

Mrs Amira Firdaus – Malaysia – 17th September 2021

Teaching via Telegram

Purpose and context of the presentation

The presenter shares an illustration of practice on the delivery of online learning via the instant messaging platform Telegram over the last two years. While many students in Malaysia have access to appropriate computers and internet, some in remote areas or from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have easy access, and often only have access to a mobile phone for learning. The purpose of using Telegram was to ensure no students were disadvantaged and all could access the same learning through the same platform. This decision was based on research from the university on students' access to technology, her own research into her students' access to mobile phones, and her desire to ensure no student missed out on learning.

Telegram functions and overview

Telegram is similar to WhatsApp and Signal. It is a low bandwidth app which can be used on mobiles or basic desktop computers. It contains features including instant text messaging, file attachment, voice recording, video recording, notifications and organisational folders, allowing for student engagement, group work and breakout rooms, and allowing fast access to the lecturer. It can function as a 'light' learning management system. It therefore supports cognitive, teacher and social presence.

Illustration of Practice

Telegram allows items to be classified into 'channels' which can be under the control of the organiser or lecturer. The lecturer creates a teacher-controlled channel for each topic within a course, in which only he/she can post, but all students in that class can access. Additionally, the lecturer creates a communication platform in which students can interact and engage with each other and with the lecturer on the course content.

Content

Each topic channel includes a brief greeting and introduction message. Content is delivered via a combination of text, mini-lectures (video or audio) of less than 60 seconds to three minutes, and images of slides which can be attached to illustrate certain points.

This format was the outcome of an iterative process of student feedback. At first, the presenter used a single channel for several topics or lessons, which made it very difficult for students to scroll to the content they wanted. By separating topics into individual channels, the content was quickly accessible.

Interaction



Students can be assigned discussion groups on the communication platform. The presenter created 12 groups based on the months of the year and posted the links to the main communication platform, asking students whose birthday falls in a particular month to join that group for ongoing discussion throughout the course.

Pedagogy of care

The presenter practised a pedagogy of care through encouragement of group interaction as illustrated above, and also by including stickers and emojis in her communications with students, and by encouraging a familiarity using less formal terms than Dr or Professor.

Student feedback

Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the Telegram-facilitated teaching and learning. Indeed, the courses taught using Telegram received higher satisfaction rates across course evaluation, instructor's teaching and facilities provided than all other first-year subjects in the discipline, which were not taught using Telegram but were instead taught using video conferencing or Google Meet. However, this outcome was not researched formally.