

Scroll Back to Learn: Telegram as a Conversation Hub for ESL Blended Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This innovation utilises Telegram's chat function into the online component of ESL blended learning as a real-time instructional tool as well as an accessible discussion space. It introduces a mobile-accessible solution that emulates students' everyday communication practices while supporting participation inside and outside the classroom. The uniqueness of this approach lies in its use of a familiar and known messaging app during online class instruction to further extend engagement opportunities for students who face challenges due to mobility, inconsistent class locations, or even language anxiety. In the context of language education, especially in higher education, students often find it difficult to contribute during face-to-face sessions. This tool provides a flexible platform that allows students to participate asynchronously, reassess past instructions and discussions, and reflect on shared content at their own pace. It also promotes a more learner-centred experience by closing the gap between synchronous class delivery and asynchronous learning needs. Key features include the use of Telegram for live online instruction, the ability to respond after class, chat-based interaction to reduce anxiety, accessible chat history for learning continuity, and mobile usability. Survey findings indicate that students found the platform helpful in supporting real-time learning, reducing pressure to speak up in class, and allowing them to catch up when absent or in transit. This innovation supports SDG 4 by promoting inclusive and quality education, and SDG 10 by encouraging equitable participation among students with varied learning needs.

Keywords: Telegram integration, ESL blended learning, mobile-assisted instruction

INTRODUCTION

Blended learning has emerged as a preferred instructional approach in higher education since it combines in-person and online elements to create more flexible and learner-centred experiences. Despite its support towards continuity and engagement, many online platforms currently in use are not always accessible or user-friendly for students who are on a constant move for their physical classes. Thus, tools like Telegram and Whatsapp which offer familiarity, flexibility, and ease of access become essential to support students' ongoing learning and participation (Ramalingam et al., 2021).

In the Malaysian context, recent studies have also highlighted the importance of integrating mobile platforms that reflect students' everyday communication habits. For example, Telegram has been found to be effective in supporting online engagement and learning for ESL students through its ease of access and conversational features (Mohd Dollah et al., 2021; Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2025). According to a study by Khomsah and Ariffin (2024), instant messaging applications supported communication, collaboration and engagement in hybrid ESL classrooms. Apart from that, a systematic review of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) integration in Malaysia found that mobile-assisted approaches are increasingly being applied in ESL higher education, that positively contributes to students' language proficiency and engagement (Che Mustaffa & Sailin, 2022). This innovation is conceptually grounded in MALL and Sociocultural Theory, which together inform its focus on mobile accessibility, social interaction, and collaborative language development.



Problem Statement

In a tertiary ESL learning environment, mobility-related challenges such as moving between physical classes, attending lessons in varied locations or having inconsistent access to devices can affect their ability to really participate in real-time discussions. Moreover, some students may hesitate to contribute to physical classrooms due to language anxiety or lack of confidence (Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2025). All these factors often limit opportunities for meaningful engagement, especially when online platforms have become overly formal or disconnected from students' everyday communication habits.

This issue highlights the need for lightweight, mobile-friendly tools that not only support participation and continuity, but also reflects the goals of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10: Reduced Inequalities, which calls for inclusive learning opportunities that facilitate diverse learner needs. In this context, there is an increasing need for lightweight, mobile-friendly tools that allow learners to not only engage in discussion, receive instruction, but also able to revisit class content at their own pace without having to face the pressure of synchronous interaction or rigid digital interfaces (Mohd Dollah et al., 2021).

Objectives

This innovation project aims to:

1. Integrate Telegram's chat function as an accessible online component of ESL blended learning to support real-time and asynchronous discussion.
2. Provide a flexible platform that enables ESL learners for further engagement in class interactions, reflections of their learning at their own pace, and revisiting learning materials despite mobility or scheduling constraints.
3. Investigate students' perceptions of using Telegram for class-based discussions and its impact on their learning experience.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

Telegram was utilised as an informal online discussion platform, where the instructor posted weekly instructions and discussion prompts during class time. This practice has allowed students to join and participate in discussions live, albeit their physical location, and were still able to contribute to them after class if they were unable to join due to valid reasons. The familiar chat format supported ongoing engagement and made it easier for students to connect with lesson content, even outside designated class time. This flexible, mobile-accessible design supports SDG 4: Quality Education, as it promotes inclusive and learner-centred practices, and aligns with SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, by supporting learning continuity and accessibility within varied campus environments, including those where students face mobility or location-based challenges.

To evaluate the innovation, a Google Form survey was administered at the end of the semester, comprising Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The survey explored students' experiences in terms of accessibility, engagement, confidence, and learning support. The instrument design and analytical approach were guided by previous studies on mobile learning platforms in ESL contexts (Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2025; Mohd Dollah et al., 2021). While this project relied on self-reported survey data from 31 students, the approach was appropriate for capturing authentic perceptions of learners in their natural learning environment. Acknowledging the limitation of a small sample and reliance on self-reports, the project is positioned as a preliminary evaluation that can guide future, larger-scale studies. Future work may incorporate other forms of evidence such as interaction logs, comparative performance tasks, or classroom observations to strengthen the findings.

POTENTIAL FINDINGS AND COMMERCIALISATION

Findings from Student Feedback

Responses from 31 students indicate that Telegram supported engagement and flexibility in the blended learning setting. Most students agreed or strongly agreed that Telegram helped them stay connected with class content, participate when not physically present, and review past discussions. Sixteen students strongly agreed and thirteen agreed that Telegram made it easier to engage while in between classes. Eleven students strongly agreed and fifteen agreed that they felt more comfortable sharing in Telegram discussions than in face-to-face sessions. These findings suggest that Telegram worked well for students who needed more time to respond, were moving between classes, or preferred text-based participation. A summary of responses to the Likert-scale items is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Feedback on Telegram Use (n = 31)

| Aspect | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|
| Stay connected with class content | 17 | 12 | 2 | 0 |
| Participate when not in classroom | 18 | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| Review previous discussions | 19 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| Engage while mobile or in between | 16 | 13 | 2 | 0 |
| Comfortable sharing in Telegram | 11 | 15 | 4 | 1 |
| Support English language learning | 17 | 12 | 2 | 0 |

The survey results are supported by open-ended comments from the students. Many students were really appreciative of how Telegram helped them stay updated with class instructions and announcements. One student noted that, “Telegram helped me stay updated, ask questions and be notified.” Others preferred the convenience and flexibility of accessing the platform outside class through Telegram, describing it as “fast and convenient” and saying “it saves time.”

Several students also highlighted the ability to revisit prior discussions, which aided their memory and understanding, as one of the reasons why Telegram has been very useful in the ESL learning context. For instance, one student stated, “I can reread what has been discussed,” while another mentioned, “Easy to get information back.” Furthermore, the comfort of sharing via text was noted as an advantage by those students with language anxiety or shyness. As for examples, one student also expressed, “I don’t have to face people,” and another shared, “More comfortable in chat.”

Overall, these comments highlight Telegram’s vital role in providing a space for reflection, accessibility and quiet participation, which are particularly valuable in blended learning environments where student mobility and confidence vary.

Commercialisation Potential

This approach has potential to be expanded into simple instructional strategies for other educators from different fields of academia. Since Telegram is already ubiquitous and does not require technical training, the method is easily adopted and cost-effective. The integration of Telegram into education particularly ESL learning context could be promoted through training sessions, mobile-based ESL teaching modules or shared in communities of practice focused on blended learning. Telegram's ability to support flexibility, comfort, and reflection aligns well with teaching needs in mobility-driven and resource-limited environments. As such, this innovation contributes to SDG 4: Quality Education by promoting access and continuity and to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by supporting participation among less confident or mobile learners.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This innovation offers a fresh approach on mobile learning by emphasising Telegram's chat function as a real-time instructional tool to be used during class. It also serves as an ongoing discussion space that students can revisit and reflect on afterward. Unlike conventional LMS platforms, Telegram offers a more natural and flexible interaction style that better suits with students' communication habits and their constant movement between physical classes.

From a theoretical perspective, the novelty lies in bringing together insights from Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Sociocultural Theory. MALL highlights the role of mobile devices in providing flexible, ubiquitous opportunities for language practice, making Telegram an appropriate tool to support on-the-move learners (Burston & Giannakou, 2021). Meanwhile, Sociocultural Theory, particularly through the lens of Vygotsky's concept of mediated learning and scaffolding, explains how peer-to-peer and student-instructor interaction in the chat space creates opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and shared meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). By combining these two perspectives, the integration of Telegram can be understood not only as a technical solution, but also as a pedagogically meaningful practice grounded in established theories of language learning.

Future adaptations of using Telegram's additional features, such as pinned messages, multimedia sharing, and structured comment sections or topic-based threads, to further enhance student engagement in learning are very much recommended. For instance, educators may organise discussions by themes or weekly topics which can help students to easily navigate and revisit relevant content, especially during revision or asynchronous reflection. At the same time, considerations must be given to issues such as potential distractions, the need for effective moderation, and ensuring students' data privacy when using commercial platforms. Educators are encouraged to set clear communication guidelines and apply Telegram's privacy features to balance openness with safety. This approach also supports a more learner-centred experience by promoting coherence and continuity in conversations.

Overall, the innovation contributes meaningfully to broader educational goals, including inclusive and equitable access, particularly in settings where physical presence or synchronous participation is limited. This also reinforces values aligned with SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. This innovation explicitly embodies ILEIID 2025 main theme that is "Technology Applications in Language and Education: Crossing Borders, Connecting Minds".

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