

# Telegram as a teaching tool in distance education



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## Abstract:

Despite existing literature attempting to comprehend how social media platforms foster student interaction in open and distance learning settings, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the use of the Telegram messenger for encouraging student motivation and interaction in academic writing. This qualitative study takes place in a South African open distance and e-learning university and employs interviews and observations to understand how Telegram can be used to teach distance education students. The study discovered that lecturers view Telegram as a valuable pedagogical tool for promoting student motivation and interaction. The results additionally indicate that Telegram motivates students to participate in group discussions and engage with the module content. It is recommended that stakeholders reconsider their pedagogical approaches and encourage the use of Telegram to support student learning in academic writing modules.

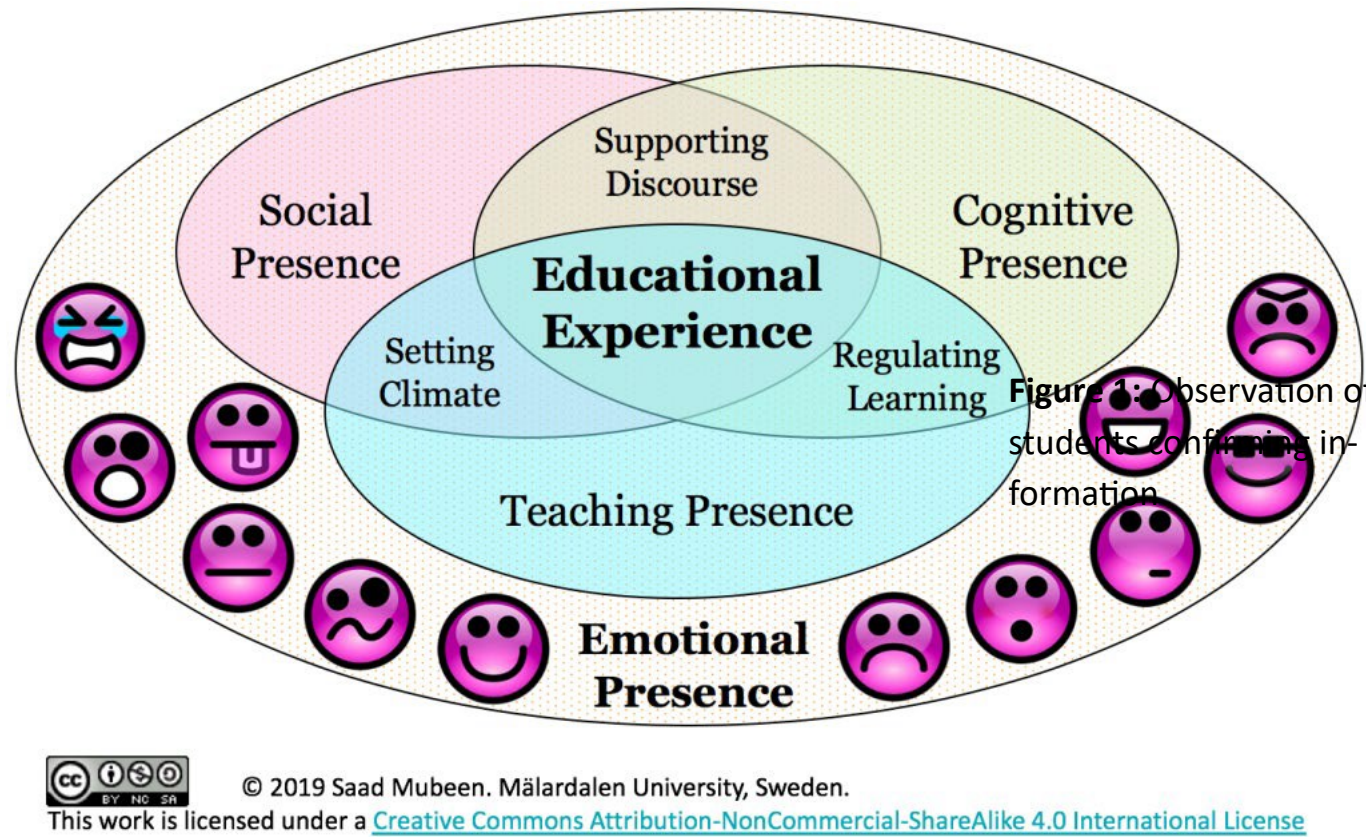
## Key words:

ODEL, e-learning, Telegram.

## Introduction:

Recent research has advocated for the integration of educational technology and social media applications into academic writing instruction (Sevnarayan, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Devkota (2021) acknowledges that students with better access to digital equipment and internet tend to benefit more, leaving their rural peers at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, Telegram, with its affordability and flexibility, has the potential to overcome geographical barriers and connect students across the world (Aghajani & Adloo, 2018; Aladsani, 2021; Swartz et al., 2022). Despite the increasing awareness of e-Learning and mobile learning (m-learning) technologies (Aladsani, 2021; Dollah et al., 2021; Sevnarayan, 2022; Sevnarayan & Mohale, 2022), lecturers often lack the necessary competencies and skills required for digital teaching, which has become the primary mode of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Machaba & Bedada, 2022). As a result, many lecturers are hesitant to use Telegram and other social media applications because they are unaware of their benefits (Dollah et al., 2021). This observation, combined with the researcher's recognition of the lecturers' limited m-learning knowledge and skills, prompted a participatory action research study investigating the use of Telegram to promote interaction and motivation in an Academic Writing module during the pandemic.

## Building a Community of Inquiry:



## Methods:

To explore the impact of Telegram as a pedagogical tool on student motivation and interaction in an Academic Writing module, this study employed an interpretive qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Holloway & Galvin, 2016) and participatory action research design. The research methods included one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and observation of the ENG321 Telegram group interactions among EFAL students. The study was conducted in University X, one of the largest mega universities in South Africa, which enrolls over 350,000 students annually. As an open distance and e-Learning (ODEL) institution, the university offers online classes instead of face-to-face instruction. The Academic Writing module, ENG321, is a mandatory English home language course for students pursuing various degrees and has 16,000 registered students and 10 lecturers.

## Results:

**To answer the first research question in this paper, the researcher asked lecturers how the Telegram group enhanced their motivation and interaction, the following are their responses:**

“Previously if we posted activities on the LMS discussion forum, very few students would answer. With Telegram, I have seen students motivating each other and encouraging each other to answer the activities and to submit their assignments. We also post short Tiktok videos on the group to motivate our students to never give up- that really helps” (Lecturer 1).

“Again, because I have not seen the group I cannot comment on the effects of Telegram on students’ motivation. As lecturers it is not our job to motivate students, we are not a face-to-face institution. At university especially, we find that students are underprepared and hence not motivated. I don’t think an app can help an underprepared student” (Lecturer 2).

“...I would say that more than motivation, Telegram increased students’ satisfaction due to all the positive and encouraging emails we have received for student support at the end of the semester. I am actually tempted to start a telegram group especially, but you need to teach me how” (Lecturer 3).

“I have been teaching this module for years and when I say these students have never been more motivated, believe me! I love how they motivate each other before and after assessments - Telegram gave these students hope. They started the semester expecting the worst from the module but ended leaving extremely satisfied with the level of support from their peers” (Lecturer 4).

**To answer the second research question, the researcher asked students how the Telegram group enhanced their motivation, the following are some of the responses of the students:**

“I love the Telegram group because it keeps me up to date with everything. I love all the encouraging Tiktok videos and all the motivation from the lecturers. This module motivates me so much because of how active the lecturers and students are. I don’t feel scared or shy to ask questions because the students are so kind, and the lecturers respond immediately” (Student 3).

“I just want to ask...do the lecturers even sleep [student laughs]. Thank you for constant encouragement 24/7. I do not think I would have made it through the semester if it were not for the Telegram group. The podcasts, vodcasts, memes and all the colour you brought to the module made this the best learning experience” (Student 4).

“I have never met such kind lecturers in my life. The support we have gotten was unmatched. I am so inspired and motivated because of the constant support we received throughout the semester. It is very rare to get lecturers who really care” (Student 8).

“I work a full time and I look at the telegram group once a day at night. If it were not for the pinned messages I would be as lost as there are thousands of messages I would have to go through. Also the fact that the lecturers and students respond immediately if there are questions is also a bonus” (Student 9).

**An observation of the 2022 ENG321 semester 1 lecturer-student Telegram group was administered to answer the third research question (1) how Telegram fosters interaction between students and to (2) discuss the lecturer-student interaction on the group.**



Figure 1: Observation of students confirming information

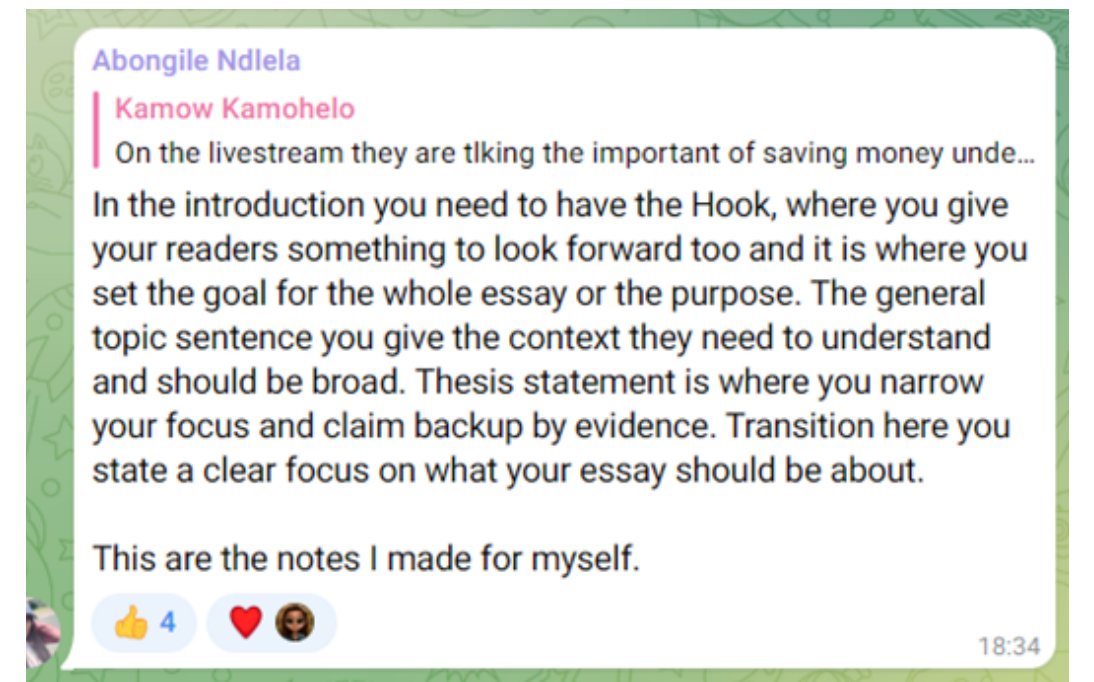


Figure 2: Students explaining content on the Telegram group.

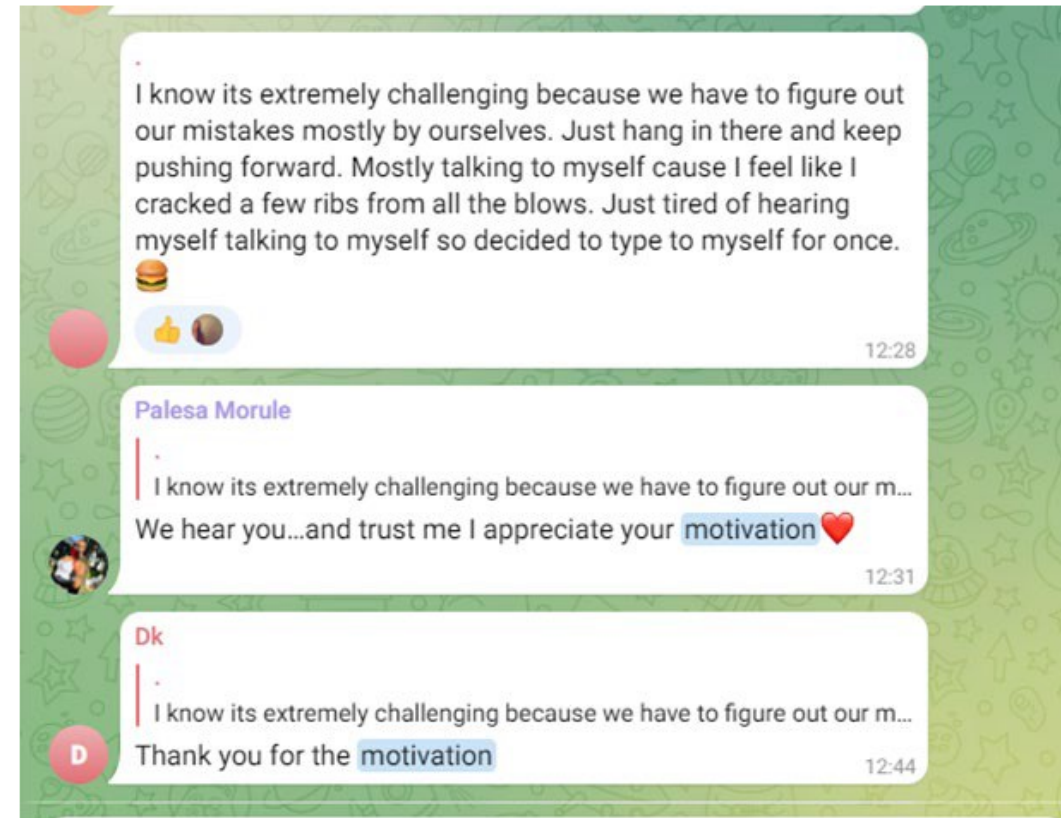


Figure 3: Students motivating themselves and each other

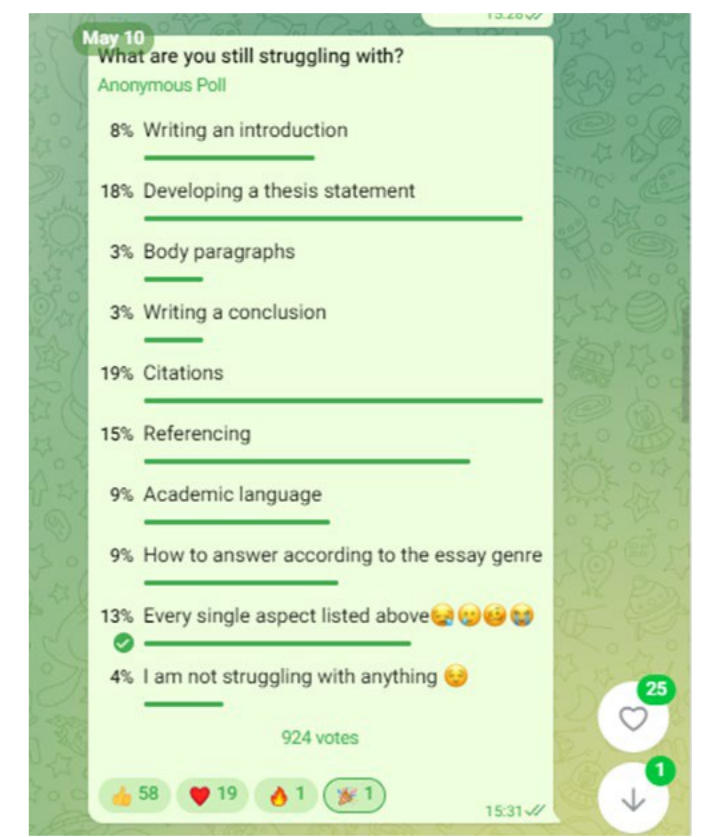


Figure 4: The creation of polls to create lecturer

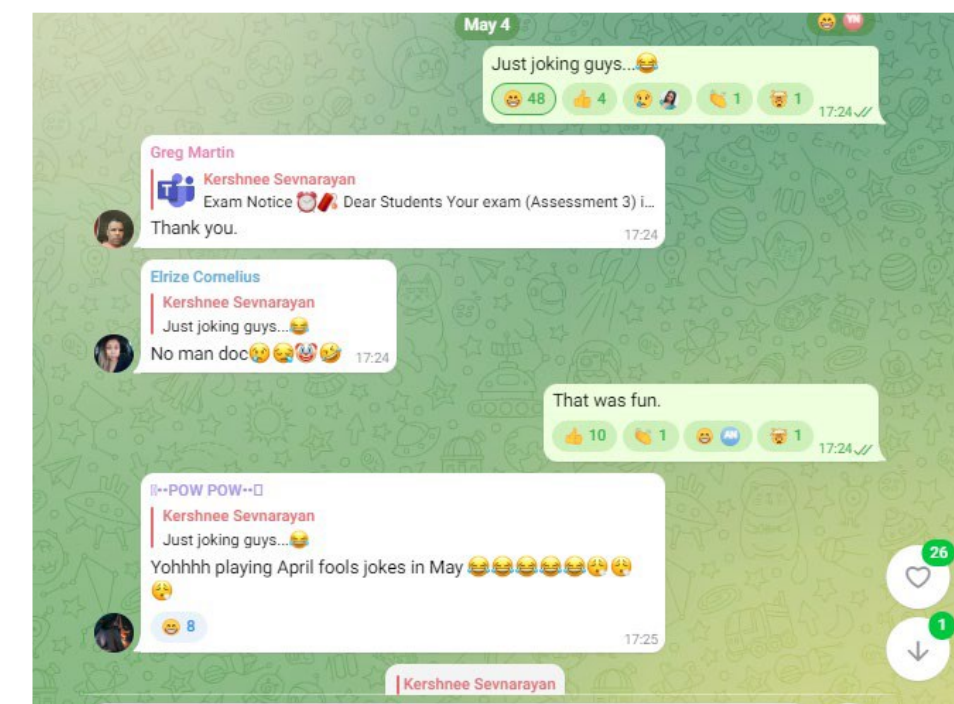


Figure 5: The use of casual language and emoticons by the lecturer



Figure 6: The use of memes by the lecturer

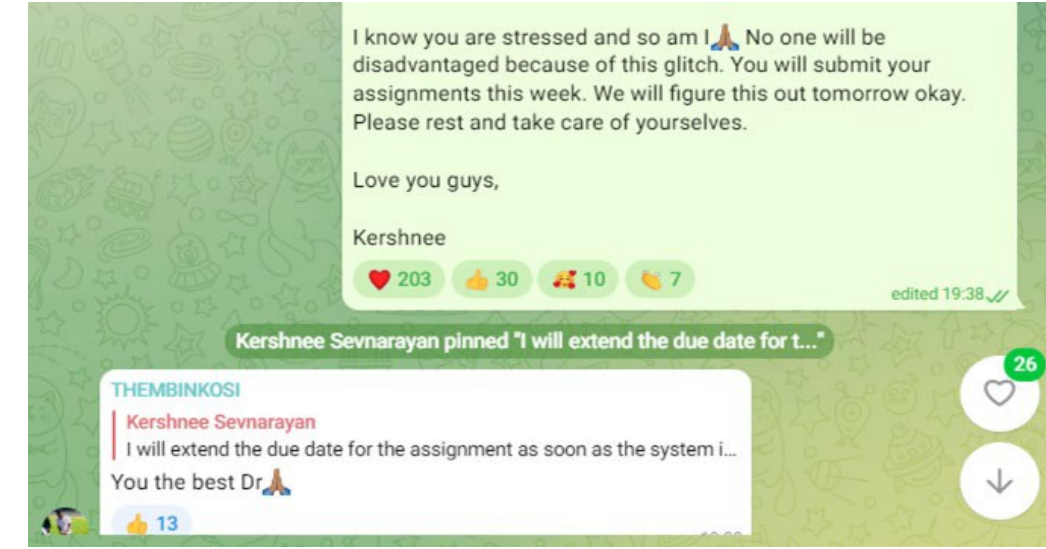


Figure 9: Lecturer being empathetic on Telegram

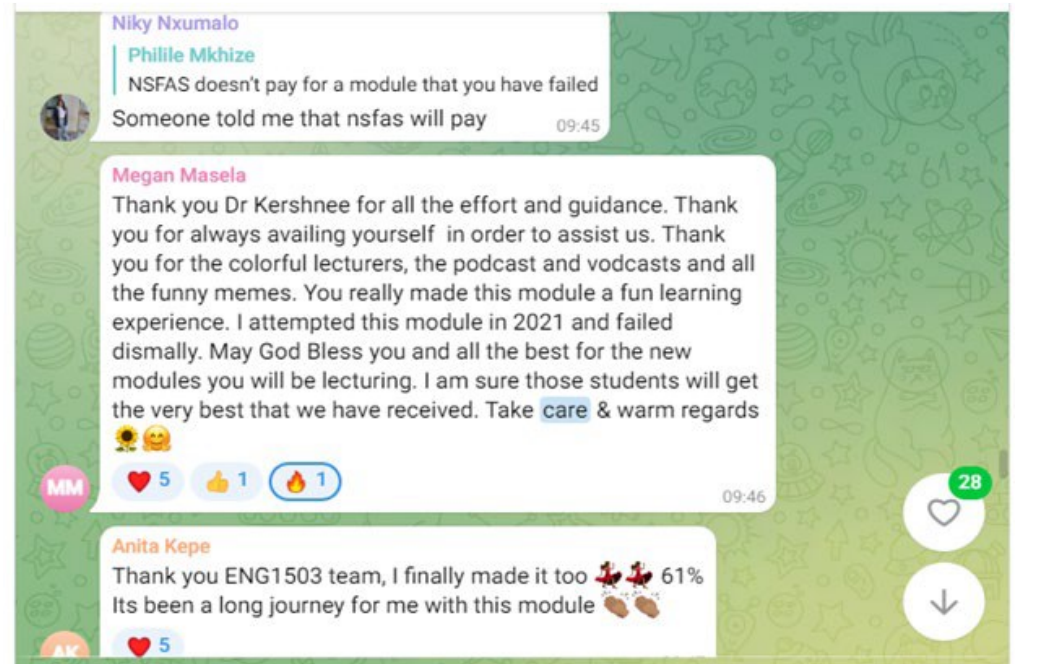


Figure 10: Student interaction, student motivation, student satisfaction with Telegram

## Discussion:

To answer the first research question, which aimed to explore how Telegram fosters student interaction and motivation, this study found that Telegram allowed for open communication between students and lecturers, resulting in active participation and high engagement in academic writing. The more interaction that occurred on the Telegram group, the fewer queries were made on the LMS. This study observed that social presence and cognitive presence were activated through the use of Telegram, which positively influenced student engagement (Garrison et al., 1999; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The second research question aimed to investigate how Telegram motivates students. The study found that the integration of technologies like Tiktok videos into the Telegram group increased students' interest in academic writing, and the responsiveness of other students further motivated students to interact within the module. Once students were engaged in dialogue, teaching, and social presence through Telegram, it positively impacted their motivation (Garrison et al., 1999; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Furthermore, the observation schedule revealed that lecturers used various strategies to interact with students, such as using polls to understand their needs, using casual language, emoticons, and memes to connect with them. Lecturers also referred students to the LMS and communicated with them on a personal level, enhancing their satisfaction in the module. The research found that students' identities had no significant effect on their social, teaching, or cognitive presence in the group under study, which is practically significant.

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