WhatsApp: An Online Platform for University-Level English Language Education

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Abstract
Technology has developed immensely and its role in the aspects of learning a language has grown bigger and bigger. Among the university level students, WhatsApp at present is getting into the frontline as one of the most widespread online social networking platforms concerning to language learning. The research work undertaken tries to understand if university level students consider WhatsApp as a significant learning platform that can develop and support their language learning skills. Moreover, , the research work focuses   on the routine practices or use of WhatsApp by students. The outcome of the survey data reveals that students consider that WhatsApp may be utilized as a teaching cum learning online platform to assist them in the process of language learning. They also highlighted the necessity of imitating language courses associated with WhatsApp, integration of technology through WhatsApp for the access of class materials with a set of objectives and outcomes explicitly focused on learning language to create meaningful experiences for students. Pedagogically, the study concludes by emphasizing the efficacy and prospective role of WhatsApp in improving the capability of students with regard to learning a language at university level.
Keywords: English language learning, e-learning, survey study, use of technology, WhatsApp

Introduction
The widespread employment of smartphones by students at university level in various parts of the world indicates that smartphones have become an important element of their e-routines. In addition, subscribing to unlimited data plans, students gain internet access by using high-speed Wi-Fi connectivity at home and on university campuses. The development of operating systems such as Symbian, IOS, Windows Mobile, and Android enhances smartphone usage in the present age. Android in particular, garners users' interest due to the advancement of hundreds Android oriented applications. The accessibility of the Internet via smartphones permits students to explore various applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, and GO SMS Pro (Jadhav, Bhutkar, & Mehta, 2013). Interaction with members of family   as well as friends is feasible by varied asynchronous as well as synchronous communication tools like Viber, Line, WeChat, BBM, KakaoTalk, Skype, Twitter, and WhatsApp (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Mobile devices offer prospects for education by letting students to access content related to courses and converse with their course instructors and peers (Shih & Mills, 2007; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Richardson & Lenarcic, 2008; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2008, 2009; Nihalani & Mayrath, 2010). The universal existence besides the unique aspects of Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) apps present in smartphones possesses the tenacity to foster a competent and supportive learning and learning platform. Rambe and Bere (2013) state that, the implementation of MIM apps in smartphones for educational motives at university level requires exploration to the fullest. The addition of the above tools to curriculum at university level is a challenge for researchers exploring in the zone of learning using mobile. Course instructors who use computers to teach are not in a comfortable position to use WhatsApp while they teach; such instructors do not realize the capacity of MIM, which provides dialogic space for students to involve in learning through collaboration (Rambe & Bere, 2013).

It is useful to understand whether students at university level could improve their English using this newest communication source at which as per (Jadhav, Bhutkar, & Mehta 2013), WhatsApp is the most-used messenger app by students studying in university. The current generation's dependence on platforms based on social networking such as WhatsApp supports the language learning aspect of students. At present, WhatsApp is known for its specialty as a widespread and well-known social networking platform; also, it is helpful to examine whether activities using WhatsApp may lead to learning of English language either through direct or indirect means. In terms of figures, nearly 1 billion people use WhatsApp across 180 countries to stay connected with family members as well as friends ("About WhatsApp," 2018). Considering the fact with regard to a number of WhatsApp users, is WhatsApp an efficient English learning base for students studying in university? What are the opinions of students studying at university on using WhatsApp concerning learning English? Can WhatsApp truly assist students in learning English language?

A sort of reaction to such questions, this study intends to inspect whether students perceive WhatsApp as a significant and constructive platform   that could enhance, strengthen, or support the aspect of English language learning. This study would guide and facilitate researchers and educators recognize that WhatsApp is potential for contributing to English language learning. Moreover, the present work suggests means in which students learning foreign language can

increase their language skills using WhatsApp, chiefly in the areas of speaking, vocabulary, writing and reading. Considering the outcomes of the present study, policymakers, educators, and course instructors can develop and incorporate relevant, essential, and innovative pedagogical inputs that make efficient employment of WhatsApp for learning English language. The present study features the following research questions:

1. What are students' common practices or uses of WhatsApp?
2. Do students consider WhatsApp as an online platform that helps to advance their English language learning? If yes, in what aspect?

Literature review and theoretical perspectives
WhatsApp as a platform for learning English
As a bonus to Facebook and Twitter, WhatsApp is a rising online platform that facilitates teaching and learning in classroom. Many online resources provide tips for educators concerned with utilizing of WhatsApp as a means for teaching. In addition, various articles are present on institutional home pages, personal blogs, and other general websites featuring about the advantages of utilizing WhatsApp in learning and teaching by employing its special aspects like chat groups, audio, videos, and graphics. These features facilitate real-time communication between teachers and students, allowing students to persist in learning even beyond the classroom. WhatsApp's exclusive features motivate students to connect and correspond in any language with anyone in the world. Nevertheless, one should have the understanding and familiarity with English to exploit the application, as it features the application of English in all its aspects. As a whole, all of the above-said aspects of WhatsApp signifies that it holds the potential as a means for English language learning at university level.

The foundational ideas, which revolve in this research work, fall in line with the study (Godwin-Jones, 2008) who demonstrates that technology-based tools like WhatsApp, which can enhance communication, interaction with one person to another person besides language learning. (Gon & Rawekar, 2017) state that WhatsApp has become a new and convenient platform for teaching and teaching with which teachers can be present anywhere and at any time. (Rambe & Chipunza, 2013) and (Riyanto 2013) also emphasize that WhatsApp could be utilized as a means to enhance students' language skills, as it provides students the chance to present their opinions in an open platform. Special features available in WhatsApp have the capacity to boost students' dynamic participation in EFL classrooms (Baffour-Awuah, 2015) and inspire them to get involved in purposeful activities with a special emphasize on effective learning outcomes (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). WhatsApp supports a great number of functionalities that gives chances for pedagogical rethinking (Conole & Alevizou, 2010).

(Sharma and Shukla, 2017) conduct a sociological study regarding students' utilization of WhatsApp concerning frequency, reasons, fulfillment of academic and personal needs, most-used features, and the technology's influence on their academic performance to recognize the means in which WhatsApp is utilized by the younger generation. Regarding collaborative research projects, (Ngaleka & Uys, 2013) study the   deployment of WhatsApp through a group of students studying undergraduate course (Alghazo & Nash, 2017), investigate WhatsApp's impact as a tool to manage classroom concerning students' accomplishment and in-class behavior. The study utilized an

experimental as well as control group, and the results proved that there was no major variation between both the groups regarding course achievement, though WhatsApp had a constructive effect by lowering absentees in the class and missed assignments, an indication of positive class behavior.

From the perspective of learning a language, (Salem, 2013) explores WhatsApp's impact in learning the English language in Kuwait and Gutiérrez-Colon et al. (2013) study the aspect of WhatsApp in learning English. (Alsaleem, 2014) finds that utilizing WhatsApp as an authentic platform to enhance writing, vocabulary, word choice, and communication in English, students were in a situation to meet the linguistic, grammatical, and functional objectives of the language course. (Gasmi, 2014) explores the impact, potential benefits, and limitations of utilizing WhatsApp to develop writing skills of Omani students. (Allagui, 2014) explores the WhatsApp's effectiveness in enhancing undergraduate students' basic EFL writing skills at university level, finding those students' motivation levels for writing increased while using WhatsApp.

Aburezeq & Ishtaiwa, (2013) try to comprehend WhatsApp's effectiveness on interaction in an Arabic language-teaching course. They found out that WhatsApp developed three varieties of interactions: student-content interaction (54%), student-student interaction (71%), and student-instructor interaction (42%). The study in addition recognized that WhatsApp provided a virtual space for expressing ideas, communicating, and exchanging information. (Han & Keskin, 2016) observe the influence of WhatsApp tasks on students' speaking anxiety at university. The results of the study brought forth the views that students' EFL speaking anxiety was considerably diminished owing to their employment of WhatsApp during the language acquisition process. In addition, (Samaie et. al,2016) study WhatsApp's efficiency for peer -and self-assessments of oral language proficiency, aiming to look at the dissimilarities between mobile-assisted self and peer assessments, procedural differences between mobile-assisted self and peer assessments, participants' attitude change toward both assessments, and reasons for attitude changes.

Theories of learning in the WhatsApp platform
The present study makes use of the theories of incidental learning, active learning, activity, community sharing, and learning communities, that acknowledge the notion that collaboration encourages learning. WhatsApp encourages the creation of an online group to learn and teach within students who work together while taking part in course exercises. WhatsApp as a medium advances the growth and spread of information among participating and communicating students by collaborative learning exercises (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). WhatsApp interventions persuade students to make enquiries that can be immediately addressed while taking an interest in a helpful, intuitive, and collective group (Rovai, 2002).

Much research examines online platforms for education; in particular, research work related to reading comprehension along with learning vocabulary employ concepts concerning incidental learning to elucidate patterns of learning and behaviors (Shahrokni, 2009; Chun, & Plass, 1996; Akbulut, 2007). In an educational course, incidental learning leads to unplanned or unintentional learning, thereby resulting in both non-academic and academic activities (Kerka, 2000). Incidental learning is successful by means of solving problems, social interaction, repetition, and observation (Rogers, 1997), and in addition when tasks are completed in an online

setup (McFerrin, 1999). Holzinger, Pichler, Almer, and Maurer (2001) state that incidental learning from the viewpoint of education and technology would incorporate the theory of (Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995), who proposed that learning occurs through mistakes, doing, networking, and a sequence of interpersonal experiments. Likewise, (Herrmann, Fox, & Boyd, 2000) state that the   combination of technology with education leads to both optimistic and pessimistic outcomes from an intentional or unintentional view. Therefore, it is implied that employing online technologies in education may have both negative and positive impact on students.

According to Nagel and Kotzé (2010), incidental learning happens in a community of practice and focus must be on the idea of interpersonal relationships, community building, and social networking as other ways to learn, observe, and experience. Such activities could happen while people with related interests use WhatsApp. In a pedagogical setting, members of the group can continue to have dynamic and significant educational experiences.

The activity theory at individual, community, and technological levels forms a theoretical outline for collaborative learning process. Activity theory encourages teachers to reintroduce information (Mercier & Higgins, 2013) where online collaborative learning approaches are implemented in online communities to enhance language-learning activities. This theory may help teachers identify important aspects of students' requirements to take in online interaction.

(Engestrom,1987), proposes community sharing, which is an additional theoretical basis for the current study. Engstrom proposes that activity theory includes rules that encourage the division of work between the subject and learning group. The community sharing theory examines the social and mechanical parts of activity pertaining to society (Bertelsen & Bødker, 2003). Group or externalization is reflected as a social scenario of the framework and a group level of activity theory. In an experimental study, all students are occupied with the activity system whereby their involvement in learning depends on social correspondence; they articulate their opinion to form a community focused on learning.

Anecdotal facts as well as research have revealed both negative and positive impacts of the   deployment of WhatsApp for teaching and learning purposes. Positive aspects include enhanced communication between teachers and students (Khatun & Al-Dhlan, 2017), strengthening of students' learning and enthusiasm (Hamad, 2017), creation of pleasant platforms and in-depth acquaintance with fellow students, better access to learning materials, as well as greater teacher availability (Veeresh & Kumara, 2017). Contrarily, negative aspects include annoyance caused by excessive irrelevant messages (Najafi & Tridane 2015), internet addiction, and its effect on educational triumph as well as mental health (Kakkar, Ahuja & Dahiya, 2015). Owing to this varied influence of WhatsApp, a debate still exists about whether WhatsApp should be seriously considered as a platform for learning, particularly at university level.

Method
Participants
This study that deals with the quantitative survey was implemented at King Saud University. The survey's main motive was to understand students' common practices or uses of WhatsApp and

their opinions on WhatsApp as an online educational platform.. The survey would be resourceful in recognizing the basic problems which are of worry to students who happen to use WhatsApp for learning the English language. The study randomly chose 300 students studying from King Saud University to take part in present survey through convenience sampling.

Instrument and data analysis
A questionnaire was used in this survey study consisting of two parts. Section A focuses on students' demographic information and language usage. The demographic data gathered was students' language abilities and gender. Section B gathers information about students' use of WhatsApp and Section C consists of 14 items about learning English using WhatsApp. The elements in Section C were obtained from Blattner and Fiori (2009), who studied English learning via Facebook. The aspects were modifiedon needs analysis, experiences and observations of dynamic users of WhatsApp. A 5-point Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was utilized to collect students' responses. The items in this section emphasize the enhancement of students' language skills and confidence, motivation and attitude towards learning English language.

To analyze the demographic facts and practices of WhatsApp, percentages and frequency were used. To describe the elements in section C, frequency, mean score and percentages were extensively utilized to reflect students' views on WhatsApp as a learning platform platform for English.

Findings and Discussion
The forthcoming three sections discuss the outcomes of the survey. The first section deals with the demographic facts; next section briefs students' common practices and uses of WhatsApp. Section three addresses WhatsApp's function as an online platform platformthat helps students to learn English language.; i.e., whether WhatsApp has positive effects on (1) the enhancement of students' language skills and (2) students' confidence attitude, and motivation concerning English language learning.

Demographic data
Overall, 163 male (54%) and 137 (49%) female students participated in present study. Of all the students, 20% used English to converse through WhatsApp while 80 % of the students used both Arabic and English.

Students' general uses of WhatsApp
All the 300 students were involved in the study used WhatsApp; it had already become a part of their e-routines for communication. Almost 78% of the students answered that they were part of a WhatsApp group and the remaining 22% said that they were not a part of any WhatsApp group.

WhatsApp as an online platform that facilitates English language learning
By considering the mean scores of all the sixteen aspects given in Table 1, a large number of students answered that they agreed that WhatsApp could serve as an online platform to facilitate English language learning in terms of the enhancement of (1) language skills and (2) their

confidence, attitudes and motivation towards English language learning. As a whole, the students gave a positive response that WhatsApp helps them inculcate a more positive attitude concerning learning English as a second language (mean score = 3.65), improve their communication skills (mean score = 3.88), enhance their reading skills (mean score = 3.85), improve their writing skills (mean score = 3.82), learn new vocabulary (mean score = 3.81), and enhances their confidence to write, read, and communicate, respectively (mean score = 3.78, 3.65 and 3.75). These positive views towards WhatsApp as platform a platform to facilitate English language learning may be attributed to the view point that online platforms present an authentic communicative space. Such experiences might lead to learning L2 and broaden students' understanding of subject matter taught in the classroom. They create a feasible ambience by giving scope for the students to interact collaboratively concerning clarity, peer assessment, and other language-related perspectives (Mwakapina, Mhandeni, & Nyinondi, 2016).

Table 1 *WhatsApp as an online platform platform that facilitates English language learning*

	Statements	SD (1) %	D (2) %	SLA (3) %	A (4) %	SA (5) %	M
1	WhatsApp helps me improve my communication skills in English	6	13	20	39	22	3.88
2	WhatsApp helps me improve my writing skills in English	9	14	13.4	53	10.6	3.82
3	WhatsApp helps me improve my reading skills in English	6	15	15	34	30	3.85
4	WhatsApp enhances my confidence to write in English	11	13.3	15.7	38	22	3.78
5	WhatsApp enhances my confidence to read English material	7	15	13	44	21	3.65
6	WhatsApp enhances my confidence to communicate in English	5	15	20	35	25	3.75
7	WhatsApp motivates me to communicate in English	2	19	15	32	32	3.75
8	WhatsApp motivates me to read in English	3.6	14.4	21	36	25	3.64
9	WhatsApp motivates me to write in English	4	19	15	34	28	3.62
10	WhatsApp makes learning more interesting	10.7	10.3	15	29	35	3.55

11	WhatsApp provides a base to learn English	9	16	10	36	29	3.68
12	WhatsApp helps me learn new vocabulary	10	12	17	28	33	3.81
13	WhatsApp helps me develop a more positive attitude towards English as a second language	3	10	23	42	22	3.65
14	WhatsApp makes learning easier	3	13	22	37	25	3.69
15	WhatsApp helps me tolerate language mistakes	6	16	18	38	22	3.52

Improvement of language skills

As per Table 1, although the mean scores for the majority of the items were below 4, the overall percentage of students who agreed and strongly agreed for all the aspects was above 60%.   As a result, it is obvious that students feel WhatsApp is an online learning platform. The percentage and mean scores are provided to have better idea on students' views concerning their patterns and practices of using WhatsApp to learn English.

In the present study, the students felt that WhatsApp could be an efficient online platform in which to use English. Nearly 61% of students felt positively that WhatsApp had paved the way to increase their communication skills (mean score = 3.88). Text-based communication leads to healthy interaction, thereby eliminating hurdles lack of communication like, shyness, cultural differences, lack of time , and other language learning issues faced by students in English classrooms. With WhatsApp, there are plenty of chances for all students to share their thoughts on any given topic, especially those who are intimidated to converse in class or those who require some time to plan, think, and respond. The anonymity present in WhatsApp language learning tasks may also add to the development of students' communication (Aburezaq & Ishtaiwa (2013). Almost 63.6% of students felt that they could write better after starting to use WhatsApp for the purpose of exchanging messages (mean score = 3.82). According to Alsaleem (2014), WhatsApp electronic journaling would permit university EFL teachers to include writing in their subject matter across the syllabus to assist students to increase their writing skills. In addition, 64% of students felt that their reading skills had improved while using WhatsApp (mean score = 3.85). The results of the reading skills, for the present study concurs with that of Hazaea and Alzubi (2016), who implemented an experimental study to understand the effect of mobile technologies in enhancing students' reading skills. The study's outcome showed a marginal enhancement in participants' code-breaking practices, text use, text participation practices, as well as text analysis practices while using WhatsApp. Students acknowledge that WhatsApp provides them opportunities and scope for language improvement.

Confidence

As a language-learning tool, WhatsApp helps students possess confidence in their capabilities (Hamad, 2017). Regarding the enhancement of students' confidence levels, 60% of students felt

that WhatsApp could increase their level of confidence in writing in English (mean score = 3.78). In addition, 65% of students felt that by using WhatsApp, their confidence in reading had increased (mean score = 3.65). As for students' communication skills using English, 60% of students believed that their confidence level had improved (mean score = 3.75). According to Kumar, Lian, &Vasudevan (2016), WhatsApp can improve students' confidence levels and the process of language learning concerning both spoken and written forms. (Motteram, 2013) proposes that students' reading skills could be developed by means of WhatsApp because it offers an authentic chance to converse with various people from various parts of the world using English. (Yunus & Chenzi ,2012) state that technology-based activities will increase students' confidence levels and nurture positive learning attitudes. It is understood that confidence levels are substantial concerning use of WhatsApp to improve reading skills. Henceforth, curriculum designers and textbook writers should make it a point to consider the positive aspects of incorporating WhatsApp for the enhancement of reading skills (Khalaf, 2017).

Motivation
With regard to motivation, 64% of students felt motivated largely to converse in English (mean score = 3.75). Nearly 61 % of students felt motivated by large extent to read in English (mean score = 3.64). Additionally, 62% of students felt motivated to write in English (mean score = 3.62). (Allagui, 2014) explores the usefulness of instant text messaging using WhatsApp at university level for undergraduate students and finds that students' motivation levels for writing increased when WhatsApp was implemented in the classroom. According to Awada (2016), WhatsApp is helpful in developing students' critique writing proficiency regarding rhetoric when compared to conventional modes of teaching. The present work also recommends that course instructors use mobile apps to enhance students' motivation for learning English writing. (Kumar, Lian, & Vasudevan, 2016) in their survey study discover that students were further motivated to utilize Mandarin after utilizing WhatsApp as a source to learn the language. (Plana et al.2013) in Spain probe the implementation of WhatsApp in English language learning and report that there was a rise in students' motivation concerning reading skills. (Manan,2017) finds that WhatsApp plays a critical part in motivating students to learn. In particular, motivation level of the students increased with regard to speaking in English in presentations and group discussions after using WhatsApp. The above said studies fall in line with the outcomes of this study, clearly showing that WhatsApp has a greater role with regard to the motivation of students to speak, read and write.

Attitude
With a mean score of 3.68, nearly 65% of students believed that WhatsApp provided them a base for learning English. (So, 2016) studies the utilization of WhatsApp to enhance learning and teaching at university level and confirmed that WhatsApp could bring out i nnovative opportunities to learn, promote effective communication, allow for significant feedback, offer formal and informal learning opportunities, and support collaborative learning. This precisely emphasizes that WhatsApp offers a space for students to learn English. Nearly 61% of students felt that WhatsApp helps them learn new vocabulary (mean score = 3.81). (Gürocak,2016) examines the effect of mobile learning and students' attitudes regarding this technology and, similar to this study, found that mobile language learning situations could increase students' knowledge of vocabulary and support them in learning target words. This indicates that vocabulary learning through mobile phones can be motivating. (Lu, 2008) further emphasizes that students

in general hold positive attitudes towards learning vocabulary via mobile phones. 64% of students had positive attitudes concerning WhatsApp's use in learning English as a second language (mean score = 3.65), which concurs with many prior studies that have figured out that most of the stakeholders in educational institutions show a optimistic attitude concerning the use of such technologies to learning (Bere, 2012; Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Demirbilek, 2010; Cochrane & Bateman, 2010). In addition, 62% of students felt that WhatsApp made learning easier (mean score = 3.69). This is supplemented by a study conducted by Amry (2014), at which students' attitudes were positive towards WhatsApp as it made their learning easier. This may be because technology paves the path for the self-learning process as well as easy access to data that teachers may not be capable to provide (Lam and Lawrence, 2002). Nearly 60% of students felt that WhatsApp helps them bear language mistakes (mean score = 3.52). This particular view is similar to that discussed by (Mwakapina, Mhandeni & Nyinondi,2016), who emphasizes that WhatsApp created a supportive and safe platform for learning. Students are often concerned about making mistakes while learning a language, and WhatsApp can help them stay positive and relaxed within their friendship circles. The more relaxed the students feel while language learning, the more likely they are to participate without much concern about their language mistakes.

Conclusions and Implications
In this study, we attempted to examine King Saud University students' beliefs and practices regarding WhatsApp as an online platform to learn English. The study's outcome proposes that while WhatsApp is utilized as an online platform to provide communicative opportunities, it can lead to implicit learning both outside as well as inside of the classroom. To exploit the positive aspects of WhatsApp for learning, it is mandatory to motivate students to identify, comprehend, and engage in learning opportunities using WhatsApp. This will let students to augment their levels of confidence, knowledge, competence, lifelong learning perspectives, and life skills (Mealman, 1993). In view of this, teachers can implement teaching-learning tasks that use WhatsApp both as a platform to study as well as a way for socialization. This can be accomplished in an organized way by informing the students in relation to the objectives and learning outcomes of tasks with a special emphasis on learning aspects rather than other general uses of WhatsApp.

Statement of Original Work
The authors affirm that this manuscript presents their original work.

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