

## Students Feedback on Using Telegram in Speaking Practice During Self Learning Time

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### ABSTRACT

This paper provides insights into students' views on the use of Telegram for development of speaking skills in the context of SLT in Malaysian tertiary education. Data gathered from questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics whilst data from the interviews was analyzed using a content analysis approach. The findings revealed that while the students display positive attitudes in using Telegram, the activities conducted have to be properly guided. The findings also showed that students do not only focus on the usability of the Telegram as a tool, but the language content delivered through the tool. This study suggests that instructors have to properly plan the integration of Telegram in SLT and provide clear instructions to students. Instructors also need to incorporate a variety of activities using Telegram to increase participation, and consider revising the content of the lesson to fit the affordances of Telegram to ensure the mastery of speaking.

**Keywords:** *Telegram, self learning time, speaking skill*

### INTRODUCTION

Non face-to-face learning is of paramount importance especially at a university where blended non face-to-face learning is conducted. In Malaysia, it is common to have universities allocating non face-to-face student learning time (SLT) for an English language course. This can be around 80 hours in a semester. Often, students have no problem when it comes to English language skills like reading and listening practice during their SLT as they can check the answers on their own. However, when it comes

to English speaking skill practice, students encounter some difficulties, for example, they are not sure of their language mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. Zhang (2009) points out that speaking is at the peak of the most difficult skill for many English language learners. Ironically, speaking skill is the most crucial aspect as the success depends on the ability to perform a conversation in the language (Nunan, 1995).

In SLT time, firsthand feedback cannot be provided immediately as the process of correcting students' speaking output is often time consuming. Our initial survey revealed that students are clueless about how to practice English speaking skill during their SLT. They are not sure of the correctness of the speaking practice output. Plus, due to too many students in an English language class, teachers are not able to cover all the speaking output from the learners within a limited time. On the other hand, students expect immediate feedback from the teachers when practicing English speaking skill. Second language learning has long been perceived as a time consuming process and needs massive amounts of input and interaction (Blake, 2008), integrating the digital technologies is particularly of great importance. Taking all the problems into consideration, this research has experimented with the use of Telegram to facilitate the SLT for speaking skill course. This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties faced by the students in practicing their English speaking skill during their self learning time (SLT)?
2. How useful is Telegram in developing the students' speaking skills during their SLT?
3. What are the students' expectations when using Telegram for SLT?

### **Review of Literature**

Literature pertaining to English speaking challenges or difficulties encountered by the ESL/EFL students in the class in general is available in bulk, but studies focusing on the use of Telegram for SLT are scarce. This section first attempts to explain the speaking difficulties faced by the learners as well as the factors causing such a situation. Other relevant studies are discussed and reviewed in the following section, particularly on the importance of using Telegram in English language learning.

### **Challenges faced by learners in speaking**

Mastering the speaking skill in English language is undeniably a common difficulty faced by English language learners. It is rather obvious that throughout the literature, globally, the mastery of English language will be a concern in any non-English speaking countries as well as countries that host international students. In Indonesia for instance, the mastery of English language, especially the speaking skill has always been a major theme. A study by Abrar et al. (2018) for example highlighted that undergraduates' difficulty in speaking can be linked to the language barriers in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. It is also found that psychological factors such as anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation slow down learners' speaking skill acquisition. It is also believed that encouraging learning environment that includes lecturers, peers, and topics, as well as the ability to practice the language through self-practice, with tutors and peers, or using media and technology might encourage the mastery of English language speaking skill (Abrar, et al., 2018).

Cox and Robinson-Pant (2008) explain that learners tend to limit their speaking to what is considered as ‘safe’ – that is, that is ‘allowable’ within institutional norms around children’s power and within the established practices of the school’ (p. 464). Hence, it can be understood that while we focus on enhancing teaching and learning to improve their speaking skill, at the same time we need to pay attention to allowing them to speak in a worry-free environment. This makes the idea of non face-to-face learning more relevant, as it happens outside the classroom walls, it could provide a worry-free environment for learners to speak, what more when an ‘unofficial’ platform such as Telegram is used, rather than the existing university’s online learning platform.

Another challenge faced by English language learners that could affect their speaking skill is grammar mastery. Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari (2020) asserted that error analysis is needed to be carried out on learners’ speech to see their weaknesses, and those weaknesses should be emphasized in the teaching and learning to familiarize them with the correct grammar form. This is indeed a rather improvised way to look at the challenges faced by English learners in speaking. This finding could be informative as in any approaches or platforms used for teaching, including the use of Telegram, error analysis on learners’ common grammar mistakes should be considered. On the other hand, Hasanah and Utami (2019) noted that the common challenges that affect learners’ speaking skill are learning materials which do not cover students’ needs, classroom size that is too big as well as learners’ low motivation.

Earlier, other scholars such as Willis (1996), stated that in order for language learning to take place, there are four essential conditions to be met — *the exposure, opportunities to use the language, motivation and instruction*. A supportive atmosphere is essential for the learners to apply the knowledge without feeling threatened. When discussing English speaking difficulties, there are ample researchers and scholars who have presented their views. Among all these, Ur (1996) argued that learners face difficulties in speaking due to factors like:

*Inhibition*

Learners afraid of making mistakes, fearful of criticism or simply shy.

*Nothing to say*

Learners have no motive to express themselves.

*Low or uneven participation*

Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

*Mother-tongue use*

Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue.

Similarly, according to Tuan and Mai (2015), speaking problems include *inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation and mother-tongue use*. In terms of lack

of *Topical Knowledge*, Rivers (1968) and Baker and Westrup (2003) asserted that learners are clueless towards topics chosen by the teachers especially when these topics are foreign and alien to them.

Rababa'h (2005) on the other hand believes that EFL learners have difficulties in speaking English because of the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum and also the environment. Littlewood (1981) pointed out that motivation and opportunity for the learners to express themselves are crucial for the development of communicative skills. Motivation is the most important factor to determine how far a learner embarks in a task, how much energy or effort a learner devotes to, and also the duration a learner preserves in learning English speaking (Littlewood, 1984, p.53).

### **The teaching and learning of speaking beyond classroom walls**

Taking into consideration aforementioned studies, most of the earlier research focused on the challenges faced by ESL/EFL learners in the class and little attention has been given to the ESL learning outside of the classroom, typically during SLT. There are however some studies such as Tok (2009) that investigated Turkish EFL learners' communication obstacles in English language and the findings revealed that anxiety and unwillingness are the two biggest obstacles faced by EFL learners during the English speaking process inside and outside classrooms. Heriansyah (2012) in a research study on difficulties and causes perceived by tertiary English language learners in learning speaking and the efforts made by these students to overcome difficulties highlighted that *being afraid of making mistakes* is the main factor that affects their speaking. Banu (2017) revealed that students use English more frequently in the class and less frequently outside the class and that these students do not just have limited time to learn English in class but also do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside of the class.

Despite the challenges, other studies have also proven that out-of-class learning plays a significant role in the language learning process (e.g. Lai & Gu, 2011; Pearson, 2003; Pickard, 1996). Learning outcomes can also be enhanced through out-of-class learning in multiple ways (Chang, 2007; Inozu et al., 2010; Sundqvist, 2011). Chatti et al. (2012) assert that learning should not just take place inside the classroom but also outside of the classroom. Importance of having additional teacher-supported learning chances beyond the classroom borders for the learners were also discussed (see Barrs, 2012; Inozu et al., 2010; Richardson, 2010).

In line with the recent trend, ample studies have shifted from the traditional ways of ESL learning to the integration of mobile phones in second language learning. Studies revealed that using mobile phones in language learning can be very effective and promising (e.g. Darmi & Albion, 2014; Abbasi and Hashemi, 2013). In the same vein, Muhammed (2014) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of m-learning in language learning. Findings of this study indicated that 99% of the students consider mobile phones as effective for both inside and outside of the language learning classroom. Positive feedback and results were also reported with the use of social media networks, typically Telegram in language teaching and learning (e.g. Xodabande, 2017; Zarei et al., 2017; Murugiah, 2018).

Ferdous (2013) for example found out that undergraduate students perceive multimedia as an important role in their life and this suggests the possibility of using an online platform to encourage speaking. Wigglesworth (2019) asserts that the use of multimedia such as smartphones can encourage learners' engagement in tasks and that most of them found using smartphones as useful in doing language learning activities. It can also be understood that based on Lee et al. (2019), to enhance the learning of speaking outside classrooms through mobile devices, it is also crucial for the instructors to pay attention to gestures when teaching, as it could encourage learners' attention and help in the negotiation of vocabulary. While non face-to-face online learning can be positively regarded, for the learning to be effective, it has to be properly guided by the instructor and attention has to be also paid on the time spent, as more time would result in better language performance (Ng et al., 2020).

### **The teaching and learning of speaking using instant messaging applications**

Despite the challenges on the teaching and learning of speaking beyond the classroom walls, the teaching and learning of speaking through online platforms such as instant messaging applications is doable. Akkara et al. (2020) in a study that experimented with the use of Whatsapp application to teach speaking found out that there is a significant difference in the participants' achievement of the English IELTS test band. In the study, collaborative learning activities and problem solving tasks were given at regular intervals to the learners. On the same notion, Ahmed (2019) concludes that WhatsApp groups could provide learners with chances to practice language naturally outside the classroom and motivate them to learn mutually. Ali and Bin-Hady (2019) concur by stating that WhatsApp can reduce learners' anxiety thus it should be applied at all stages of English language learning and teaching. Amelia (2019) believes that instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp helps in fostering speaking skill as learners might find the learning as less stressful as they do not have to speak in front of the class. However, proper execution needs to be considered to ensure effective learning, from assigning learners a speaking topic, giving clear instruction on what to do, allowing them some time to practice, getting them to record their presentation, setting a due date for them to submit via WhatsApp, providing the assessment rubric, getting them comment on their peers' video, and providing a feedback to each presentation. Soria et al. (2020) also maintain that while the type of feedback that is popular among learners is smileys and images, written feedback from peers or instructors is more appreciated, as they are more detailed. Kartal (2019) in a critical literature review of previous studies on the use of instant messaging applications for language learning noted that none of the 37 studies mentioned any challenges in using WhatsApp in language learning, which shows that this platform is a user-friendly app that can be used in language teaching and learning.

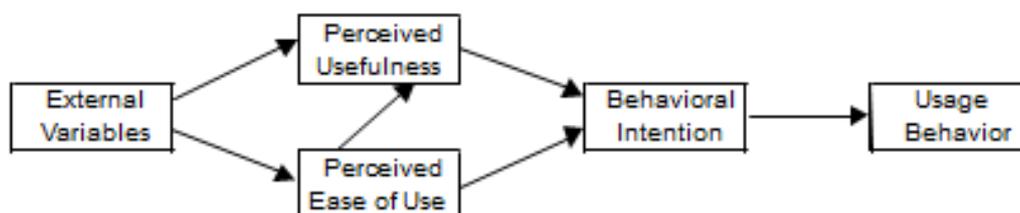
There are a few studies on the use of Telegram in teaching English language. A survey conducted by Abu-Ayfah (2020), revealed that the majority of EFL students perceived Telegram as a useful tool for English language learning, and this has shown that Telegram can be positively regarded in language teaching and learning. Telegram, according to Faramarzi et al. (2019), has everything in it for collaborative and distant learning and these features make it suitable for beyond classroom lessons. The features of Telegram covers safety and security, provide seamless network, the ability to access a variety of channels and groups, it supports files of any sizes and types that makes it

suitable for collaborative learning, and there's also the artificial intelligent robot software that could help in correct pronunciation of words. In the same vein, Mahzoun and Zohoorian (2019) confirm that there is a significant effect of using Telegram in vocabulary acquisition as well as learners' attitude. It can be concluded that the teaching and learning of language through mobile phones beyond the classroom walls and using instant messaging applications is indeed doable and research has shown that it could result in positive impacts. While most research focused on language teaching and learning in general, a more focused study on the impact of self-learning using instant messaging applications like Telegram on learners' speaking skill is still necessary, which is what this particular study would investigate.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the purpose of this study is to examine students' views on using Telegram in speaking practice during self-learning time, Davis et al. (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is adopted as the theoretical framework. The updated version of the framework has been produced by Venkatesh and Davis (1996) as shown in Figure 1 below. TAM is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. It has been one of the most influential models of technology acceptance, with two primary factors influencing an individual's intention to use new technology: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Charness & Boot, 2016). The TAM model is relevant to be based on for this particular study as it matches the intention of this study. As this study is to analyse learners' feedback on the use of Telegram in learning speaking, the TAM model would relevantly guide how this study can be conducted from determining the external variables, observing the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness, looking at learners' behavioural intention and the usage behaviour.

Figure 1: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)



### METHODOLOGY

A total of 36 semester-one undergraduates from the Faculty of Business and Faculty of Hospitality, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan under the English for Business Communication Course were selected for the study as they have a total of 80 hours of SLT and speaking is the main focus in the course. This group of students achieved Band 3 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), a university entrance test to measure students' English language proficiency.

The data were gathered at multiple points of time before and after the end of the experiment to determine the students' response towards the effectiveness of using Telegram in enhancing their English speaking skill during self learning time. A four-point Likert scale questionnaire ('Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree'), consists of 12 items, was first administered to the students in order to gather the primary data on the difficulties faced by the students and practising their English speaking skill during their SLT in the beginning of the semester (Week 2). Then, the teacher conducted one English speaking practice each week using Telegram outside of the English language class starting from the mid-semester. Students are required to give responses at the end of the semester (Week 16) through a four-point Likert scale questionnaire (12 items). Questionnaires were administered online using google form. The data gathered from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Interviews were also conducted in order to dwell on the students' responses in depth. Data generated from the interviews was analyzed using a content analysis approach.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are three parts of the research, first, the questionnaire on the difficulties faced by the learners in practicing their English speaking skill during their self learning time, second, the questionnaire on the usefulness of Telegram in helping to develop the learners' speaking skills during their self learning time, and third, an interview on their expectation of practicing English speaking skill using Telegram during their self learning time. Data presented in Table 1 provides insights into the difficulties faced by these students in practicing their English speaking skill during their SLT. Data presented in Table 2 provides insights into the usefulness of Telegram in developing students' English speaking skills during their SLT. The interview data provide insights into the Telegram features which help in improving the students' speaking skills during their SLT.

*What are the difficulties faced by the students in practicing their English speaking skill during their self learning time?*

As can be seen in Table 1, students faced some difficulties in practicing their English speaking skill during their SLT. Data obtained illustrates that the students are aware that they need people to guide them in English speaking skill during SLT, in which S10 achieved A= 21 and SA=11. For S12 (A=22 and SA=12), the data indicates that the students need immediate feedback for their English speaking skill practice during SLT. The need for giving feedback to learners is one of the important topics of discussion in language teaching and learning. It has been more of a concern when it comes to online teaching and learning as well students' learning during the SLT where face-to-face conversation is absent and giving direct feedback is somehow impossible. This is agreed by Amelia (2019) where an effective non face-to-face speaking teaching and learning should consider how feedbacks could be provided apart from other necessary executions such as assigning learners a speaking topic, giving clear instruction on what to do, allowing them some time to practice, getting them to record their presentation, setting a due date for them to submit via WhatsApp, providing the assessment rubric

and getting them comment on their peers' video. Soria et al. (2020) also agreed with the finding of the questionnaire as they maintained that written feedback from peers or instructors is more appreciated, as they are more detailed, while the type of feedback that is popular among learners is smileys and images.

Table 1. Difficulties faced by the students in practicing their English speaking skill during their SLT

	STATEMENT	SD n	D n	A n	SA n
S1	English is a very important language.	2	0	17	17
S2	I need more English speaking skill practices outside of English language classroom.	2	0	21	13
S3	I feel nervous whenever I have English class.	3	18	10	5
S4	I feel nervous whenever I need to speak in English.	3	10	15	8
S5	English frustrates me because my English is weak.	2	22	9	3
S6	I don't practice English speaking skill on my own because I'm lazy.	9	18	7	2
S7	I don't practice English speaking skill on my own because I don't like.	10	24	1	1
S8	I wish to practice more English speaking skills on my own.	0	2	22	12
S9	I don't practice English speaking skill on my own because I do not know how.	5	20	8	3
S10	I need people to guide my English speaking skill practice during my self learning time.	0	4	21	11
S11	I need a proper way to practice my English speaking skill during my self learning time.	0	2	23	11
S12	I need immediate feedback for my English speaking skill practice during my self learning time.	0	2	22	12

\*n = total no. of students

\*SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

### *How useful is Telegram in developing the students' speaking skills during their self learning time?*

As can be seen in Table 2, Telegram received positive feedback from the students. 'Telegram is useful in developing my speaking skills outside of class' (A=23, SA=12). Statistics also show that students notice the improvement in English speaking skill using Telegram during SLT (S2 - S6) with more than 20 students out of 36 *Agree* with the statements. None thinks that Telegram does not help to improve the English speaking skill (S11). This finding is in line with the findings of previous studies such as the one by Abu-Ayfah (2020) who revealed that the majority of EFL students perceived Telegram as a useful tool for English language learning, and this has shown that Telegram can be positively regarded in language teaching and learning. Telegram, according to Famarzi et al. (2019) has everything in it for collaborative and distant learning and these features make it suitable for beyond classroom lessons. The features

of Telegram covers safety and security, provide seamless network, the ability to access a variety of channels and groups, it supports files of any sizes and types that makes it suitable for collaborative learning, and there's also the artificial intelligent robot software that could help in correct pronunciation of words. On the same note, Mahzoun and Zohoorian (2019) agreed that there is a significant effect of using Telegram in vocabulary acquisition as well as learners' attitude.

Table 2. How useful is Telegram in developing the students' speaking skills during their SLT?

	STATEMENT	SD n	D n	A n	SA n
S1	Telegram is useful in developing my speaking skills outside of class.	1	0	23	12
S2	My English speaking skill is better than the beginning of the semester by using Telegram.	0	1	29	6
S3	My English speaking skill improves after listening to the pronunciation in Telegram.	0	3	26	7
S4	My English speaking skill improves after receiving immediate responses from my teacher in Telegram.	0	3	25	8
S5	My English speaking skill improves through video sharing in Telegram.	1	4	22	9
S6	My English speaking skill improves through audio sharing in Telegram.	1	1	25	9
S7	I enjoy using Telegram to practice my English speaking skill during my self learning time (SLT).	0	1	26	9
S8	Telegram is very easy to use.	1	0	22	13
S9	I learned how to use Telegram in not more than 10 minutes.	1	2	19	14
S10	I wish my next teacher will still use Telegram for English speaking practice in our self learning time (SLT).	0	2	18	16
S11	Telegram helps me to improve my speaking skill.	0	0	28	8
S12	The delete feature in Telegram help me to improve my speaking skill as I am able to self correct and edit my answers in voice messages before sending.	1	2	25	8
S13	When I listen to recordings sent by my friends in the chats, it can help me to improve my speaking skill.	1	0	27	8
S14	When I listen to recordings sent by my friends in the chats, it can help me to improve my pronunciation.	1	1	24	10
S15	The feedback (e.g comments, pronunciation correction, and etc.) given by my teacher through Telegram helps me to improve my English speaking pronunciation and skill.	1	0	23	12
S16	I am totally satisfied with Telegram.	1	2	18	15
S17	I would like to change some features.	0	8	22	6

\*n = total no. of students

\*SD= Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

*What do you expect when practicing English speaking skill using Telegram during your self learning time (SLT)?*

The data obtained through interviews revealed that students have their own expectations when ESL learning is conducted outside of the classroom by using Telegram. Their feedback include *‘students wish to have a proper guidance to improve their English speaking skill, to improve their English speaking skill grammatically and semantically, to be able to boost their confidence level and to speak more fluent and smooth, to be able to pronounce certain words properly, and incorporating with more activities using Telegram in ESL learning outside of the class’*. This finding is supported by the study done by Ng et al., (2020) that, for a non face-to-face learning to be effective, it has to be properly guided by the instructor and attention has to be also paid on the time spent, as more time would result in better language performance. On using Telegram to boost learners’ confidence in speaking, a study by Setiawan and Wahyuni (2017) confirmed that an active use of Telegram could actually improve learners’ speaking skills. According to the study, a Telegram lesson has to have learners to speak actively everyday by using a recording tool in the telegram application. Speaking topics have to be provided by the instructors on a daily and weekly basis and not to forget, feedback must be given by the instructors directly after the class session ends. As for pronunciation, as it is one of the concerns of the learners, the concern is not without a base. To achieve the pronunciation goal through Telegram, Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam (2010) suggested the emphasis of the social nature of learning to be the focused, in which Abbasi and Behjat (2016) believed can be achieved through assigning activities such as storytelling through Telegram app. Xodabande (2017) without a doubt agreed that the use of Telegram contributes significantly to the improvement in students’ pronunciation. There is also a concern by the learners that it could be better if more activities are incorporated using Telegram in non face-to-face learning. As Telegram offers extensive features that covers the possibility of collaborative non face-to-face learning (Faramarzi et al., 2019) such as safety and security, seamless network, the ability to access a variety of channels and groups, support files of any sizes and types and artificial intelligent robot software that could help in correct pronunciation of words, all instructors have to do is just be creative on how to utilize these features to make the non face-to-face lessons less boring.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the present study can be summarized in the following points. First, the majority of the students demonstrated that they face difficulties in practicing their English speaking skill outside of formal English classes. Their responses have revealed that they are clueless without the guidance from their teachers. Based on the findings and the literature that we have highlighted, one of the aspects of online non face-to-face learning that is less explored is how guided online learning can be effective. Most of the literature on this realm explores only the effectiveness of online learning and how online learning tools can be utilized in different ways. We believe, while online learning is no doubt can be as effective as face-to-face learning, it still has to be guided, just like a physical lesson. It is even more relevant for an online non face-to-face lesson to be guided when we talk about filling in learners’ SLT, as it will make sure what they learn, and the activities they do is well instructed and in line with the course syllabus.

Second, another significant finding is that students display high positive attitudes towards the use of Telegram in practicing their English speaking skill outside of the

formal class since the majority of the students chose *Agree*. If English students perceive that Telegram is easy to apply and useful, they tend to show a high of both satisfaction and motivation, and positive attitude, which will lead them to deduce this app (Ahn, 2018). While this finding is rather common as agreed by previous studies, it suggests that there is a wide world to be explored using Telegram in the ; be used as a medium to tell students what to do, but it has to be a platform that integrates different applications, like a website that hosts many links to other learning resources, and it would be much more handy using a Telegram, as students use it everyday for communication purposes. We suggest instructors to link their Telegram groups to other learning applications such as Kahoot!, Quizlet or Quizziz, to name a few.

By doing the aforementioned suggestion, instructors will be able to fulfill the other significant finding of this research, which is the students' expectation of using Telegram which is to have more activities incorporated using Telegram. It can also be noted that the students' expectations from the interview in this study's context do not only focus on the usability of the Telegram as a tool, but the content delivered through the tool. This can be seen from their concerns on how it can improve their English speaking skill grammatically and semantically, increase their confidence level, speaking fluently and with correct pronunciation. A future study, thus, we believe should focus more on what can be done using Telegram, what activity can really help students grammatically, semantically, improving their pronunciation and increasing their level of confidence, and these activities have to be tested and measured to see how effective can they be in improving students' speaking skills.

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