INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH STUDENTS – THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BASED TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract: *Today, more than ever, effective communication, regardless of the shape it takes, is important for every company's success. Having as a target the idea of going global, employers search for employees who know exactly how to express themselves in order to be understood efficiently and correctly, constantly ranking writing ability among the most popular skills for business graduates to possess. Nowadays, the global business image needs professionals who possess communications skills, especially writing skills since businesses want to convey their idea, a message, a concept to employees, customers, partners, contractors all over the world. We can think of a lot of reasons why writing skills are important in the business world. As communication technologies and information are having a great impact on all the aspects of the language use, written communication changes, too. The more diffused computer-mediated communications are, the more we witness a modification in the purpose of writing, the genres of written communication and the nature of the audience. For both teachers and students, writing has always been a problematic issue, due to several aspects, among which the most significant ones are: it is more time-consuming, it is not very dynamic, it is not very interactive and therefore, it is more difficult to be integrated in the structure of the course of Business English. The whole picture has changed. One of the most used platforms among students is WhatsApp, being a popular instructional learning medium. The present article is based on research using semi-structured interviews, in the qualitative phase, as an instrument for data collection, aimed to find out the students' perspective towards the use of WhatsApp group in improving their writing ability in English. The sample of the study consists of 45 students at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, first and second year of study. The author wants to research how today's technology influences the development of writing skills in Business English students, more exactly the impact of the WhatsApp groups, in the case of the above-mentioned students. The elements discussed are the following: tone, simplicity, clarity and concision. The results show that the students feel that their writing skills have improved after a period of using WhatsApp group and benefit during the teaching and learning process. It also shows that it can develop the writing ability of the students. This result is supported by the opinions of the students who gave more good responses than bad ones. Thus, the result shows that the WhatsApp group is one of the most appreciated and appropriate learning platforms for today's Generation Z.*

1. Introduction

The last decades have witnessed a lot of changes in our lives, mostly related to the appearance, incredible development of the Internet and the unbelievable technological advancement. The available technology, the interconnection created with the use of various electronic devices, as well as a change in management styles have led to an unprecedented increase in written communication (Crainer&Dearlove, 2011) The new millennium is facing an educational process in which both students and teachers use technology in fundamental ways. Students and teachers alike have access to their own source of information and the ability to learn though different platforms and communicate with teachers have driven to a more direct link to a range of different knowledge sources. The industrial Revolution 4.0., in which education is done through advanced technology, artificial intelligence and robotics, have pushed technological innovations to a higher that ever level. In this context, applying technology in developing the students' skills seems to be the only approach that can stimulate the students' enthusiasm. As Sim M. & Pop M. (2017), 'students love technology so they are likely to be excited about it and continue learning outside of school hours. If students are really excited about studying inside the classroom, they are likely to continue learning outside of it and they can do so with mobile technology'. However, this is not an easy thing to do. In order to master a language, you need to develop the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Business English students have to master writing skills as they represent one of the essential competencies in today's business world. Due to this fact, written communication has become one of the particularly important questions in teaching Business English methodology.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Being one of the foremost important communication skills in business contexts, teachers face the challenge of investigating teaching models and techniques which can be efficient in today's challenging landscape of the digital era, which is not an easy task to achieve. Researchers across the world have been examining the situation of integrating mobile technology in the educational process and its impact and value. Due to lack of time, as the university level syllabus does not provide enough time for the students to practice the writing ability in class, teachers are trying to use WhatsApp as an alternative tool to help students. Although the use of technology has proved to be helpful so far, researchers have found several problems in using technology, ranging from the right type of technology that can attract students, the right approach regarding time in using it, up to the problem of the authenticity of the learning environments. This study wants to throw some light on the idea of using different kinds of platforms in the improvement of the writing skills and the students' approach to this subject, at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea.

1.2. Research Questions

This study is based on the following questions:
1. Year
2. Specialization
3. Do you think that your writing ability has improved by using WhatsApp groups?
4. Do you think using WhatsApp groups is difficult?
5. Does WhatsApp develop your writing ability during the learning process?
6. Do you think that WhatsApp groups create interaction between students?
7. Is WhatsApp group an appropriate tool to dev**elop students' writing ability?**

2. Review of Related Literature

It is needless to say that social networks have proved to be extremely popular among young people, gaining an important place in our lives. The development of the technology has led to a change in the learning/teaching process. Generation Z students regard technology-based activities as a means of synchronous or asynchronous instruction which is founded on various tools, which seem to be extremely appealing and challenging at the same time. These activities can be applied to various subjects, including English for Specific Purposes, in our case Business English, bringing a serious contribution to the enhancement in the learning experiences of the students, in the acquisition and development of different skills. According to Naveen Joshi, *'the Industrial Revolution 4.0. has pushed technological innovations that have a fundamental disruption or change impact on people's lives. The Education world in 4.0. describes various ways to integrate cyber technology both physically and into learning '.* It is absolutely obvious that the teaching and learning process has been impacted, providing various methods which seem to be suitable for the learners' characteristics, being in clear opposition with the traditional way of approaching education. As Porumb (2020) says *'the use of new digital technologies does not exclude the use of traditional communication devices, but it is a complement to them '.* In order to master a foreign language, more exactly Business English in our case, the students must master the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading and listening are perceptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills, implying a process of organizing ideas and being creative by means of text. The writing skill is one of the most important since through the written text we can observe the writer's ability to deliver ideas and express opinions. As this is not something to be taken for granted, teachers must use technology to support the development of the writing skills. As Carrio-Pastor states *'the role of technology in the education systems all over the world has influenced the way of teaching from conventional to modern way. Technologies nowadays mostly bring positive effects towards the education world especially in learning English '.* WhatsApp is one of the most popular social-networking application that has emerged among the students as a useful and appreciated instructional learning mobile medium. A study conducted by Carrio-Pastor (2017) showed that regarding the use of WhatsApp as a medium of English Language acquisition, the students proved to be confident, independent, enthusiastic and had a positive attitude related to the topic. In 2019, Sari&Putri also presented a study having a positive result regarding the use of WhatsApp group in their writing class, where the respondents admitted that the use of this platform can intensify the interaction between the members and the effectiveness in submitting the writing assignments. This research presented WhatsApp as a medium to teach writing since *'it can help students' ability to write the text-based instruction on the application (…) besides, during the process of writing, the students can explore ideas, show expressions and increase the vocabulary '.* In 2015, a complex study was conducted by Dahlstrom et al. in 112,000 university students from the USA and 13 other countries. The conclusion was that between 2011 and 2013, there has been a significant growth in the use of smartphones for academic activities. Similar studies undergone in the European Union between 2015 and 2020 show that students, regardless of region, use their WhatsApp application as a tool for academic purposes, appreciating its mobility (learning can take place anywhere), its technology (storing and accessing resources), being conceptual (learning contents are administered using different applications so that the students can easily access the needed information) and being social (users can connect). Studies undergone on the use of messaging platforms in education show that they have potential to increase learning (Smit 2012), the students being more active in their approach (Cifuentes & Lents, 2017), having a sense of belonging (Keser H., Ozdamli F. 2012) and increasing their motivation (Sweeny, S. M. 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

In this paper, the selected approach is the qualitative type of study. The qualitative approach underlines descriptive data collection techniques, using inductive attitude in studies, in natural environments together with the opinions of the respondents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The Concise Oxford Dictionary offers the following explanation (1998) *'in qualitative studies the key concern understands the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective, finding out their opinions and feelings rather than information that can easily be shown in numbers'.* Qualitative research uses techniques including structured and semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, not only to help generate hypotheses which can be more rigorously tested with quantitative research but also to help researchers delve deeper into the quantitative research. According to Sweeny, S. M. (2020) *'qualitative interview approaches to research can be stimulating and rewarding experiences for both researcher and participants '.*

3.2. Sample of the Study

This study has been conducted at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, the sample being 45 students from the first year of our faculty (35 females and 10 males), all specializations of the faculty. The students' level in English is upper-intermediate.

3.3. Research Informants

In order to examine and get a clear image of the usage of WhatsApp platform in learning foreign languages, having clear reference to Business English, writing skills, we have chosen key informants that could provide relevant information, being chosen following the inclusion criteria:
1. students in Economics who have English selection exam scores above 80 points;
2. students in Economics who have taken Introduction to Business English Course during the first semester.

3.4. Research Instruments

The instrument of this research is a semi-structured interview, containing five questions, regarding the students' experience and perspective about using WhatsApp application in learning foreign languages. Thus, this study provided the students an opportunity to express their opinion in their own words.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

All interviews were conducted in English, being anonymous and written. The length was between 7 and 10 minutes. Each interviewee was asked to describe their personal experience regarding the usage of Artificial Intelligence apps and platforms in developing communication skills in Business English.

Table 1 (showing the characteristics of all the participants in the study)

Characteristics	
Age	18-21 years old
Female/Male	35 Female, 10 Male
Educational Status	College students

School	University of Oradea, Faculty of Economic Studies
Specialization	Accounting – 20 students; Marketing – 5 students; Tourism – 5 student; Finance-Banks – 10 students; Management – 5 students.

The first-year students in Economics, the study programs of Finances-Banks, Accounting, Management, Marketing, and Economy of Commerce, Tourism and Services were the respondents to the five questions in the questionnaire. The total number of respondents was 45 students and the representation of each study program is seen in Figure 1.
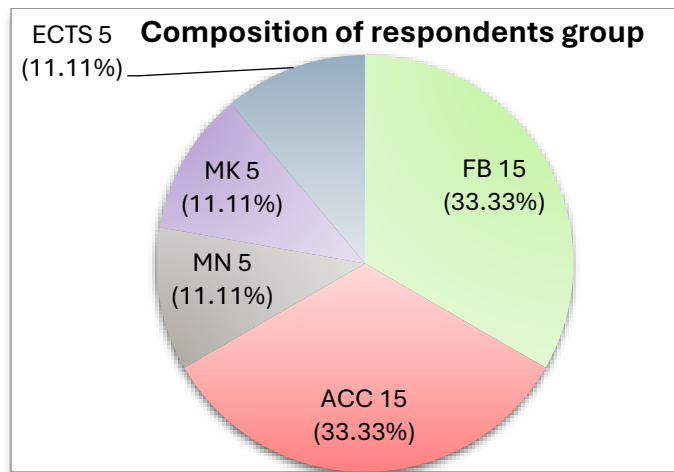

Figure 1. Number of respondents in each study programme
Source: own design on the basis of the data received from the respondent students

A synthesis of the positive or negative responses of the 45 respondents to questions 1-5 is presented by the chart in Figure 2.
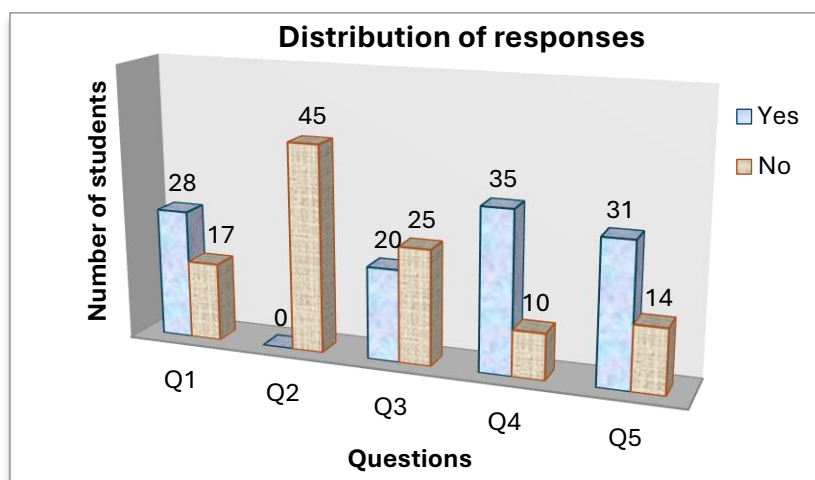

Figure 2. Replies (Y/N) to the questionnaire (Qs 1-5)
Source: own design on the basis of the data received from the respondent students

The students' perception on how the use of Whatsapp groups has helped, helps or can help them, according to their answers to the five questions in the querstionnaire, can be found in Figure 3.
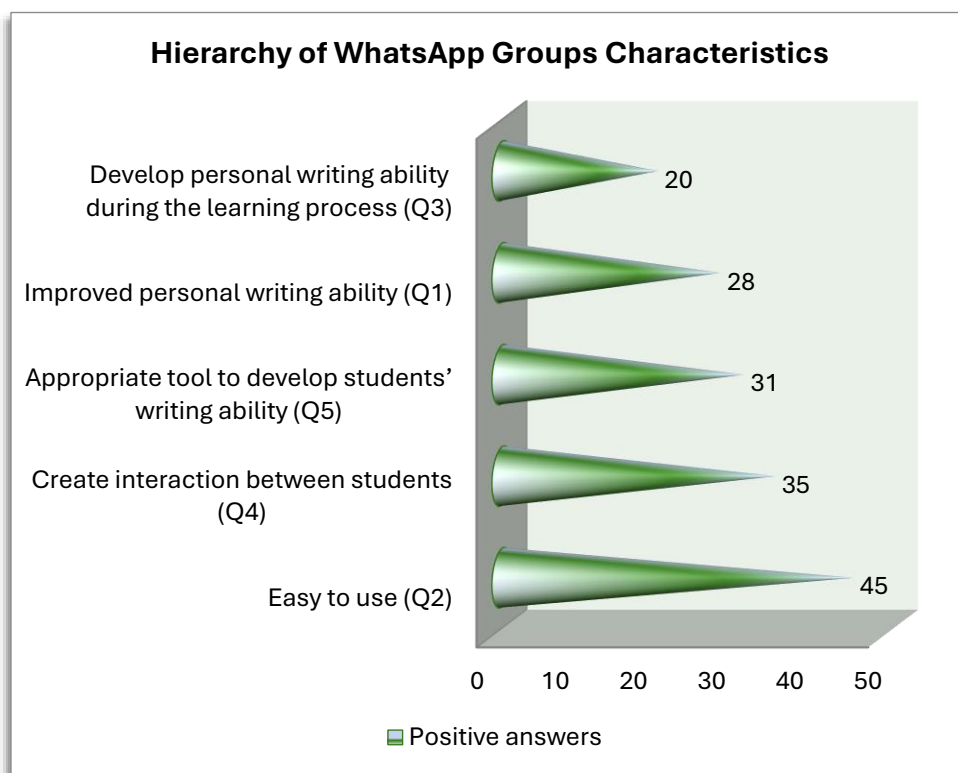

Figure 3. Perception of WhatsApp groups usefulness
Source: own design on the basis of the data received from the respondent students

4. Conclusions

We are all living in a digital era where the students' lifestyle is synonymous with the use of technology-based gadgets, where instant messaging, video sharing, blogging and podcasting represent the reality of our daily lives. These realities have started to shape the way people are formed and educated, due to the increasing time, scope and frequency of use. The high number of people using the programs based on people interaction, between individuals and groups, have led to the conclusion that the students' need for interaction and for these networks is immense. After the introduction of web based social network, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the appearance of messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, BBM and Line, proved to be a great success. However, it has taken quite a long time for these platforms to be used in education. The studies undergone in the field of Business English acquisition in the European Union countries have shown that these apps have both positive and negative effects over different variables, such as motivation, social interaction, academic success and communication; as negative effects, we can mention concerns regarding privacy, getting beyond the limits in personal relations, losing attention and excessive use. The present study shows that students consider that using WhatsApp group can develop their writing ability, producing a positive effect and a visible development in writing skills. The incorporation of WhatsApp group in Business English courses

encourages the students to establish their learning goals as well as the level of their implication in the activities. The students admit that, having the possibility of peer correction, giving comments and having discussions about the topic with the others engaged in the activity can have a visible improvement in their writing ability. The fact that this platform gives the chance to share information and knowledge also comes as a support in building interaction among students. Thus, mobile technology, more exactly the use of WhatsApp application in improving the writing skills in Business English is definitely an alternative to traditional teaching. It has impacted the students' interests in accomplishing the educational tasks, raising students' satisfaction and generating a greater collaboration in their activity. Moreover, the use of this App encourages the students to be more active and supportive with their peers, commenting, discussing and correcting on the topic. On the other hand, the students are familiar with this type of interaction, finding it enjoyable and appropriate for the improvement of their writing skills. Analysing the results of this study, we can conclude that students find technology-based tools as having a positive impact on the development of their writing skills, and the use of WhatsApp as a helping application in Business English courses is welcomed substantially. It should be noted that the above-mentioned app has the potential of a natural educational technology and the qualities by which it contributes to education a real technological support.

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