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Bringing Classroom and Outside World Together: Mobile Instant Messaging via WhatsApp© for Extracurricular Writing

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Abstract

Mobile phones have a rapidly growing language teaching and learning potential due to various technologies and applications including instant messaging. However, the related literature mostly documents studies aiming at investigating their role for teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, and content, and thus there are calls to focus on other skills, including writing. Responding to these calls to solve the problem of research scarcity on other skills, I opted for a qualitative research design to investigate the pedagogical potential of WhatsApp©, perceive my students' experiences, and evaluate the process with all strengths and weaknesses. I attempted to make contributions to the existing knowledge on the role of WhatsApp© as one of the most commonly utilised mobile instant messaging applications for language teaching. At the end of a 4-month-period, I gathered my detailed qualitative data from 44 preparatory programme English majoring students at a large-size public university in the northeast of Turkey via a self-devised open-ended questionnaire and conducted a thematic content analysis. My findings highlighted the potential of WhatsApp© as an educational tool to enhance language skills and allow practice chance, offer entertainment and increase interest, decrease anxiety and increase motivation, encourage participation, offer a better communication between the teacher and the students, and help self-improvement. However, no classroom implementation is without limitations, and WhatsApp©-geared interaction was no exception as the implementation had some challenges such as student inconvenience, emotion-related issues, technical problems, content-related and language issues. Based on my dual role, that is, both an academician and practitioner (pracademic), I offered some pedagogical implications for those who want to utilise mobile phones to bring classroom and outside world together to enhance language teaching.

Keywords

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Bringing Classroom and Outside World Together: Mobile Instant Messaging via WhatsApp© for Extracurricular Writing

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Mobile phones have a rapidly growing language teaching and learning potential due to various technologies and applications including instant messaging. However, the related literature mostly documents studies aiming at investigating their role for teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, and content, and thus there are calls to focus on other skills, including writing. Responding to these calls to solve the problem of research scarcity on other skills, I opted for a qualitative research design to investigate the pedagogical potential of WhatsApp©, perceive my students' experiences, and evaluate the process with all strengths and weaknesses. I attempted to make contributions to the existing knowledge on the role of WhatsApp© as one of the most commonly utilised mobile instant messaging applications for language teaching. At the end of a 4-month-period, I gathered my detailed qualitative data from 44 preparatory programme English majoring students at a large-size public university in the northeast of Turkey via a self-devised open-ended questionnaire and conducted a thematic content analysis. My findings highlighted the potential of WhatsApp© as an educational tool to enhance language skills and allow practice chance, offer entertainment and increase interest, decrease anxiety and increase motivation, encourage participation, offer a better communication between the teacher and the students, and help self-improvement. However, no classroom implementation is without limitations, and WhatsApp©-geared interaction was no exception as the implementation had some challenges such as student inconvenience, emotion-related issues, technical problems, content-related and language issues. Based on my dual role, that is, both an academician and practitioner (pracademic), I offered some pedagogical implications for those who want to utilise mobile phones to bring classroom and outside world together to enhance language teaching. Keywords: Mobile Phones, M-Learning, Writing, Extracurricular, WhatsApp©, Case Study

Introduction

Information and communication technologies have become popular in education as they offer "great opportunities for the delivery of education" (Gezgin, Adnan, & Güvendir, 2018, p. 4). Technology is valued in language teaching and learning because it helps related parties do several things easily: obtaining information, being exposed to the language, reading, writing, speaking, and listening for pleasure, creating written products and publishing them, interacting with others, creating a community, and managing one's own learning (Stanley, 2013). Particularly mobile technologies such as laptops, personal digital assistants, tablet personal computers, e-book readers, to list but a few, have become popular as "a significant part of the grain of daily life" (Pettit & Kukulska-Hulme, 2007, p. 17). They have revised how we communicate, produce texts, collaborate, and form social networking (Levy, 2009). Besides, they extend the classroom boundaries and enable anywhere-anytime learning and

support educational outcomes. In the related literature the integration of computational, mobile or wireless devices into education, and their utilisation on the move is entitled as mobile learning (m-learning) (Park, 2011; Quinn, 2000), which went on the stage in the 1970s and 1980s with the invention of portable technologies (Cui & Wang, 2008). There have been a number of studies on m-learning that focus on student attitudes, practices, and self-efficacy (see, for example, Gezgin et al., 2018; Parajuli, 2016; Pettit & Kukulska-Hulme, 2007; Yang, 2012), teacher attitudes (Shohel & Power, 2010), attitudes of both parties (Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, & Al-Sharhan, 2018), classroom implementations and their impacts (Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018; Kennedy & Levy, 2008; Koohestani, Arabshahi, Ahmadi, & Baghcheghi, 2019; Lu, 2008; Saran, Seferoğlu, & Çağıltay, 2012), and meta-analysis (Darmi & Albion, 2014; Sung, Chang, & Liu, 2016).

Among these mobile devices, mobile phones are vital, and their utilisation to help language learning is entitled as Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL, hereafter) (Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Conducting studies on the possible impacts of mobile devices including mobile phones in education is regarded extremely important due to their rapidly growing learning potential (Koohestani et al., 2019), and studies on student perceptions and experiences have the potential to offer "meaningful suggestions for the design, development, and management of integration of mobile technologies into teaching and learning environments" (Gezgin et al., 2018, p. 5). However, the related literature documents that the majority of MALL activities utilise mobile phones to teach mostly vocabulary and conduct quizzes and surveys, and further research is needed on other language skills such as listening, speaking, and writing (Darmi & Albion, 2014; Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007, 2008). Furthermore, writing is not a popular skill to develop while learning a language as it is associated with boring assignments and negative feedback. Students cannot see the fun aspect (Reinders, 2010). Besides, academic writing is like a "Herculean task" (Kroll, 1990) in that students are supposed to "create written products that demonstrate mastery over contextually appropriate formats for the rhetorical presentation of ideas as well as mastery in all areas of language" (p. 140). Here mobile phones could be utilised to turn the enhancement of this complex and demanding language skill into an enjoyable and fruitful process (Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018). Traditional teaching methods are argued to fail in attracting the attention of young adults (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, Najafi, & Nesari, 2011), and as academic writing is a challenging skill to be enhanced in higher education, MALL could increase student engagement. Also, in their review of the studies on the integration of mobile phones into language teaching published from 2004 to 2013, Darmi and Albion (2014) highlight that the most popularly chosen research design in m-learning studies is quantitative, and thus investigations from a qualitative stance are needed "to gain additional insights into the context of discussion" (p. 97). Besides, research scarcity on the use of mobile phones and Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM, hereafter) in language teaching and the need to extend the existing research about their role in language classrooms are well-documented (Andujar, 2016; Saran et al., 2012). Further research is needed to draw a complete picture of the WhatsApp© utilisation in language education. My departure point for utilising WhatsApp© to practice writing outside the classroom was my observation that my students like spending time on WhatsApp©, my expectation that what they have at their fingertips could serve well to practice writing whenever my students want and wherever they are, and my curiosity about their reaction to this novel experience. Besides, that instant messaging can make written exchanges between teachers and students simpler (Sokolik, 2014) encouraged me to utilise WhatsApp©. Lastly, my desire for self-improvement encouraged me to conduct this study. As I am a practitioner "driven by a desire to seek different and potentially better ways of doing things" (Senior, 2006, p. 73), I wanted to try new things to engage my students fully and avoid boredom of both myself and my students. Also, my curiosity about my students'

reactions to my "experiment" and my tendency not to see myself as "consumers of others' research" (Hyland, 2003, p. 245) encouraged me to research the way I teach writing. Therefore, with all these in mind, I attempted to investigate the pedagogical potential of WhatsApp© and perceive students' experiences to make contributions to the existing knowledge on the role of MIM for language teaching in the current study.

Review of Literature

This part is entirely devoted to, respectively, the conceptualisation of m-learning, its attributes and elements, benefits of and barriers to m-learning, MALL and its justification, instant messaging in language education, the nature of writing skill and the potential to add variety to its instruction via mobile phones, and a summary of some representative previous investigations on MALL.

M-learning and Its Attributes

The new generation is tech-savvy (i.e., technology-fluent) and as Frand (2000, as cited in Farmer, 2003) rightly notes, these students have a different profile than their fathers and mothers. He lists ten attributes of these students that form *information age mindset*: (1) they do not see computer as technology; it is quite usual for them, (2) they prefer Internet to TV, (3) they see reality as no longer real, (4) they prefer doing to knowing, (5) experimentation is more important than logic, (6) multitasking is a lifestyle for them, (7) they prefer typing to handwriting, (8) constant connectivity is vital for them, (9) they have zero tolerance for delays, and (10) there are no certain lines between consumer and creator. Therefore, demand for mobile technology integration into the education of this technology literate generation is inevitable. The existing related literature documents several definitions of m-learning. For instance, to Parajuli (2016), it should be understood as "any learning that occurs when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that occurs when the learner takes advantages of opportunities offered by mobile technology" (p. 42). In the relationship between e-learning and m-learning, Keegan (2005) points at the tension between functionality and mobility, stating that in the definition of m-learning there is a continuum that goes from computer to laptop computers (e-learning) and PDAs/handhelds/palmtops to smart phones and mobile phones (m-learning). While functionality is important in e-learning, mobility is focused on in m-learning, and thus Keegan (2005) defines m-learning as "the provision of education and training on PDAs/palmtops/handhelds, smart phones and mobile phones" (p. 199). To him, this phenomenon utilises mobile devices "which citizens are used to carrying everywhere with them, which they regard as friendly and personal devices, which are cheap and easy to use, which they use constantly in all walks of life and in a variety of different settings, except education" (p. 199). M-learning is regarded as an updated version of e-learning, which forms one part of digital learning (Parajuli, 2016; Wang, Wu, & Wang, 2009). Similarly, Çitçi-Özüorçun and Tabak (2012) highlight two basic differences between e-learning and m-learning. They note that e-learning is formal as external agents such as other individuals, schools, companies etc. However, m-learning is informal in that natural learning driven by the individuals themselves occurs here. Besides, while the former is collaborative, the latter is situated. In m-learning learners motivate themselves to learn and develop themselves. This function can support collaborative learning feature of the former.

The attributes of m-learning are worth of note. Özdamlı and Çavuş (2011) list its basic characteristics as "ubiquitous, portable size of mobile tools, blended, private, interactive, collaborative, and instant information" (p. 940). M-learning is ubiquitous/spontaneous in that it allows anytime and anywhere learning. It requires the use of small and portable tools that

could be carried everywhere. It is blended in the sense that it allows a combination of face-to-face classroom learning with outside learning such as homework, tasks, projects, to list but a few. Besides, it is private because every learner reaches information at their best convenience, and they are independent from each other. Also, it is interactive in that students are active in the process, and the devices involve them by reacting to how they use them. M-learning is also collaborative, for it encourages communication between parties and thus allows collaborative learning. Lastly, it allows users to reach information quickly. In tune with those, Kukulska-Hulme (2005) lists similar mobile learning attributes, noting that it is "spontaneous, personal, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous (available everywhere) and pervasive (so integrated with daily activities that it is hardly noticed)" (pp. 1-2). Besides, learner mobility is emphasised in that it avoids constraints of time and physical location.

Effective m-learning has five basic elements: learner, teacher, environment, content, and assessment (Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011). Learner is vital in that the remaining four serve to the learner. The learner is associated with several roles: reaching information when needed, having the responsibility of own learning, learning at their own speed, utilising own learning style, sharing information/products with others, collaborating with peers, and evaluating their and others' performance. Teacher is another element, yet the teacher adopts the role of consultant rather than an expert as in traditional teaching environments. They are supposed to be well equipped to use mobile tools, identify the weaknesses and strengths of mobile tools and compensate the possible weaknesses with various methods, guide and advise students, be open to learning, motivate students, and arrange activities to encourage cooperation and evaluate the process. The third element, content, should be understood as what the students are expected to learn. Content should be negotiated with all related parties based on their needs and wishes and enriched via multimedia elements. Fourth, since m-learning has no traditional classroom borders, environment should be understood as the location when students obtain information. Students may get some of the content in face-to-face classroom environments and later go on learning everywhere. These environments could encourage interaction. Lastly, assessment is a key element in that without it a complete successful process is not possible. Student performance could be evaluated with various techniques such as "database logs, software packages, online exams, chat room, discussion board, online quizzes, or project evaluation" (Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011, p. 940).

M-learning offers various technologies: Short Message Service (SMS) for sending/receiving short messages up to 160 characters, Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) for messages with graphics, Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) for accessing the Internet, General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) enabling connections, Bluetooth for transmitting data over a short distance, 3rd Generation and 4th Generation Mobile Telecommunications (3G and 4G) for transmitting data effectively, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for serving as personal information manager, MP3 for sharing audio files, and CAM for taking videos (Cui & Wang, 2008; Hashemi et al., 2011). With m-learning, teachers and students could do several things. They could obtain much information via accessing documents or online libraries. It also makes it possible to have quizzes and conduct-self assessment via mobile devices. Students could also benefit from courses and tutorials by participating them via their mobile devices. Similarly, archived, or live lessons could be accessed. Video clips and audio libraries could be utilised. They could also read their asynchronous postings. These devices also enable them to exhibit their works. Besides, they could participate in virtual learning communities (Hashemi et al., 2011).

Benefits of and Barriers to M-learning

In the existing literature the benefits of m-learning have been commonly documented. For instance, Parajuli (2016) lists some of these documented in the literature as follows: learning opportunities with low cost, offering various learning experiences, offering interaction between teachers and students, sharing knowledge, promoting active student participation, to list but a few. Similarly, Çiftçi-Özüorçun and Tabak (2012) highlight that it allows freedom in that learners can learn whenever and wherever they want. Besides, its interactive nature allows communication and information/product sharing. It also enables collaborative learning. These mobile devices could also help students with disabilities (Hashemi et al., 2011). Several empirical studies have documented the benefits of the incorporation of mobile devices into education in a wide variety of fields: several benefits of iPads as an instructional tool to teach mathematics to students with learning disabilities (Kaur, 2017), development of language competencies, learner engagement, and some more thanks to mobile phone-integrated writing classes of English majoring students (Kayaoğlu & Erbay-Cetinkaya, 2018), the chance to get information easily, collaborative and ubiquitous learning, and increased participation in English learning (Yang, 2012), increased environmental awareness (Uzunboylu, Çavuş, & Erçağ, 2009), support for acquiring new vocabulary and retention (Lu, 2008; Saran et al., 2012; Thornton & Houser, 2005), reduced anxiety, promoted motivation, enhanced oral reading confidence, and a higher level of concentration on reading tasks (Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2007), lowered cost in reading instruction (Huang & Lin, 2011), adult support for intentional informal learning (Clough, Jones, McAndrew, & Scanlon, 2007), help for students to plan and manage their learning strategies and activities, promoted verbatim note taking skills, and sharing annotations (Chao & Clen, 2009), to list but a few.

Despite its advantages, m-learning may have some potential challenges. For example, Çiftçi-Özüorçun and Tabak (2012) list the most frequently documented ones in the related literature as follows: the possibility to destroy the teacher-students relationship, the difficulty to evaluate students accurately, and the popularity at university rather than primary or high school levels. They note that the teacher cannot interfere with what the students have been doing and cannot motivate them, thus. Also, as the students can reach information easily, they cannot be evaluated. Besides, m-learning is popular among tertiary level students, yet primary or high school students cannot benefit it. Similarly, Kukulska-Hulme (2007) list several other disadvantages:

> (1) physical attributes of mobile devices, such as small screen size, heavy weight, inadequate memory, and short battery life; (2) content and software application limitations, including a lack of built-in functions, the difficulty of adding applications, challenges in learning how to work with a mobile device, and differences between applications and circumstances of use; (3) network speed and reliability; and (4) physical environment issues such as problems with using the device outdoors, excessive screen brightness, concerns about personal security, possible radiation exposure from devices using radio frequencies, the need for rain covers in rainy or humid conditions, and so on. (as cited in Park, 2011, pp. 82-83)

Another concern about m-learning is "the lack of a solid theoretical framework which can guide effective instructional design and evaluate the quality of programs that rely significantly on mobile technologies" (Park, 2011, p. 82). This results in serious problems in evaluation. However, Prensky (2005) notes that retrieving information via mobile phones in exams which could be normally regarded as cheating could be turned into a chance by

"redefining open-book testing as open-phone testing, for example, and by encouraging, rather than quashing, student innovation in this and other areas" (p. 5).

Al-Hunaiyyan et al. (2018) categorise the challenges of m-learning documented in the existing literature as (1) management and institutional challenges, (2) design challenges, (3) technical challenges, (4) evaluation challenges, and (5) cultural and social challenges. The first category should be understood as conservative attitudes towards such technologies in traditional education and the lack of institutional support for them, thus. Design challenges cover the need to design effective educational interfaces in mobile devices which have normally technical limitations such as screen size, memory, brightness, etc. These are expected to be attractive, user-friendly, and interactive. Technical challenges could be about the infrastructure, the device, application, technical support, security, technological readiness of teachers, students, and the other related parties. The fourth category, evaluation challenges, refer to the limitations of the current face-to-face-oriented evaluation system for student performance learning whenever and wherever they want with all sources available to them. Lastly, the cultural and social challenges cover various concerns such as less control over the students, frequent interruptions in learning, teacher reluctance to utilise it, negative effects on personal lives of the parties, the need to store much information on personal devices, privacy and security, the requirement to own a device, cost, frequent technologies updates, student distraction, sensitive cultural issues such as gender, to list but a few.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Among mobile devices mobile phones have taken scholarly attention as they have the potential to add variety to education (Cui & Wang, 2008). They are regarded as high-end and powerful computers carried in pockets. These small devices "complement the short-burst, casual, multitasking style of today's 'Digital Native' learners" and could be turned into learning tools to teach "anything" if they are designed well (Prensky, 2005, p. 2). The use of mobile devices such as mobile phones, MP3/MP4 players, PDAs and palmtop computers in language education is entitled as MALL (Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). It is different from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) due to "its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasizing continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008, p. 273). In their overview of MALL-related articles, Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) categorised them as content-based and design-related. While the former deals with the development of language activities and materials for formal contexts where the content is delivered via them, the latter is about the development of materials for mobile devices. The majority of MALL activities utilise mobile phones to teach vocabulary and conduct quizzes and surveys (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007). Other areas such as listening, speaking, and writing are underresearched.

The majority of MALL activities utilise mobile phones (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). In m-learning mobile phones have an important role due to their popularity among students and high smart phone ownership rate. They possess various capabilities including voice only short text messages, graphic displays, downloadable programmes, Internet browsers, cameras and video clips, Global Positioning Systems, to list but a few (Chinnery, 2006; Levy, 2009; Prensky, 2005). They are valued for language learning as they can provide authentic communication and collaboration among peers, enable immediate use of information, bring classroom and outside world together, provide student access to language, and help students control their own learning (Reinders, 2010). The existing MALL literature covers rapidly growing studies that focus on various issues such as the role of text messages for vocabulary learning, quizzes and surveys, web-boards accessible by mobile phones to access

English language learning websites, multimedia messages for language learning, oral interactions via mobile phones, the use of iPods to improve communicative competence, web-based materials for mobile access, to list but a few (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

Mobile phones could be utilised for several purposes in language teaching and learning. For instance, Reinders (2010) suggests twenty ideas to integrate mobile phones into language learning and teaching: using the Notes feature to collect everyday language samples outside, using camera to take the picture of language samples, using free programmes to upload student products and make flashcards, using the Voice Memo Recorder to collect language samples from TV and radio and to collect audio language samples outside, using SMS to learn vocabulary, do circular writing, learn another language via tandem learning, using a phone with Internet connection to keep a blog, to micro blog on Twitter, using social networking tools to practise writing, using mobile phones for speaking exchanges, phlogging (leaving messages on websites), using mobile phone memory to distribute listening and reading materials to students, playing games with a focus on language, using the Voice Memo Recorder, Notes, and Calendar features to take control of their own learning via a portfolio, checking student comprehension and getting student opinion, and collecting research data.

Based on his comparative study to investigate students' preferences for mobile phones or desktop computers environments, Stockwell (2008) determines five usage patterns of MALL based on their preparedness to utilise mobile devices to learn language: non-users, try-and-quit users, sporadic users, balanced users, and heavy users. As the name speaks for itself, the first category covers those who do not use mobile platforms to do the activities. Try-and-quit users, on the other hand, try them for a couple of times and later go on with the methods they were used to. Sporadic users utilise them longer than the former group yet not regularly. They may use them even towards the end of the process. Balanced ones try to have a balanced use of both mobile and other platforms. Lastly, heavy users use mobile platforms completely.

MIM is an application that offers real-time communication with others (Farmer, 2003). It has become quite popular due to its several advantages: (1) it is easy to use, (2) it offers real time and fast response, (3) it offers the chance to create a contact/buddy list that results in controlled access and chance to view availability online, (4) it is less intrusive as only authorized users can access you, (5) it is cheaper than phone calls, (6) it is secure due to the options to add security, encryption authentication with corporate directory. However, no application is without its limitations, and MIM has some, too: (1) there could be security risks due to message interception and viruses, (2) there are privacy concerns, (3) it could be distracting, (4) it lacks administration, (5) it may be seen as a time waster, (6) secure IM software are not free, (7) administration is required, (8) users may feel intruded, and (9) access to personal contacts could be lost (Farmer, 2003). There are various MIM/IM software/programmes such as Google Hangouts©, Skype©, Facebook Messenger©, Telegram©, Yahoo Messenger©, IBM Sametime©, Line©, Pidgin©, Slack©, Trillian©, Wiber©, to list but a few. WhatsApp© is one of these IM softwares mostly preferred on mobile devices, and today more than 1 billion people from over 180 different countries use it to communicate with their families and friends (WhatsApp, 2019). This instant messaging platform allows users to connect to each other personally, form groups, have synchronous or asynchronous exchanges via the Internet, and informs them with phone alerts (Andajur, 2016). WhatsApp© has several features including simple and reliable messaging, the chance to keep in touch as a group, voice and video calls, the option to use it on web and desktop, photo and video sharing, end-to-end encryption, document sharing, and voice messages (WhatsApp, 2019).

Writing Skill in Higher Education

In the 21st century, the development of writing has a central place as written communication has become not only possible but also necessary due to globalisation and technological advances in various fields such as business, education, social networking, to list but a few (Weigle, 2014). Writing is a kind of communication as a written interaction between the writer and the reader occurs, and it a challenging skill due to the requirements of "linguistic accuracy, clarity of presentation, and organisation of ideas" (Olshtain, 2014, p. 209). As Weigle (2014) clarifies, it has two perspectives, namely cognitive ability and socio-cultural phenomenon. While the former refers to various skills and knowledge necessary to produce written texts, the latter should be understood as a communication act happening in a particular setting and aiming certain goals. Second/foreign language writers have serious responsibilities in the process, as clarified by Weigle (2014):

> Writers have to keep in mind their overall message, the major points and subpoints to be included, how these points will be organized, and a representation of the likely readers: what they already know or believe about the topic, what sorts of information they will find persuasive, and how they might react. Writers need to be able to plan their writing, monitor and revise what they have already written, and keep focused on the process until they are satisfied with the end product. (p. 223)

In addition to its challenging nature, writing is not a popular skill to develop in higher education as it is associated with boring assignments and negative feedback, and students cannot see the fun aspect (Reinders, 2010). Besides, attracting the attention of young adults could be really difficult (Hashemi et al., 2011). Thus, writing is one of language skills in which mobile phones among other technological advances could be exploited as they could allow genuine interaction, and "writing increasingly involves keyboarding, a skill that can be taken for granted in some contexts but may need to be taught in others" (Weigle, 2014, p. 234). The related literature documents limited information on the utilisation of mobile phones into writing teaching and learning as the majority of MALL activities aim at teaching mostly vocabulary and conduct quizzes and surveys. Therefore, more studies are needed on writing (Darmi & Albion, 2014; Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007, 2008).

A Slice of Previous Research

Several studies focusing on the use of mobile technologies for education have been documented in the related literature. For instance, in a recent quasi-experimental study, Andujar (2016) attempted to investigate the academic potential of WhatsApp© on 3rd graders' writing at tertiary level. The researcher utilised the application to support the face-to-face writing class out of the class by encouraging communication and interaction. At the end of the process the experimental group was found grammatically, lexically, and mechanically more accurate than the control group. They tended to use more syntactically complex sentences and diverse vocabulary. Besides, they were highly involved in the activity and showed their interest in the field. Also, this interaction was regarded valuable as it reduced the formal distance between the teacher and the students and made the students feel more relaxed. Andujar (2016) concludes that the tremendous educational potential of WhatsApp© is a new research field, and more research on the combination of education and technology is needed.

In a seven-week case study, Kayaoğlu and Erbay Çetinkaya (2018) investigated tertiary level students' attitudes towards mobile phone-integrated language practice where the students

did collaborative circular writing outside the school borders and had whole-class feedback conferences in the classroom. They identified various benefits such as learner engagement/motivation, competence in language skills, socialization and effective leisure time. The participants self-reported that they learned new words, had enhanced writing skills, had chance to practise English, learned new chunks/sayings/idioms, had better thinking skills, expanded their horizon, learned coherence and cohesion, imagined creatively, self-evaluated their own products, translated well, had improved reading skills, applied whatever learned to other departmental courses, had improved spelling, and produced new things. In addition to language competence, their motivation and engagement also increased in the process in that they felt more motivated to search and learn more and enjoyed the collaborative activities with the peers. Besides, they reported that mobile phone-integrated activities helped them keep pace with technology, know their friends better, be autonomous, practise writing and speaking outside the classroom, learn how to give feedback, and realise the difference between the writer' intention and the reader's comprehension/audience development, respecting different ideas of their peers, and realise their mistakes. However, the researchers identified several challenges reacted to this blended learning application such as technical problems (credit/financial issues, storage capacity limit, difficulty of writing on a small screen), communication problems among peers (inability to agree on a plot, unfamiliar peers to collaborate with), and some others such as feeling uneasy due to SMS exchange at inconvenient times, disconnections in the written products, grammar mistakes their peers made, to list but a few. They concluded that "blended learning combining mobile phone advantages with traditional teaching could yield efficient results when tolerant teachers convince students with clear goals, explicit procedural steps, and expected results" (Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018, p. 3112).

Similarly, Koohestani et al. (2019) reported a study of 23 healthcare professional students to explore their experiences about mobile learning and identified four benefit themes: a catalyst for learning, stepping into different paths of learning, improving academic confidence, and self-managed learning. Mobile devices were found to accelerate student learning as they enabled the participants to access to information fast, have easy interaction with classmates to exchange educational ideas, and access to teachers fast to consult them about educational issues. Mobile devices also helped them experience different learning methods such as accidental learning, group learning, trial and error, just in time learning, and blended learning. These devices were also found to have improved their academic confidence in that they did not have to carry books under their arms, which was a marker of a clinical student. They also participated in scientific discussions more, easily accessed to the related latest information, and learned autonomously. They were also found to have self-management in their own learning in that they made their own learning process suitable for their own needs, motivations, progress, and abilities. These devices also helped them self-regulate their own learning (i.e., design, control) and manage it, repeat learning opportunities, improve their time management skills, and collect and manage data. Beside these benefits, mobile devices encouraged the participants to conduct reflective self-assessment in that their interest and motivation increased, their theoretical knowledge increased, and they were equipped with clinical skills.

Methodology

In the current study, I attempted to investigate the pedagogical potential of WhatsApp© when used in an extracurricular writing activity outside the classroom and perceive students' experiences to make contributions to the existing knowledge on the role of MIM for language teaching. To this end, I formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp© for supporting their writing skill?
    1.1. Did they find any benefits of this implementation?
    1.2. Did they face any challenges of this implementation?
    1.3. What are their suggestions for a better future WhatsApp© writing implementation?

The Research Design

To explore my students' English writing experiences with WhatsApp© and evaluate the process with all strengths and weaknesses, I opted for a qualitative research design, which should be understood as "data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data which is then analysed primarily by non-statistical methods" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 24). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3). My study could be categorised as a qualitative inquiry as it shows three elements of qualitative research tradition (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). First, one subject area of this research tradition is people's experiences, situations, perspectives, and histories, and thus naturalistic data are gathered. In this study, I aimed at reaching an in-depth understanding of my students' writing experiences with WhatsApp© in a naturalistic context by spending time with my students and focusing on meaning. Second, qualitative studies generally use small purposive sample, and 44 preparatory programme students taking my course served as my participants. Third, qualitative researchers are not distant to their participants. Similarly, I was their teacher, and we had a very close relationship inside and outside campus. I was the only lecturer that they could contact comfortably whenever and wherever they wanted, and this closeness helped me observe them better and collect detailed and honest data. Third, qualitative researchers aim at gathering detailed and rich information. In the current study, I aimed at describing rather than reducing the richness of my data in the sense that I did not limit this data richness to numbers, and I tried to add up to this richness by supporting the findings with excerpts taken from student reports.

Among the qualitative research designs, I chose case study to investigate my students' experiences. Case study as one of the most key and popular qualitative research designs serves well to conduct in-depth and clear investigation and to explore important factors effecting behaviours and comment on relations (Mayring, 2011). It "shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances" (Stake, 2005, p. 459). There are three categories of cases in qualitative research: intrinsic case study, instrumental case study, and multiple/collective case study. The current study falls both in the first and second categories (i.e., intrinsic and instrumental) due to the lack of "hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose" (Stake, 2005, p. 445). My case could be entitled as intrinsic as I wanted a better understanding of WhatsApp© writing experiences of two of my writing classes outside the classroom. In other words, my case did not represent other cases, and it was of interest. Besides, I did not aim any theory building. Rather, I decided to investigate my students' experiences because of an intrinsic interest. However, I can also entitle my study as an instrumental one in the sense that I examined my classes to provide insight into my students' reactions towards the use of WhatsApp©. Here my case is of secondary interest as I utilised it to help my understanding of this instant messaging application. In other words, I conducted an in-depth investigation, yet my aim was to understand this issue (i.e., my external interest).

Every research design has its own strengths and limitations, and case study is no exception. It is criticised due to its limited generality in that the research design does not allow researchers who rely on a single case to generalise their results beyond the confinements of their case (Bryman, 1988). However, quantitative and qualitative findings have different scope of findings and thus different functions. The former is associated with nomothetic modes of reasoning, and the later with ideographic one. While "a nomothetic approach seeks to establish general law-like findings which can be deemed to hold irrespective of time and place; an ideographic approach locates its findings in specific time-periods and locales" (Bryman, 1988, p. 100). In the current study, I adopted an idiographic approach and attempted to understand my case itself in a detailed manner rather than a nomothetic one which requires "generating statements that apply regardless of time and place" (Bryman, 2004, p. 50).

Setting and Participants

I conducted the current study at the department of English language and literature at my institution, a large-size technical university in the northeast part of Turkey. I have been working here as a fully-fledged staff since 2010 and have been offering various courses at both preparatory programme and Bachelor of Arts levels. The department hosts mostly students from diverse cities of Turkey, but most have abroad higher education experience via Erasmus Exchange Programme during their BA education. Besides, a few foreign students have Erasmus experience in the department. The institution accepts students with centralised university exam, and the newcomers have to sit for an English proficiency exam at the very beginning of the first semester. Those who take 70 out of 100 can start BA courses, but students who cannot pass this exam are put in pre-intermediate classes (2 day-time and 2 evening classes) and have to attend a 1-year preparatory programme that equips them well with skill-based courses such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and General English.

I chose the participating students from this preparatory programme via convenience sampling strategy as I have been teaching various courses in the programme for 9 year such as writing, speaking, pronunciation, reading, and General English. Convenience/opportunity sampling is the most popular non-probability sampling strategy in second and foreign language learning research (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Due to my teaching position in the department, these students were proximate, available, and accessible, and practical to work with the whole year. However, I am fully aware of non-representativeness of this sampling (Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), but I aimed at understanding my case in detail and give ideas and inspiration to those practitioners who want to try new things in their classes rather than emphasise the general relevance of my results. I invited two preparatory classes (n=47, one Iranian and 1 Azerbaijan student) which I had been teaching writing since the beginning of 2018-2019 education term to participate in the study. However, only 44 of them responded positively (F=31; M=13) and participated in the activities. Their scores in the English test of the university entrance examination show that they are pre-intermediate students. Mobile phones are embedded in their personal life and all own a smart phone, yet they have not experienced any moment in which they are integrated into their professional (i.e., educational) life.

Some of the participating students were foreign. One female student came from Azerbaijan, two came from Germany although they were of Turkish origin (one male and one female), and one male student came from Iran. The rest were from diverse cities of Turkey: Istanbul (n=7), Trabzon (n=4), Ankara (n=3), Çorum, Manisa, Gaziantep, Denizli, Artvin and Kayseri (n=2, respectively), Sakarya, Sinop, Hakkari, Aydın, Gümüşhane, Rize, Muğla, İzmir, Kars, Tekirdağ, Adana, Bursa, Mersin, Kahramanmaraş and Eskişehir (n=1, respectively). There were participants from all seven regions of Turkey including Black Sea, Marmara,

Aegean, Mediterranean, Central Anatolia, Southeast Anatolia, and Eastern Anatolia. All of them were daytime students. Almost all were under 20 as they were newcomers: those who were 18 years old (n=19), those 19 years old (n=15), those who were 20 (n=3), those who were 23 (n=2), two who were 21, two students who were 17 and 24, and one unstated.

My students lack exposure to English outside classrooms as in Turkey English is learned as a foreign language. English lacks any colonial past and it is utilised as a "performance variety" (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998, p. 30) in domains such as international business and education. It does not have any institutionalised second language role, and formal education is the basic way to learn it. However, English is a popular language to learn in Turkey to keep up with global economic, scientific, technological, cultural, educational, and intellectual life (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005). English is quite popular in Turkish higher education in that most of the universities offer English-medium instruction and ask the newcomers to sit for an institutional or international exam to document their level or otherwise attend their one-year intensive English programme (Arık & Arık, 2014).

The Role of the Researcher

I regard my role in the current study as a qualitative researcher since I attempted to capture my students' point of view regarding the utilisation of WhatsApp© for writing improvement, studied their world directly, and provided rich descriptions of both the process and findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this process, I was both a practitioner and academician in the sense that I read the existing literature, criticised it, identified the WhatsApp© idea to experiment with in my own class and then decided to implement it in my writing instruction and later conducted this research in my own professional context. In other words, this engagement in and with research attempts helped my professional development and professional practice (Borg, 2010). First, I did all related readings and then planned the whole process of WhatsApp© instruction and data gathering. I myself devised my data gathering instrument, gathered the data at the end of the process, analysed my data, and reported my findings. I believe that this dual role of research and teaching could enlighten multiple audiences such as academicians who read my research, practitioners who feel encouraged to implement similar things in their classrooms, and me who can deepen her scholarship and teaching experience as a pracademic.

The Procedure

I planned a four-month WhatsApp© extracurricular writing exercise procedure. I designed the activities as an extension of Academic Writing course. It is a required course for students in the preparatory programme of the aforementioned department. The objectives of the course are to equip learners with the knowledge of academic writing conventions, help them address various audiences, teach them how to write various types of paragraphs/writing modes, help them follow the writing process and produce various accurate and fluent written products, and help them build and their own arguments. The course is a 15-week two-semester-course, and I have been offering it since 2010 in the same institution. Each term students are to sit for two traditional pen and pencil exams and hand in their portfolios which cover the first and final drafts of their papers with teacher and peer feedback at the end of the semesters. They follow a global academic writing coursebook. Yet, I bring various materials that I originally devise or adapt from the Internet. I chose writing to integrate WhatsApp© into due to my scholarly readings, observations, and teaching experience. As Harmer (2007) rightly notes, some writing students could be quite unconfident and unenthusiastic, for they may not have the habit of writing in their mother tongue, or they cannot generate ideas. Building writing

habit is vital for these students in the sense that teachers should encourage them to see writing as a usual part of teaching and increase their interest with enjoyable tasks (Harmer, 2007). Similarly, as Turkish students do not practice writing outside classroom and feel unconfident and discouraged, I designed this outside classroom activity to help them write for fun, engage them fully and practise writing at the same time.

All of the students had smart phones with various brands, and they had both their 3G Internet connection and had the chance to use the Wi-Fi at the university and their dormitories. They had previously downloaded WhatsApp© application and had been using MIM for several years. After I informed them about the procedure, I added the phone number of the volunteers to my contact list. I clarified that the process was an individual one, and I would send the prompts to every single student and start communicating simultaneously. Although I sent them one prompt each time, I extended the interaction with extra bridging questions and allowed them to ask me related ones. In this way, we had an authentic and rich conversation. I served as their audience and responded to their questions. The following dialogue with one of my female students exemplifies the nature of this interaction with the main prompt, one bridging question, two implicit feedbacks, and one student questioning act:

> Researcher/Teacher: Good evening, today it is our second texting day. Thanks for your eager participation last week. Now here is our second topic: if you could change one thing about you or your life, what would it be and why?
> A Female Student: Good evening. I always overthink about anything and it's a really bad habit so I would change it because it is very tired.
> Researcher: It is tiring for you, hmm...
> Student: Also it sometimes makes me feel anxiety.
> Researcher. Anxious, hmm.
> Student: Yes.
> Researcher: Any strategy to solve this?
> Student: I don't know any strategy.
> Researcher: Hmm, I see.
> Student: Do you have such a kind of thing? (The conversation goes on) (December 18, 2019; 22:59).

As is seen in the interaction above, I started with the main prompt that I sent everybody individually. While answering, the students made a mistake about the use of adjective (*I would change it because it is very tired**). I repeated the correct version without showing explicitly her mistake (*It is tiring for you, hmm*), for I wanted her to feel easy and go on communication. Right after, she again made a mistake about the use of adjective (*Also it sometimes makes me feel anxiety**). I repeated the correct form without showing that her sentence was problematic. Later, I asked a bridging question, questioning her whether she utilised any strategy to solve her problem (*Any strategy to solve this?*). Then the student took the role of the communication starter and asked me whether I used any strategy to solve the challenges in my life (*Do you have such a kind of thing?*).

During these four months, I sent WhatsApp© messages to my students twice a week and expected them to comment on the questions and go on communicating and interacting with me on the individual level. I focused on content in that I wanted them to write about various issues such as relationships, personality, hypothetical situations, education, dreams, books, friendship, school problems, bad habits, exam anxiety, to react to some photographs, and to complete a story (Hyland, 2003). In other words, there were fun, hypothetical, reflective, and dilemma/ethical prompts. The Internet, my own teaching experience, my informal observations, and the related literature (see, for example, Andrei, 2012) all inspired me to

devise these writing prompts. I tried to add a personal voice to my writing syllabus as the academic writing syllabus expects students to have a formal tone and avoid first person singular mode. Table 1 presents the MIM prompts that I sent them.

Table 1
WhatsApp© prompts sent to the students

	Date	Prompt
1	December 14, 2018	Hi, I hope this writing will give you a chance to practise writing without worrying about language form (grammar, spelling, organisation etc.). Let's have a free communication and have fun! Here is our first topic: Tell me about yourself. Let me know you a little bit. Write whatever you want about yourself. By the way I am open to your questions.
2	December 18, 2018	Good evening, today it is our second texting/journal writing day. Thanks for your eager participation last week. Now, here is our second topic: If you could change one thing about you or your life, what would it be and why?
3	December 21, 2018	Hi again, thank you for your active participation in WhatsApp© writing activity. Here is another question: What would you like to do next week instead of coming to class/school? Please tell me in detail.
4	December 25, 2018	Good evening. Here is our 4th topic: Turkey spends much money on English language education. However, the results are not satisfying. I mean everybody complains that we cannot learn English successfully. Why do you think this happens?
5	December 29, 2018	Dear all, here we have another question: What is your biggest fear and why? Please elaborate on your answer.
6	January 2, 2019	Good evening everybody. Here is today's topic: if there is a film about your life until now, what would its title be? Why?
7	January 5, 2019	Dear all, here is another topic to discuss: if you had to choose only three items/objects to save for students in 2050 to represent your generation, which objects would you choose and why?
8	January 9, 2019	Dear all, I wonder how it is going. What are you doing and how do you feel now?
9	February 9, 2019	Dear all my students. Welcome back to Trabzon! I wish a successful and happy term for you all. From now on, we will go on our conversation through WhatsApp. Please chip into discussions. Here is a new question from me: nowadays I do not have hectic days and thus I want to read books. Which book would you suggest me to read and why? Please convince me.
10	February 19, 2019	Dear all, here is another topic: what is the ideal present to give to a boy or girl friend? Why? Please convince me that it is the most appropriate gift.
11	February 23, 2019	Dear all, here is a new topic to discuss: if you broke somebody's heart, what would you do earn him/her back? (Friend or boy/girlfriend)

12	February 26, 2019	Hey guys, good evening! Let's talk about the following topic: imagine that your girl/boyfriend or husband/wife has been cheating on you. What would you do? How would you behave? Please be serious and detailed.
13	March 3, 2019	Good evening dear all, if you could change the time and the place where you were born, which place and which time period would you choose and why?
14	March 6, 2019	Dear all, I wonder your idea about the following topic: let's compare and contrast yourself when you first come to Trabzon and you now.
15	March 13, 2019	Good evening dear all, I have a question for you: if you could have been someone from history, who would you have been and why? Please elaborate on the issue.
16	March 16, 2019	(I sent a picture of a bibelot in my house). Dear my flowers, I have this bibelot at my house. What does it symbolise? Please tell me the aim of such a structure.
17	March 20, 2019	(I sent a picture of my son messing up the drawers). Hi dear all, you turn back and the scene is this. What would you do and why?
18	March 26, 2019	Good evening. Here is something I wonder: who is the one person in this world that knows you best? Why?
19	April 3, 2019	Dear all, What's up? I wonder whether you feel anxious about your upcoming visas. For which classes and why? If you have exam anxiety, what do you do to cope with your exam tension?
20	April 17, 2019	Dear all, what's up? I need your advice: how could you help your beloved one (mother, father, husband, wide, child etc.) quit smoking? I mean what would you do to discourage them from smoking? Thanks in advance.
21	April 24, 2019	Dear all, I have a short story situation here, but it has no end. Let's complete it shortly.

On a cold winter night, the man was sitting on his coach across the fire, and he was reading his daily newspaper with his cuppa in his hand. When he turned the page, he was startled because... |

As is seen in the table above, I sent them messages from December till the end of April twice a week. However, as they were having their semester holiday in January, I did not want to bother them, and thus gave a break until the 9th of February (i.e., the beginning of the second term). Besides, although I generally sent them messages twice a week, sometimes we skipped the second task and wrote to each other once a week when they had challenging assignments, quizzes, and visas. As I wanted them to enjoy the process fully, I gave an ear to their problems and concerns. At the very beginning of the process, I, as the both the researcher and the lecturer, attempted to create a natural and authentic atmosphere. I clarified the process with all steps, requirements, and possible gains. I emphasised that it would be a voluntary extra-curricular activity, and participation or non-participation would not do any change in their course grade. I stressed that this non-compulsory process would have a natural chatting atmosphere where I would not correct their mistakes explicitly or evaluate their written products (i.e., their sentences during the conversations) and thus they should feel easy and focus on their message rather than form. However, when further desire to get feedback on how they wrote came from the participants, I gave explicit feedback to the ones interfering with comprehension and provided the correct forms. I sometimes gave implicit feedback by showing that there was a problem with their sentences. However, mostly I rephrased their sentences with correct forms

to help them understand that they had a mistake so as not to discourage further commenting on the issues.

Data Gathering and Analysis

I utilised a self-devised open-ended questionnaire to gather the data as it saved me researcher time, effort, and money and enabled me to gather useful (i.e., versatile) data to do many things. Questionnaires could be utilised to gather attitudinal data as well as factual and behavioural ones (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). However, as I was aware of the limitations of close-ended questionnaires to gather superficial and unreliable data, I decided to devise an open-ended one where my students could feel comfortable to report their feelings and experiences. I designed short and simple questions and avoided ambiguous words and double-barrelled questions. Later, I asked the opinions of two of my BA supervision students about the clarity of the instructions and questions and page format to avoid possible problems. The final questionnaire covers four items aiming at investigating my students' experiences with WhatsApp©: (1) Were there any benefits/advantages/good sides of this implementation for you? If yes, please elaborate on them in detail, (2) Were there any challenges/disadvantages/bad sides of this implementation? If yes, please elaborate on them in detail, (3) Could you suggest anything for more successful future implementations? and (4) How could you evaluate the overall effectiveness of this implementation out of 10?

As I did not want my students to feel discouraged due to the questionnaire length, I prepared duplex copies to make them look short. Also, I asked the participating students to answer the questions in Turkish as it could be intimidating for them to respond in English, which they were struggling hard to learn. Besides, to avoid any misunderstanding, ensure completion of all questions and high response rate, and clarify items, I asked them to complete them in the last class in my presence (i.e., group administration). I tried to get fully honest answers by being earnest with my study aims, ensuring that their positive or negative answers would not affect the success of my study, and offering to share the results with those interested ones. Besides, I did not allow them to talk to each other to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere that helped them focus on easily and avoid any possible data "contamination" (Oppenheim, 1992, as cited in Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 69).

In order to analyse the data gathered via open-ended questionnaires, I followed the procedure of content analysis which should be understood as "a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessary from an author's or user's perspective" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 3). The aim of this scientific tool is to make "replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use", with Krippendorff's (2004, p. 18) own words. While analysing my data, I started with the research questions to protect myself "from getting lost in mere abstractions or self-serving categorizations" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 32). I conducted both quantitative and qualitative content analyses. Counting the codes and categorising enabled me to be systematic. However, I did not restrict my analysis to numerical counting as I also provided verbal answers to the research questions guiding the study and supported my interpretations with quotes taken from the student reports. While analysing the data, I basically followed some steps (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, I organised the data by enumerating all the papers and checking whether there were any unclear handwriting, inaccurate answers, and missing papers. Then I familiarised myself with the data by reading the answers. Later, I read them question by question, noted patterns/codes, counted their frequencies of occurrences, and created theme categories. Then I identified direct respondent sentences to be more illustrative. Lastly, I reached my conclusions and made some inferences.

Research Validity

I followed some steps to ensure the validity of my research. First, I tried to ensure the content validity of my questionnaire by ensuring that the questions covered my students' experiences from all aspects. Besides, I took their time and motivation into account while deciding the number of questions and page format. Also, I asked the opinions of two of my BA supervision students to identify the possible problems with my wording and page layout. Second, to improve data validity, I was totally honest in representing and documenting my rich data by avoiding limitation to numbers (Cohen et al., 2007). I encouraged my students to give detailed answers and be honest. These detailed answers helped me much as I supported my findings with detailed respondent excerpts, for as Agar (1993) rightly notes, "in-depth responses of individuals secure a sufficient level of validity and reliability" (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 135) in qualitative investigations. Third, to ensure transferability of my findings, I presented detailed information about all stages of my investigation so that the readers could understand the research better. Besides, to get honest and detailed answers, I developed rapport with my students, showed how I deeply cared about them, gave enough time to answer the questions, ensured privacy, and welcome student requests to learn the results of the research. I established a good rapport by helping them trust me, being transparent about my research aims and justification, steps of research, and ways to share my result in the future. I tried to reduce their anxiety by ensuring that their positive or negative answers would not affect the success of my research. I gave them time to answer as much as they wanted and allowed those who wanted to listen to music while answering the questions with their earphones. Lastly, I attempted to increase my research credibility; I used peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007) and asked one of my colleagues (i.e., my classmate in graduate education) to give his opinions about the general methodology of the study I was planning to conduct. I trust him as he holds MA and PhD degrees in Applied Linguistics, has expertise in both academic writing and research, and has several related publications in diverse scholarly journals.

Ethical Considerations

In my institution a third-party approval (e.g., Institutional Review Board) was not required as I did not receive any funding for my study and I just aimed at seeing the effects of an alternative implementation outside school borders and thus improve professionally. Therefore, I did not hand in any proposal for my qualitative research project and expected any approval from the committee. However, I took four codes of ethics listed by Christians (2005) into consideration from the beginning till the end of my study: informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. First, at the very beginning I showed total respect for my students (i.e., participants) in that I informed them fully about what I aimed with the current study, how I would collect my data, what they were supposed to do, and what I would do with the findings. And then I worked with those who were voluntary to allow me to record their phone number into my mobile phone and send them messages twice a week on WhatsApp© and communicate individually. In other words, I obtained their voluntary consent after I informed them about the study and the procedure. Second, related with the first code of ethics I avoided deception in that I clarified the nature of the research, my aims in conducting it, the procedure of data gathering analysis and reporting. I did not deceive them about anything related to my study. Third, I paid much attention to privacy and confidentiality in that I secured all personal data of my students. I did not ask any personal information in the questionnaire, and I assigned numbers to the participants while supporting the research qualities with excerpts taken from open-ended questionnaires. Lastly, I was careful about accuracy. I ensured that my

data were accurate, and I avoided research fraud, fabrication, and plagiarism (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Neuman, 2014) by reporting the data honestly without any omission or contrivance (Christians, 2005) and crediting the ideas of other scholars.

Findings and Discussion

Out of 46 preparatory programme students taking my writing course, 44 agreed to answer the questions, which shows a quite high participation rate (i.e., 95.6 %). This high response rate could result from the fact that I was both the practitioner and researcher in the current study, and I had a very close relationship with my classes. Besides, questionnaire administration as a group in the classroom might contribute to this high response rate. Only the Iranian student did not want to answer the questions as he did not answer any of the questions although he saw every single message. When I asked him in a friendly manner why he did not participate in this activity, he said that his English was not good enough to express himself. Besides, one male student dropped out in the second semester. The findings are presented theme by theme below: benefits, challenges, suggestions for better future use, and overall satisfaction.

Benefits of WhatsApp© Writing Implementation

I reached five principal themes at the end of the content analysis, which I can list from the highest to the lowest as follows: language enhancement (n=42), affective improvement (n=41), communication betterment (n=32), personal growth (n=26), gratification (n=20), and others (n=10). These principal themes are presented with their sub-themes, explained and interpreted, and supported with extracts taken from student questionnaires.

Language enhancement theme is concerned with the acquisition and improvement of various language skills that the participating students attributed to the integration of WhatsApp© into writing outside classroom. This theme covers sub-themes such as learning new phrases and words (n=13), practising writing (n=11), improving English in a general sense (n=5), improving spontaneous/ unprepared speaking (n=5), enhancing English chatting abilities (n=3), writing spontaneously (n=1), learning different usages from teacher responses (n=1), enhancing grammar (n=1), increasing writing speed (n=1), and paying much attention to punctuation (n=1).

The following excerpt taken from student questionnaires exemplifies how this outside-classroom WhatsApp©-oriented implementation helped them learn new words and phrases, which improved their writing and speaking, two sub-themes under this language enhancement category:

> Plus, this activity helped me in speaking. While speaking in English, I remember the words and phrases that I used in WhatsApp© interactions and the ones that you used, and thus I speak fluently. I can say that it worked in this way. It was also useful in my writing as well as speaking. I learned various words and phrases there and I can express myself well. [Participant 25, male]

The excerpt above represents language enhancement quality in that the participants highlighted the fact that these interactions served as context for him to see how various words and phrases are used in sentence. This awareness at lexis level helped him in not only writing but also speaking in the sense that while speaking spontaneously, he remembered these words and thus managed to speak fluently without any hesitation. This finding supports the results of several earlier studies that highlight the contribution of m-learning for expanding vocabulary

(Kayaoğlu & Erbay Çetinkaya, 2018), ensuring lexical accuracy (Andujar, 2016), supporting not only vocabulary acquisition but also retention (Lu, 2008; Saran et al., 2012; Thornton & Houser, 2005), to list but a few. In fact, this finding is not surprising, for most of the previous investigations focused on the role of m-learning on vocabulary learning. This may result from the fact that designing vocabulary activities and implementing them via mobile phones and evaluating the pre- and post-situations could be much easier for the researchers. Therefore, supporting the earlier studies with a parallel finding from a writing-focused study could be invaluable as it adds to the existing literature and gives ideas to those who are interested in other than vocabulary.

Practising writing is another sub-theme under the category of language enhancement. The following excerpt exemplifies how this implementation offered them chance to practice writing in English outside the classroom:

> At the very beginning, I found this implementation unnecessary, but after I started writing, I immediately realised that I really liked it, it benefitted me, and I realised that it was good for my English. It enabled me to use English outside school. It was both a more comfortable environment and I had chance to express myself the way I wanted. [Participant 14, female]

As the excerpt above clearly indicates, the participant highlighted that they were used to writing in English only in writing classes, but in this implementation, she had chance to practice English writing outside, which resulted in language enhancement and good feelings. Corresponding to the results of Kayaoğlu and Erbay Çetinkaya (2018), who found that their participants emphasised that thanks to mobile phones they could practice English outside school whenever and wherever they wanted, I found that my students were happy with ubiquitous learning opportunity of WhatsApp©. This finding also supports one of the most important attributes of m-learning, that is, ubiquitous presence /spontaneity (Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011). Mobile phones with WhatsApp© allowed anytime and anywhere learning as these small and portable tools helped my students practice what they learned in the classroom outside.

The thematic content analysis also led to the development of affective improvement theme which groups together emotional factors and internal feelings that could affect student learning such as anxiety, motivation, inhibition, and self-confidence. Affective sub-themes that the thematic content analysis led to are decreasing anxiety of making grammar mistake (n=10), decreasing speaking anxiety (n=4), writing without evaluation/grade anxiety (n=1), increasing student motivation (n=6), encouraging them to participate in the written communication more (n=2), participating in writing activities easily thanks to mobile phones (n=1), encouraging them to participate in face-to-face writing sessions more (n=1), encouraging them to speak in English more (n=2), motivating them to search more about new English phrases (n=1), feeling more comfortable in writing classes due to teacher familiarity (n=1), feeling relaxed due to the teacher's funny and sincere mood (n=1), and increasing self-confidence in writing in English (n=3), making them feel happy and comfortable (n=7), feeling valuable as somebody cares about and contact them (n=1).

One of the highly referred sub-themes under the category of affective improvement is decreasing anxiety of making mistake. To illustrate, the following excerpt shows how English written interactions through WhatsApp© decreased not only their English writing but also speaking anxiety:

> I can say that it was quite beneficial and constructive for me, and even I want this implementation to continue in summer holiday. I can say that I am much braver in writing and speaking since we started writing via WhatsApp©. At the

very beginning, I felt a little bit afraid and hesitant as I was anxious about making mistake or using an incorrect word, but now I can write without feeling anxious of making mistake. [Participant 19, female]

The excerpt above represents affective improvement quality in the sense that while the participant had the fear of using inaccurate English at the outset, she felt really comfortable during and after the implementation. This comfort, in turn, encouraged more student engagement and participation. Emotional factors are vital in language learning, for when their affective filter is high, their defence mechanism is on, which makes them remain silent to protect themselves. Teachers should first lower this filter to make them again responsive. This implementation was useful to lower my students' affective filter as I showed them that communication matters most, and I was really interested in what they said rather than how they expressed it. This attitude of mine encouraged my students not only to chip into discussion through WhatsApp© but also participate more actively in face-to-face writing sessions in the classroom. This finding is in line with the ones of several earlier studies such as reduced anxiety (Lan et al., 2007), learner engagement (Kaur, 2017), increased classroom participation (Yang, 2012), high student involvement (Andujar, 2016), to list but a few.

Increased self-confidence is another affective improvement sub-theme. Building self-confidence is vital not only for school but also outside world. The following excerpt best exemplifies how interacting with my students through WhatsApp© inspired confidence in them:

I find this implementation both beneficial and entertaining. I think it was really good to cover spontaneous and diverse topics. Frankly speaking, writing without using dictionary etc. or preparing beforehand increased my self-confidence. I realised my potential more and understood that it was not really difficult. [Participant 27, female]

As is seen above, the student emphasised how the activity boosted her self-assurance in her English writing ability, for she managed to see that she could make herself heard without consulting to any sources or getting academic help from others. Self-confidence improvement is one of the most important study findings in that it is the only way to ensure an improved performance in writing or any other language skill. In a parallel way, in their study focusing on reading, Lan et al. (2007) found enhanced oral reading confidence among students, which shows the potential of these mobile devices to make our students believe in themselves, thereby questioning their inner critical voice.

Another popular affective-related sub-theme is the feeling of happiness and comfort. Several students reported that informal writing focusing on content rather than accuracy and fluency and knowing that their teacher was deeply interested in what they wrote made them feel happy and comfortable. The following excerpt can exemplify these feelings:

WhatsApp© implementation was a beneficial one in that it enhanced our texting language and improved the relationship with our teacher. Even it made me feel happy/good as if I was pouring out my grieves to my friends. I think the sincere and daily talk on WhatsApp© are much more beneficial than the scientific talks we do in speaking classes, for we become more comfortable while talking about daily staff. Also when the teacher's approach is sincere, we can speak without feeling bored. [Participant 31, female]

As is seen above, feeling relaxed and happy is vital for language skill enhancement. As the student highlighted, when the distance between the teacher and students is shortened, they feel comfortable and happy. This naturally reduces their anxiety and increases student receptivity. The Turkish teaching and learning culture values teacher authority in that students always keep a formal distance with the teacher to show their respect. This distance unfortunately may hinder student learning particularly in social fields where close relations are vital. Therefore, as is seen above, when students feel how close their teachers are, they may feel more eager to participate in. This finding is in line with the results of Andajur (2016), who found that WhatsApp© could reduce the formal distance between the teacher and students and thus they felt more relaxed in his quasi-experimental study.

Communication betterment is concerned with close relationship with the teacher and parties knowing each other much better. 32 participating students emphasised the fact that this genuine interaction outside the classroom offered chances to both parties to know each other far better and thus have close relations. The following excerpt best shows how the reduced formal distance between the two parties could yield to good results:

> In this way I learned some daily phrases faster and the most positive effect of this implementation was that a different bond was created between us and our teacher. Sometimes I cried while writing some messages to her, and sometimes I shared some secrets with her which I could not tell other people. And this was quite valuable. We became like friends rather than having different than the traditional teacher-student relation, and I had chance to know her better. [Participant 14, female]

As the excerpt above shows, when my students saw how sincere and close I was, they felt more comfortable. As Turkish education system is teacher-centred in that teacher is the main authority and their presence and importance are unquestionable (Balçıkanlı, 2010), they were surprised to see a teacher with whom they could communicate easily at the very beginning. However, later they felt relaxed and this comfort increased their receptivity and active participation. This finding is in line with the result of Andujar (2016), whose quasi-experimental study on the academic potential of WhatsApp© on 3rd graders showed that the participants regarded this implementation valuable as it reduced the formal distance between the teacher and the students and made the students feel more relaxed. Similarly, in their SMS study with groups of students, Kayaoğlu and Erbay-Çetinkaya (2018) found that the interaction within the group and collaboration helped them know group members better, and this helped them socialise.

Gratification theme contains sub-themes related to student interest, joy, and entertainment: getting pleasure and enjoyment (n=9), increasing student interest (n=9), and avoiding boredom of academic writing (n=2). In the following excerpt, the student reported how he enjoyed the interactions particularly due to my effort and sincerity:

> First of all, my general problem with English is that I cannot understand how I improve, and therefore I can't say how it benefitted me. However, I can say that it entertained me and helped me practice. What made the activity valuable is not the benefits it offered but that you were in contact with me and other students, showed that you did not write us reluctantly, and the communication with you was entertaining although some of the topics were commonplace. I think that if we had another teacher other than you, the activity would not have been so pleasing. [Participant 43, male]

The excerpt clearly indicates the pleasure and enjoyment the student got from the interactions. He mostly associated this with my attitudes towards them, noting that my willingness, ambition, sincerity, and humorous tone showed them all that the teacher valued them much. Although Kayaoğlu and Erbay-Çetinkaya (2018) conducted an SMS-based collaborative writing activity, their findings are similar in that their participants reported how they enjoyed the collaborative activities with their peers. In the current study, this enjoyment mostly resulted from positive teacher attitudes, teacher care, and first-time educational use of WhatsApp©.

Another gratification-related sub-theme is increased student interest. For instance, the following student reported how the activity increased her interest towards English: "Of course, it had benefits. First, it helped me think in English, and later it increased my willingness to produce orally in English. That the topics were diverse increased my interest and encouraged me to write in English more" [Participant 22, female]. The excerpt shows that the writing prompts that I designed were about diverse topics, and this variety increased their interest and encouraged them to participate more. In line with this finding, Koohestani et al. (2019) found that their healthcare professional students' interest and motivation increased when mobile phones were used in their courses. I observed that when the topics attracted their attention, they were more engaged and eagerly chipped into the interactions. This diversity naturally avoided boredom associated with rule-governed academic writing, another gratification-related sub-theme I found in the current study. One student touched on this issue as follows: "That the writings were not in the form of question-answer but interactive satisfied me. Using English for solely academic terms were quite boring in the classroom, but seeing that I managed to use English for daily topics thanks to these interactions made me happy" [Participant 9, male]. The quote shows that this kind of daily topics could increase student interest and avoid boredom that is generally associated with academic writing due to its rules, negative feedback, and the requirement to produce several drafts. This finding about increased student interest was also found by Andajur (2016), who saw that his 3rd grade writing students were highly involved in the activity and showed their interest in the field. Therefore, as Özdamlı and Çavuş (2011) highlight, content is one of the basic elements of effective m-learning, and therefore, teachers could negotiate it with their student to design topics that serve well for their needs and wishes so that their interest and engagement could be increased.

Personal growth theme should be understood as self-improvement that covers themes such as learning new things about oneself, developing new skills, and becoming responsible. The thematic content analysis enabled me to identify the following sub-themes: improving the ability to express themselves well in English (n=8), knowing their own ideas and themselves far better (n=5), evaluating their own capacity well (n=4), using time well (n=2), realising their own mistakes (n=2), managing their own learning (n=1), learning how to look at things from different aspects (n=1), learning how to think in English well (n=1), contributing to their personal growth (n=1), and learning new things from the teacher (n=1).

The following excerpt best shows how these written interactions through WhatsApp© enhanced the students' ability to express them clearly in English: "These interactions were useful in helping us practise what we learn in the classroom. As we did not use any dictionary while replying to your prompts, we explored diverse ways of expressing ourselves". [Participant 28, female]. The findings also showed that thanks to the activity the students knew themselves better as exemplified in the following quotations: "Some questions helped us analyse our personality, and these kinds of prompts were beneficial to have information about the nature of people" [Participant 5, female], and "Later in time when the questions become more detailed, I both realised that I had some ideas about my personality that I was not aware of and I knew you better" [Participant 9, male]. Both reported that their answers to the prompts on particularly personality and hypothetical situations brought some details about their

personality to light, and this exploration contributed to self-knowledge. Another self-improvement-related theme is self-improvement, and the following excerpt can indicate how the implementation offered the student the chance to evaluate her capacity well: "These interactions helped me evaluate to what extent I could feel relaxed and I am proficient while I was talking English in my daily life and clarifying what I experienced yesterday or something else" [Participant 14, female]. The student reported that her mistakes and hesitancies all helped her realise her current academic proficiency. Besides, two students highlighted that thanks to this integration, they used their time well: "The second advantage is that I allocated time to improve my writing even it was in the evening after school. If it had not for this activity, I would have been engaged in something else (useless)" [Participant 3, male]. These findings are invaluable in that the researchers of the earlier studies did not highlight the benefits of m-learning regarding personal growth (i.e., self-improvement) to the best of my knowledge. Exploring new things about one's personality (i.e., self-awareness) is the first step of self-improvement, and developing new skills such as expressing oneself well in written English and time management are vital to make progress in a foreign language.

Lastly, the other category covers the sub-themes that I could not place in the aforementioned groups: having mind exercise (n=2), having real communication (n=2), creating a sincere and relaxing atmosphere (n=2), exchanging ideas with the teacher constantly (n=1), getting guidance about their social problems from the teacher (n=1), being more active in social media (n=1), and orienting to the new city (n=1). Two of the participants touched on the importance of these interactions to offer them mind exercise chance:

> Thanks to the questions, I tried hard to express myself well and this helped my language enhancement. At the same time, particularly the questions asked towards the end of the process were quite beneficial regarding making mind exercise. To exemplify, while we were trying to understand what a bibelot might symbolise, I concluded that we could look at objects from quite different perspectives. Later, similarly in the short story completion question, I learned how to look at an event from different aspects. [Participant 5, female]

As is seen above, the prompts that I sent to my students and my follow-up questions encouraged them to look at usual objects and events from different aspects, which lead to mind exercise in their own words. This m-learning benefit has not been documented in the findings of the earlier studies, and thus I believe that it is valuable to add to the related literature. Another benefit is having real communication through WhatsApp©. For example, the following excerpt point at this real spontaneous interaction: "In addition, as we did not know when the message would come, we did not have enough time to think about what we were going to write, and this created a more natural communication atmosphere. In other words, we did not write to each other for the sake of writing." [Participant 37, female]. As the excerpt shows, the student was satisfied with the authentic communication where they felt the need to communicate rather than feel the necessity. Another sub-theme in the other category is creating a sincere and relaxing atmosphere, which is worded by a female student as follows:

> At the very beginning, I was a little bit nervous and I was thinking for a long time before I wrote. However, the more I saw our teacher's tolerance, the more comfortable I started to feel. In this way, a fluent interaction occurred between us. Overcoming English speaking anxiety outside school increased my self-confidence. [Participant 34, female]

As the excerpt above clearly indicates, the participating students found my attitude towards them tolerant both in the classroom and WhatsApp© interactions, and this contributed to the creation of a sincere and relaxing atmosphere. When their anxiety decreased, the quality of their written interactions increased, thereby helping them build more self-confidence.

Drawbacks of WhatsApp© Writing Implementation

Despite the five principal benefit themes, I identified some drawbacks of these four-month-WhatsApp© written interactions. Totally 27 students said that this implementation did not have any challenge or drawbacks for them. The rest touched on some challenges, which I grouped into five from the highest to the lowest as follows: inconvenience (n=9), emotion-related issues (n=8), technical problems (n=3), language-related challenges (n=3), and content-related challenges (n=2).

The most frequently reported drawback theme was inconvenience, and it covers various codes such as inconvenient hours for texting/late hours (n=4), not being available (n=3), and difficulty in replying or writing superficial answers due to other assignments (n=2). The following excerpt shows how some of the students were unhappy when they felt the need to answer at late hours: "The implementation did not have any disadvantage, but some of the messages were sent at late hours, and this resulted in a little bit disconnected communication" [Participant 40, female]. I observed that my students felt the need to write as the interaction was authentic due to the interesting topics, and therefore, they felt unhappy when the communication was disconnected as they could not reply or write superficially at late hours. Similarly, Kayaoğlu and Erbay Çetinkaya (2018) found that their participants complained about SMS exchange at inconvenient time. Three of them also complained about not being available, yet they did not clarify the reasons for this inconvenience. Besides, two of my students reported that they had to answer superficially or they skipped the messages as they had assignments:

> It did not have any disadvantage. However, sometimes the messages were coming while I was doing homework or I had things to do. There were times when I replied late or I could not answer as I wished, but this is definitely my own problem; it has nothing to do with the implementation. [Participant 7, female]

The preparatory programme offers 1-year-intense English education that focuses on all language skills including reading, writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, and General English in separate classes. Naturally, the students are supposed to do several tasks, and therefore they were quite busy. Thus, although they wanted to participate in the authentic interactions, they could not produce satisfactory answers.

The second drawback theme is emotion-related issues: feeling the responsibility/pressure/need to answer (n=3), boredom resulting from frequent messaging (n=2), having bad mood (n=1), and fear to be judged by the teacher at their homes (n=1). The following excerpt best shows the pressure to reply in some students: "The only disadvantage may result from me. I felt a kind of meaningless responsibility when the messages came. However, this negative feeling disappeared the more I wrote in the interaction." [Participant 43, male]. It is seen that when the students felt that they had to write twice a week, their motivation decreased, for the atmosphere of authentic communication disappeared. However, as is seen above, the more they wrote and the interaction turned into a real communication, this negative feeling disappeared. Besides, I found boredom due to frequent messaging as a sub-theme:

It did not have any disadvantage for me. I did not feel uncomfortable as such an implementation can affect us only in a good way. However, through the end of the school, as I was bored with school and I grew lazy, I could not write, but this resulted not from the fact that it was a bad implementation. [Participant 12, female]

As is seen above, the more time passed, the lazier some of them grew as the process turned into a mechanic procedure. However, they accepted that they put the blame not on the nature of the activity but their own personality. One of the most interesting drawback sub-themes is the fear to be judged by the teacher, which was worded by a male student as follows:

Although it was not so bad, it had some drawbacks. The first challenge is that people normally can judge us at school, work or any other place, but nobody wants to be judged at their own home. This implementation could cause teachers to judge their students at their own houses. [Participant 3, male]

Although my students and I were really close not only in our face-to-face interactions but also outside school and I did not correct their accuracy problems in our WhatsApp© interactions, this student had the fear of judged by me. This may result from the fact that although he had really nice ideas, this student has accuracy and fluency problems in that I spent much time to give feedback to his papers in the classroom. Besides, he had difficulty in comprehending writing modes and their requirements. All these classroom experiences may make him think that I would judge what he wrote regarding accuracy, fluency, mechanics, and format, as I did in the classroom.

Another drawback theme is language-related issues: fear of making grammar mistakes (n=1), writing imprecisely as writing is not a serious platform like e-mail (n=1), and ignoring grammar rules as content rather than form is emphasised (n=1). One student reported this fear when she writes: "In addition, I held back for the fear of making grammar mistakes, but later I realised that I had to be comfortable." [Participant 23, female]. This fear might result from the fact that what we practised in the classroom was academic writing that requires structured written products with accurate and fluent language as well as formal tone and style, and students naturally felt hesitant. They might expect that I would do the same thing on WhatsApp© and correct all their grammar mistakes. Besides, one more student complained about the fact that as WhatsApp© is a comfortable zone and not as formal as e-mail, they did not pay attention to language accuracy: "If we had written in a serious/formal platform like e-mail rather than WhatsApp© which is a very comfortable arena, we would have written more professionally. In another words, we could have written more carefully." [Participant 44, female].

I also identified technical problems as another drawback theme: lack of Internet access (n=2) and battery problems (n=1). Although there were free Internet connection in both campus and their dormitories, and they mostly had their mobile Internet packages, two complained about Internet connection: "We had communication problems when there was no Internet access or we had battery problems" [Participant 17, male]. Here, the students also touched on battery problems. These technical problems were also documented as one of the most serious challenges of m-learning in the related literature. For instance, Al-Hunaiyyan et al. (2018) list several technical challenges such as the infrastructure, the device, application, technical support, security, technological readiness of teachers, students, and the other related parties. In their SMS-based circular writing implementation problems, Kayaoğlu and Erbay Çetinkaya

(2018) identified various issues such as credit/financial issues, storage capacity limit, difficulty of writing on a small screen as serious drawbacks of mobile phones.

Lastly, I identified some content-related challenges. This category covers issue such as difficulty in talking about some topics (n=2) and hesitancy about writing on personal issues (n=1). The following excerpt exemplifies problems with the content: "One disadvantage was that some questions were strange such as the one that asked us what we saw in the strange bibelot. I sometimes could not find things to write" [Participant 31, female]. I had a bibelot in my house which had three heads on each other: one Indian and two wolves with different expressions on their faces. I think some of my students did not like it as they could not guess what it represented. Besides, one student reported her reluctance to talk about herself: "Yep, I had some challenges. Some topics were not appropriate for me. I feel hesitant about writing about myself" [Participant 6, female]. This reluctance might result from the fact that in Turkish education system students are not used to having close relations with the teacher who has a strict authority. This student might feel hesitant to share things about herself with me, therefore.

Apart from these five categories, I found three more sub-themes such as feeling lazy and reluctant towards the end of the term and thus not writing any more, not having the habit of using WhatsApp©, and finding interaction frequency inadequate (n=1, respectively). The following excerpt shows some of the challenges:

> One disadvantage was that the messages were sent too frequently. I did not always have Internet access, and therefore I could not answer constantly. I tried to participate, yet as I do not communicate with my friends through WhatsApp©, I did not participate in the writing interactions much. [Participant 31, female]

The participant highlighted that she did not actively utilise WhatsApp© to communicate with her friends, and as MIM was not a basic communication means for her, it was difficult for her to interact with me regularly on this platform. Besides, one more student found the texting frequency inadequate: "To me, writing twice a week was not enough because we can use English only in such environments. Therefore, it could have been more fruitful if we had written every night" [Participant 44, female]. This student thought that I created "a small England atmosphere" for them, and thus wanted me to send them WhatsApp© messages every night.

Suggestions for Better WhatsApp© Utilisation in the Future

In the questionnaire I also asked my students to offer me suggestions for more successful future WhatsApp© implementations. 9 students said that they liked the implementation the way it was and thus offered no suggestions. The rest made several suggestions which I grouped into five categories as follows: content-related (n=23), time/frequency-related (n=10), WhatsApp© features-related (n=4), interaction-related (n=4), and other suggestions (n=4). Most of the suggestions were about the content of the interactions. They wanted to write about more formal, challenging, and academic topics (n=9), story completion (n=4), more personal problems and happy and sad moments (n=3), visual prompts (n=3), negotiated topics with them (n=2), the places they visit (n=1), and open-to-discussion topics (n=1). The following excerpt shows that although most of them liked talking about daily topics, several of them wanted me to start an interaction about more formal, serious, challenging, and academic topics:

In order to make the implementation more effective, students and teachers could talk about more advanced topics. In this way, we can improve our academic writing skills by learning and practising English with more challenging and academic words and phrases rather than daily style. [Participant 19, female]

Besides, some students said that they liked most the story completion task in which they were required to complete a short story. I think as this encouraged imagination and creative thinking, they enjoyed the activity much. The following excerpt exemplifies some topics that the students wanted to talk about:

That the topics are more interesting could make the activity more engaging. For example, story completion tasks could have interesting topics or questions about students' personal lives could be asked, for when the topic is about the students themselves, they could be more enthusiastic to tell. This results from the fact that everybody may not have somebody to listen to them. [Participant 9, male]

In the excerpt above, the student highlighted the importance of topics in that story completion tasks and questions about their personal problems attracted their interest most. This desire shows that my students found our WhatsApp© interactions authentic and thought that this platform could turn into an arena where they could comfortably share their personal concerns and have guidance when necessary. What is more, some students voiced their wish for more visual prompts where they could comment on a picture as such kind of tasks could attract their attention and avoid boredom: "If more visuals are used in messages, the students could be encouraged more" [Participant 16, female]. All these suggestions about the content show that content is one of the basic elements of effective m-learning, which should be understood as what the students are expected to learn, and it could be negotiated with the students based on their needs and wishes (Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011).

The students also made some suggestions about the time and frequency of messages: the need for more frequent interactions/more than twice a week (n=5), earlier hours to send messages (n=2), messaging only once a week (n=2), and continuation of texting during 1-year-prep programme (n=1). The following excerpt shows the wish to increase the frequency of these interactions: "In the future the number of messages which was twice a week this year could be increased because as we cannot practice English enough in our daily life, we can spend more time with English in this way". [Participant 5, female]. The wish for more frequent texting and English practice comes from the fact that in Turkey English not having an official status is mostly used to have education or communicate with people around the world rather than intergroup communication, and thus students generally cannot find chance to practice it outside school (Selvi, 2011). However, there were two students who complained about this frequency, noting that they had many assignments, and therefore they either ignored my messages or wrote superficially. Besides, there were two students who suggested that the interaction should take place at earlier hours, which mostly results from the fact that the classes in the preparatory programme start at 8.00, and they need to get up early.

There were also some suggestions about the interaction pattern: conducting group interactions (n=3) and matching two students randomly and asking them to interact (n=1). This was an individual interaction between the teacher and each student, yet some favoured group interactions that allow exchange of ideas and socialisation could be utilised: "For example, one topic could be chosen in the classroom and we could discuss it in a competitive atmosphere as a group" [Participant 37, female].

Some students also suggested the use of other WhatsApp© features: using voice messaging function (n=3) and adding video call function (n=1). One student justifies the use

of these features as follows: "In addition to written interactions, this environment could be turned into a more suitable one with voice records. I think trying to understand the voice records sent to us and sending an audio reply could be beneficial" [Participant 38, female]. This is again related to the lack of speaking and listening practice chance outside school in Turkey. They wanted to practice not only English writing but also speaking and listening outside classroom.

Lastly, the students listed some more suggestions which I categorised as other: giving extra grades to active participants, designing competitions and quizzes and awarding the winners, putting word limits to the messages, and asking for more rule-governed writing (n=1 for each code). For instance, one participant writes, "Quizzes about the class could be held. If the winners are rewarded, participation could be increased" [Participant 28, female].

Overall Satisfaction with the WhatsApp© Implementation

In order to find the overall satisfaction level with the implementation I also asked my students to grade the effectiveness of this implementation out of 10 (1 stands for the lowest and 10 for the highest grade). 7 students did not grade the implementation, which might result from the fact that it was the last question and might have escaped their notice. The mean rate was 8.9. The reasons for this high satisfaction were my devotion, care, care, and wonder about their ideas, the chance for both the teacher and students to know each other well, anxiety decrease and motivation and joy. Yet, they lowered the grade for the need to increase the quality of the topics and student inconvenience.

Conclusion

The current study was motivated by my observations about the penetration of mobile phones into students' daily life and the idea why they should not be utilised for writing practice, which is a problematic skill to develop in education contexts where students do not have chance to practice English outside classroom borders as in Turkey. Overall, the findings of the current study highlight the potential of WhatsApp© as an educational tool to enhance language skills and allow practice chance, offer entertainment and increase interest, decrease anxiety and increase motivation, encourage participation, offer a better communication between the teacher and the students, and help self-improvement. However, no classroom implementation is without limitations, and WhatsApp©-geared interaction was no exception as the implementation had some challenges such as student inconvenience, emotion-related issues, technical problems, content-related and language issues.

Despite the drawbacks I identified in the current study, I could argue that high mobile phone availability and popularity among Turkish students and smart phone ownership by teachers as in most cultures (see Kuwait, for instance, Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2018) could make the utilisation of mobile phones for language education easier. The benefits of the current application show that m-learning in general and mobile phones in particular could be used as complementary to traditional learning (Wang et al., 2009). However, it is impossible not to agree with Koohestani et al. (2018), who note that teachers should revise or adapt their teaching in order to enable students using their mobile devices in a proper and efficient way.

Based on my four-month-experience and my pracedemic position (i.e., both a practitioner and an academician), I could offer some implications. First, in the current study, some of my students did not want to participate and some dropped after a few weeks. I believe that at the very outset teachers should convince their students about the educational potential of WhatsApp©, as suggested by Cui and Wang (2008). For effective m-learning at tertiary level, mindset is vital in that students, teachers, and officials should be open-minded about the

possible benefits of mobile devices for learning, and teachers need to establish a positive psychological classroom atmosphere to support implementation (Koohestani et al., 2019).

Second, most of the participants expressed their wish for a better m-learning content in that they voted for more serious and academic topics, visual prompts, and other functions of WhatsApp© such as voice record and video calling. In other words, they wanted a kind of connection between what they learned in the classroom and what they did outside. Therefore, as rightly put by Hashemi et al. (2011), mobile devices play a key role in carrying learning and teaching "out of the classroom, often beyond the reach of the teacher", which could also be a threat; therefore, teachers need to "develop designs that clearly identify what is best learnt in the classroom, what should be learnt outside, and the ways in which connections between these settings will be made" (p. 2481).

Also, as suggested by Cui and Wang (2008), to increase the instructional potential of mobile phones in language learning, materials designers and teachers should devise high-quality multimedia materials that could engage learners more. Besides, mobile phone transmission systems should be upgraded to ensure high quality calling, sending, and receiving. Furthermore, teachers as one of the most important education parties should be offered training to use these technologies confidently. Also, if needed students' basic computer literacy should be enhanced. Lastly, mobile phone companies should design softwares or applications suitable for language teaching and avoid technical limitations, which are one of the most serious barriers to m-learning.

Overall, mobile phones as "the combination of miniaturization, mobility, and power that grabs today's Digital Natives" (Prensky, 2005) could have the potential of enriching language teaching and learning process and thus should be integrated into the process with careful planning by educators. However, here as Stockwell (2008) rightly notes, what is needed most is patience on the part of both learners and teachers. Learners should be offered various options and given time to get prepared for m-learning. They are expected to participate in when they observe their peers and see the benefits in time. Teachers are advised to see these novel applications from learners' perspective and give them time to test and use them. Learners also should be patient with their teachers who struggle to utilise these devices to add colour to their language classes.

As a last word, the current study has some limitations which could give direction to the future investigations. The study lasted four months. The time is short, and thus further studies could explore student experiences with mobile phones in expanded study time. Besides, future qualitative studies could transfer the findings of the current one to various parallel education contexts with different student profile so that the findings could be compared and contrasted to help practitioners and education authorities to make informed decisions. Such individual attempts from diverse contexts are invaluable "to better theorize the phenomenon of smart phone use in learning", with the own words of Chan, Walker, and Gleaves (2015, p. 96). Also, some of the participants' answers were too shallow in that they limited their messages to short answers of the prompts rather than interact with me more. Thus, further studies could clarify this issue at the very beginning of the process and exemplify desired and undesired interaction messages. Furthermore, in the current research teacher-learner collaborative approach was utilised at individual level. Future studies could explore student experiences in learner-learner collaborative activities. Besides, I collected the data via only open-ended questionnaires. An outsider perspective (i.e., peer observation) may add critical perspectives to the related research.

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