, the students journaled using WhatsApp to respond to a daily prompt. No feedback was provided on the journals until after the study was complete. On the final day of the study, the students spent 45 minutes to respond to a second writing prompt.

The research question was scored using a writing rubric that has six different scale criteria from 1 to 6 (See Appendix B). These scores were added so that there was a potential total score of 36 on the rubric. The scores were compared by subgroup as well as by specific writing skill. They were analyzed using a Kruskal Wallis test which is most commonly used when there is one nominal variable and one measurement variable, and the measurement variable does not meet the normality assumption of an ANOVA (McDonald, 2009). The two different categories scored on the rubric were compared using a Friedman's analysis of mean ranks which is an appropriate alternate statistical aid when looking at multiple analyses and possible interaction (MacFarland, 1998), and a Wilcoxon test on vocabulary word choice and voice. Each of these

skills was given a score of 1 to 6 depending on how well the students performed on each one. Each subgroup was analyzed separately by running a Kruskal Wallis test to determine if the treatment had a significant effect on each subgroup. Each skill was examined by treatment group using the Friedman's analysis of mean ranks and the Wilcoxon test to see if WhatsApp journaling had an effect on the development of specific writing skills.

To sum up, being able to analyze these scores by disaggregated groups as well as by specific writing skill using the Kruskal Wallis test, the Wilcoxon test, and the Friedman's analysis of mean ranks provided the data necessary either to recommend the WhatsApp dialogue journaling treatment, or not.

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that the writing English teachers followed the curriculum laid out by the English department. It is also assumed that the students were able to write a five paragraph persuasive essay at the time of the study. It is assumed that the classes had access to smart mobile phones to update their journals via the WhatsApp application.

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to discover the effect of WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling on writing development as marked in a rubric specifically scoring vocabulary word choice and voice. Improving voice and choice are important skills that teachers need to work to improve. This study showed that these writing skills benefited from WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling. In regards to the research question, the Friedman test revealed that the mean of the vocabulary choice section reached 2.59 in the journalers' group. The Wilcoxon test revealed that voice improved significantly ( $p = .030$ ).

This improvement could signal teachers to allow those students who are having a problem with vocabulary word choice and/or voice in their writing to use WhatsApp journaling. The results signify that writing in a journal for an extended period of time may foster growth in these writing skills.

According to Solomon and Schrum (2007) electronic dialogue journals allowed for the reader and writer to develop a dialogue and a community. As WhatsApp was a part of a new smart phones' technology, it was to appeal to the members of the net generation and the word choice and voice would be better because the students were allowed to express their creativity (Deaerstyne,2005( . Word choice and voice were improved in the posttest of this study, as well.

Moreover, electronic journaling was considered to be a tried and true method for helping students to develop their voice (Ramaswami.2009). Hubbs and Brand (2005) found that students moved toward a level of contemplation with journaling. This was consistent with the results of this study since voice was one of the two writing traits that showed significant improvement ( $p = .030$ ) for journalers.

The research from this study allows the teacher of writing to understand the implications of using WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling as a tool to teach writing. Therefore, it can be used to teach writing. In addition, the research revealed that voice and vocabulary choice can be improved with the addition of WhatsApp journaling to the writing activities that are already used in the writing class.

To conclude; the current study exposes that WhatsApp electronic journaling shows a significant improvement of writing skills, especially concerning the voice and vocabulary word choice.

### **Discussion**

When looking at the treatment of WhatsApp electronic journaling, the mean ranks of the posttest scores show journalers to have a higher mean score than the pretest. This indicated that WhatsApp electronic journaling showed significant improvement towards writing, suggesting the task would be a good option to improve writing scores. Since only 22% of undergraduate university students write at or above the proficient level (Magrath, 2003), the results of this study are important to helping university English instructors find new and updated methods that are using the new technology to assist students in improving writing skills which are needed later on in life. This would indicate that teachers need to use any means available to develop this skill. Since journaling is a viable method, teachers should use this method to help improve writing skills that will help the students as they get a job.

Since WhatsApp electronic journaling is an online activity and there is a possibility of a public audience in the group, it was proposed by the connectivism theory that the students may be concerned with the possibility of people being able to view their finished product (Seimens, 2006) and consequently might write more productively for an audience. Journaling was a factor in improving writing scores in a research study conducted by Ramaswami (2009). In addition, a class electronic journal in a college classroom was a factor in allowing students to communicate to each other outside of the normal classroom (Glass & Spiegelman, 2008. (

Kajder and Bull (2004) researched an undergraduate class and found that students wrote more when they were using a computer for their electronic journaling instead of a paper and pencil journal. The sample group used the WhatsApp electronic journaling to write responses in this study showed a significant improvement in their writing skills.

Journaling has been considered to be a tried and true method for helping students to develop their voice (Rohman, 1965). Hubbs and Brand (2005) found that students moved toward a level of contemplation with journaling. This was reliable with the results of this study since voice was one of the two writing traits that showed significant improvement for journalers.

To sum up, this research allows the university EFL instructors of writing to understand the implications of using WhatsApp electronic journals as a tool to teach writing. In addition, the research revealed that voice and vocabulary word choice can be improved with the addition of WhatsApp electronic journaling. EFL instructors should know that this method can help students to develop writing skills. In addition, if an instructor is trying to encourage students to develop their own voice or improve their word choice in their writing, this study models an effective method.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Journaling has been a tool that has been used to teach writing. WhatsApp electronic journaling is a newer tool, but nonetheless it is a valuable tool for teachers to use with their students. This study provides data showing that student's writing skills can be improved with WhatsApp electronic journaling in a relatively short period of time. It is possible that university EFL instructors will consider having all students keep an electronic journal.

In addition, using this method allows university EFL instructors to make use of current technology as well as century-old methods to help their students develop writing skills. However, the current study has a number of limitations that include the selection of the writing prompt topics, since some topics were easier for students to write about. There were only two writing prompts with only six weeks of journaling between them. Another limitation was that the study was conducted with only one section of 30 female students as an experimental group with no control group. An additional boundary was the running of the study in the second semester of 2013 in one university in Saudi Arabia with undergraduate female students.

Using WhatsApp electronic journaling will allow university EFL instructors to add writing to their subject matter across the curriculum while helping their students to improve their writing skills at the same time. Electronic journaling is a tool that significantly helps students develop their voice and improve the vocabulary word choice in their writing. Instructors could spot students that need work in improving the specific skills of voice and vocabulary word choice and incorporate electronic dialogue journaling into an individualized assignment for them to help improve those skills.

In light of the results of this study, university EFL instructors need to be aware that WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling methodology could be an effective method of helping their students to improve their writing scores. English language instructors in Saudi Arabia need to be made aware of the implications of this study because it will give them options in teaching their students to write.

Moreover, as this was a short term study, there is a need for a longitudinal study looking at the development of writing skills over a longer period of time, following students for at least one year but possibly four years, while they complete undergraduate level coursework.

Decision Makers at the Ministry of Higher Education and Universities in Saudi Arabia should consider introducing training programs for less experienced teachers that center primarily on ways of using new applications such as WhatsApp effectively in students' classrooms.

Training programs on ways of incorporating WhatsApp and other chat applications in the new generation of smart phones into the Writing classroom should further be introduced for the more experienced teachers of languages in universities. Both, less and more experienced teachers should be coached on how to implement active and interactive Electronic dialogue journaling activities into the undergraduates' Writing classroom.

The researcher believes that with the proper training and the support from figures of authority students' writing skills can easily be improved. Consequently, this will result in students becoming more fluent writers, and will inevitably start to think critically in what they write and change their attitude toward the Writing skill.

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## Appendix A

### Writing Rubric

#### Word Choice and Author's Voice

Author's Name

Title of Piece

	<b>1</b> <b>Does not meet</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Partially Meets</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Does Not Fully Meet</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Meets</b>	<b>5</b> <b>More Than Meets</b>	<b>6</b> <b>Exceeds</b>
<b>Vocabulary/ Word Choice</b>	Careless or inaccurate word choice, which obscures meaning.	Language is trite, vague or flat	Shows some use of varied word choice	Uses a variety of word choice to make writing interesting	Purposeful use of word choice.	Effective and engaging use of word choice.
<b>Author's Voice</b>	Writer's voice/ point of view shows no sense of audience	Writer's voice/ point of view shows little sense of audience	Writer's voice/ point of view shows that sense of audience is vague	Writer uses voice/point of view. Writes with the understanding of a specific audience	Writer has strong voice/ point of view. Writing engages the audience.	Writes with a distinct, unique voice/point of view. Writing is skillfully adapted to the audience

**Note: The Original Writing Rubric is available at:**

[http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson\\_images/lesson782/Rubric.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson782/Rubric.pdf)