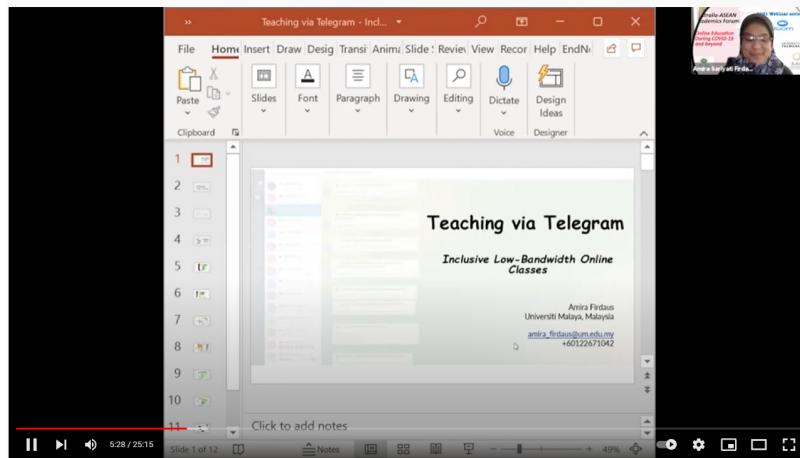


Australia-ASEAN Academics Forum: Online Education during COVID-19 and Beyond

AAAF Mrs Amira Firdaus talk 17th Sep 2021

Transcript

Thank you so much, Sharon for that kind introduction.

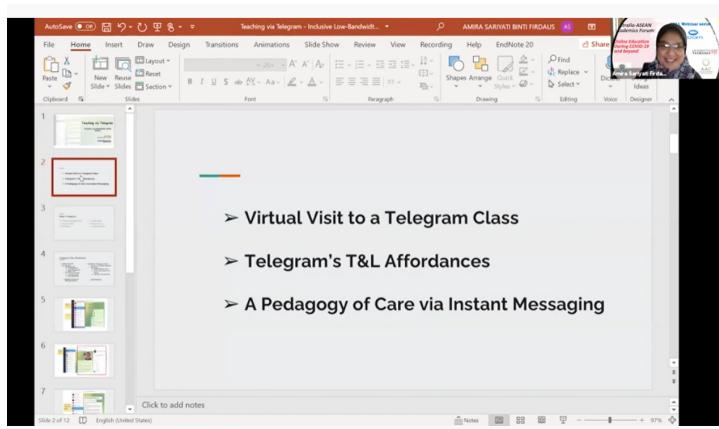


Today, I will be talking about teaching via Telegram. Basically, this is a little bit of a sharing. It's not really a research study, per se. It's really just a sharing of my experience in the last one and half years, teaching, using the Telegram instant messaging platform. So, when I'm teaching via Telegram, of course, this came about in early March 2020, when all universities including mine had to suddenly jump from face-to-face teaching in the middle of a semester and then have to teach online. And many of our students, some of them might have been at home, might have gone home in anticipation of a lockdown. Some of them probably weren't really ready, maybe didn't even bring all of their laptops and things like that. So there were a lot of issues at that time. ...where the university is, I knew that there would be a lot of students who are in the urban areas, who probably come from pretty well-to-do families with broadband internet and multiple devices at home. So, I wasn't worried about them. I knew that somehow or the other, they would be able to connect to a Zoom class or a Google Meet class, any kind of video conferencing classes.

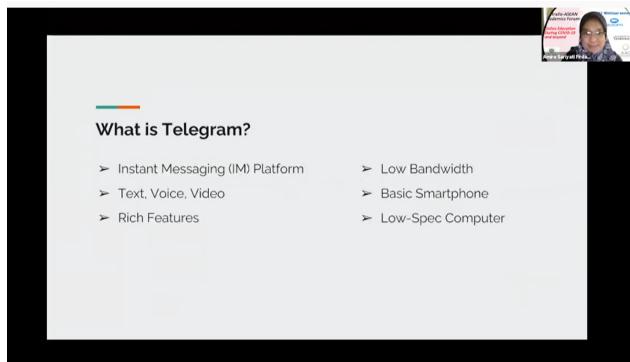
But I was actually a lot more concerned about my students who might be in remote areas, firstly, where connectivity is not that good. And also students who may come from households that may not have the extra income for a really good broadband service, or who may come from households where they may actually have to share their laptops and their devices with their younger siblings who are of course now also having online schooling. And sometimes, even their parents might even borrow their laptops and their devices so that they can work from home. So, my concern was that I didn't want to be teaching class and then having three or four or ten or even one student missing out when everybody else was progressing and getting the material. I didn't want there to be one student or two students who were missing out. I mean, a lot of times, when you're talking at the institutional level about should we go and make it mandatory to have live synchronous video conferencing classes, to simulate that classroom experience. And very often, people are saying, or management are thinking that, oh, it's okay, it's fine. We've done a survey. Most of our students,

majority of our students, say that they are equipped to follow the classes online. Yes, majority are equipped, but majority is not all. And you will have students who will not be able to follow that Zoom class or that Google Meet class.

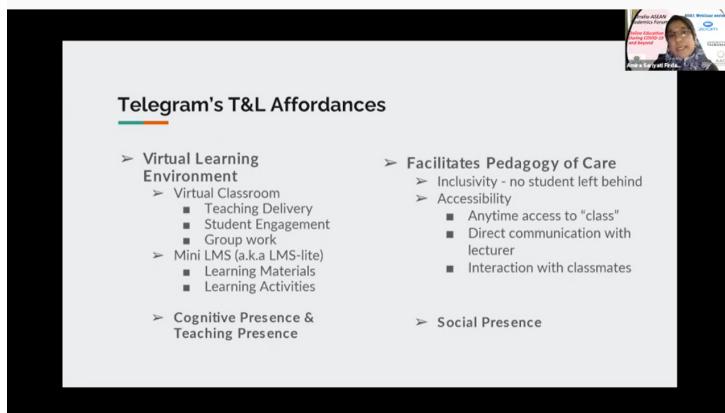
And I know for a fact, thankfully, that all of the students in my class have mobile phones. I know that because, at the early onset of class, I always set up a WhatsApp group and I always ask students, do you have a phone. And even the students from the lowest income groups seem to manage somehow to have at least a basic smartphone. So, I knew that all of them had their own mobile phones. And it's less likely that if they were at home, they would have to share their mobile phones. So, I figured that low bandwidth teaching, low bandwidth meaning that using very little data, using very little speed. I'm not really a technical person, so I don't even have the right jargon for it. But I knew that using just a basic phone would be the best way to deliver my teaching.



So, I'll just go through this really quickly. We're going to go and take a peek at my Telegram classroom, talk a little about Telegram's T and L affordances and also talk a bit about a pedagogy of care by instant messaging, which I've kind of already covered just now. So, very quickly, Telegram is an instant messaging platform, just like WhatsApp, just like Signal and many other instant messaging platforms. And the really great thing about instant messaging platforms is that they tend to be low bandwidth. You can use a basic smartphone with it. Many of them have desktop applications or you can actually use them in a browser. And you don't really need to have any special, high-tech computer. Even if you have a really old, ten-year-old computer, a low spec, slow computer, you can still access Telegram as well as many of the other instant messaging platforms.



And many of these platforms, of course, come with text messaging, voice, video and a lot of other rich features as well, which we'll touch on a little bit later on.

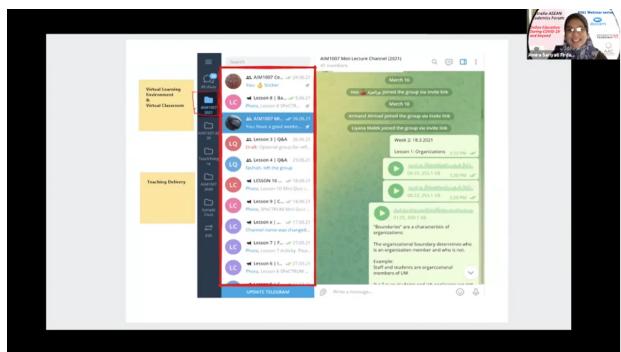


Telegram's T&L Affordances

- Virtual Learning Environment
 - Virtual Classroom
 - Teaching Delivery
 - Student Engagement
 - Group work
 - Mini LMS (a.k.a LMS-lite)
 - Learning Materials
 - Learning Activities
- Cognitive Presence & Teaching Presence
- Facilitates Pedagogy of Care
 - Inclusivity - no student left behind
 - Accessibility
 - Anytime access to "class"
 - Direct communication with lecturer
 - Interaction with classmates
- Social Presence

So I've touched a bit on the pedagogy of care, but one of the reasons that, I'd actually been using WhatsApp to do teaching and also to do supervision for about four or five years. But I decided to go into Telegram because of what I found to be its technical affordances that were very amenable to teaching and learning. So, one of the great things about it is that it provided me a virtual learning environment, which also allowed me to have, sort of like, a virtual classroom. It facilitated teaching delivery. It allowed for student engagement. It even allows for group work and breakout rooms. And it's, at a basic level, Telegram actually can function as a light or mini learning management system, where you can put up learning materials and even do some very, very simple learning activities. And of course, in terms of accessibility, whenever you have an instant messaging platform, as long as you make sure that everything that you put in there is not the kind of item that disappears after one view or that disappears after one day, you just have to make sure for that, basically students can have access at any time to whatever content, whatever communication interaction, that's already in that particular Telegram group or WhatsApp group. And it of course allows direct communication with me, the lecturer. I'm slow with emails. So, when students send me a direct message, DM me, or in Malaysia, we call it personal message, PM me, I respond a lot faster. And when you have a group, a chat group, a text chat group, it also allows interaction with the other classmates, which is important for students who, especially first year students, who have actually matriculated but never actually set foot on campus and never met any of their new classmates.

So, Telegram's affordances are really great for allowing cognitive and teaching presence, as well as social presence.

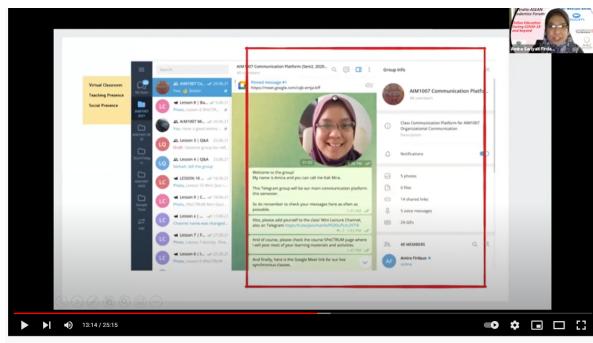


The screenshot shows a Telegram group interface for 'AN1007 Mini Lecture Channel (2021)'. The left sidebar has a 'Virtual Learning Environment' section with a 'Virtual Classroom' tab highlighted. The main screen displays a list of messages and files, including a video thumbnail of a person speaking, a file named 'Week 2 19.3.2021', and a file named 'Week 1 19.3.2021'. The interface is clean and organized, reflecting the affordances of Telegram for teaching and learning.

So let's just take a really quick peek at my Telegram class, so to speak. So, this is a class that I taught. It's a first-year class. It's a second semester, first year class. And it's a class on organisational communication. So, you can tell from the class code, it's a first-year class, with a one there. So, the virtual learning environment and the virtual classroom that you can find on Telegram is based on this

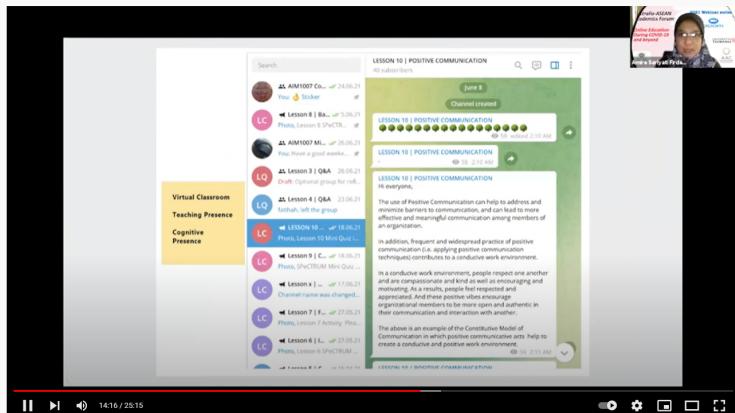
feature that Telegram has, where you can actually group chats that you feel are somehow related to each other into folders. So, you can see here, a sample. This is my folder for the class that I taught this year, in 2021. This is the folder down here that I taught for the same class last year in 2020. And I also have some other folders which are not visible here right now. So, this kind of presents a virtual learning environment in the sense that, in this virtual learning environment, I have here what, it's not really visible here, but this is basically my Telegram lecture group. It's actually called a channel, a Telegram lecture channel, which means that only I, as the organiser or administrator, can post or broadcast messages via this particular group. And as long as my students join the group, they can receive it. But they cannot interrupt my lecture messages by asking questions or sending random texts.

However, I also have something else which I'll show you early on, which is a communication platform, where we can talk. And students can ask me questions, and we can also have interactions and engage with each other. But, so as you can see down here, it's not very clear, but I actually have different Telegram channels for each of the topics or the lessons in that particular class. So, I've got from lesson one all the way to lesson ten. It's not arranged in order here, because in Telegram, unfortunately, whatever is the last message that you put in, that particular chat will actually go up in the list.

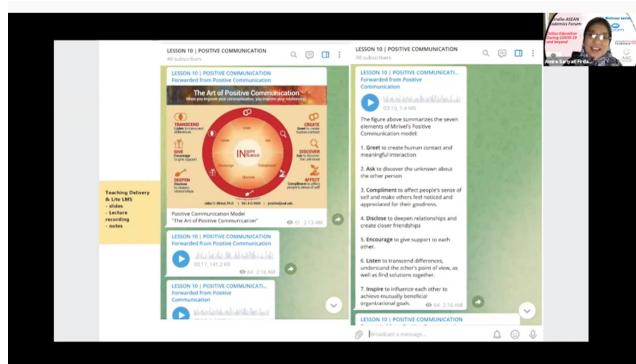


So, let's just take a look now. I was mentioning just now that we also have a communication platform. And this is where we, I communicate with the students. So, just imagine that you're entering a classroom, and we greet out students. We say, hi, how are you, good morning everybody. So, basically, this particular, I call it here, you can see, communication platform. This particular group, and this in an interactive group, where all the students who are in this group can also post messages and ask questions and talk to me and talk to their classmates. And having this particular group is important because it allows not just for the teaching presences, which happened, you can have actually teaching presence and teaching delivery in the lecture channel, but in the communication platform, where we interact, you can actually have social presence if you're talking

about, say, the community of inquiry framework.



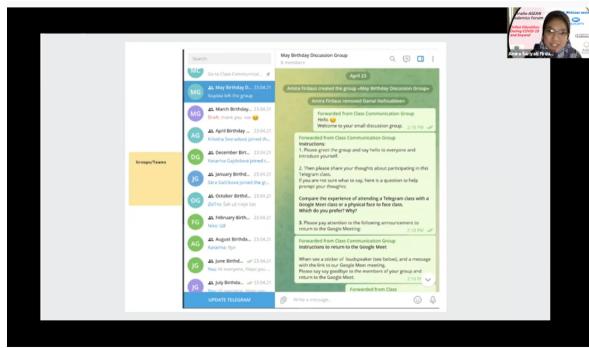
And as you can see here, this is an example of one of the lessons or one of the lectures or topics. And as you can see, I have posted something here. So, generally, if I was standing in a physical class or if I was doing a Zoom class like I am now, I will probably get up and say to the class, hey everybody, good morning. We're going to talk about positive communication. So, what's positive communication? Well, it's something that can help to address and minimise barriers to communication. So, I would stand up and give my lecture. But in here, I type it out in a text. And this, of course, functions to, for the teaching delivery, which also allows for teaching presence or the teacher presences. And also cognitive presence, because the knowledge actually comes via this particular channel, which is a channel for lesson ten on the topic of positive communication.



Now, this is additional messages or additional mini lectures that I give out in lesson ten. And as you can see here, the teaching delivery is done via a lecture which is done by a voice text. So, I record myself speaking. And I always make sure that what I do, this is actually a really long one. I usually try to keep my lecture, my mini lectures or each one of these texts down to less than one minute. I think I just got overexcited and spoke for three minutes here. And sometimes, I might, I think one of the reasons I also have these little notes here, it's because I ended up speaking way too long, for three minutes. So, I tried to, if students want to go back and listen to this lecture, this particular segment of my lecture, they can actually go and see this text. Oh, okay, Amira is actually talking about the seven different elements of positive communication. And they can go back and listen to this, because they can see the text here.

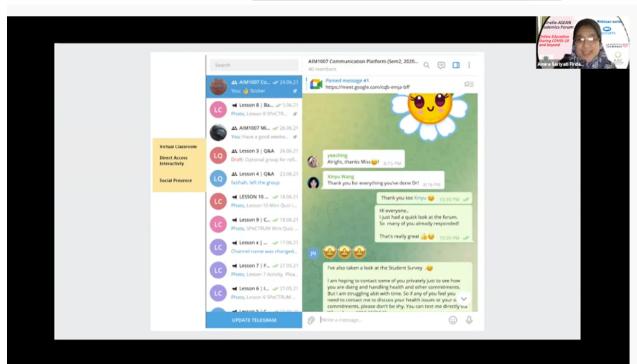
So, yes, so the features of Telegram and other instant messaging platforms is that you can have both voice as well as text messages that you can leave for your students. As in here, so you can see here that I've also posted, generally we would call this a slide, if I was doing a normal lecture in a class.

This would actually be in my deck of slides. But in the Telegram lecture, what I do is I will take one slide, like, literally one page of a slide, put it on. And then I would give a little lecture there. You can see this mini-lecture or my voice note here is only 17 seconds. And it's followed by another one down here. So, I would actually have a few of these kinds of slides or pics, I used to call them, pictures or images, followed by a mini lecture, a few voice texts and maybe some typed, written text.



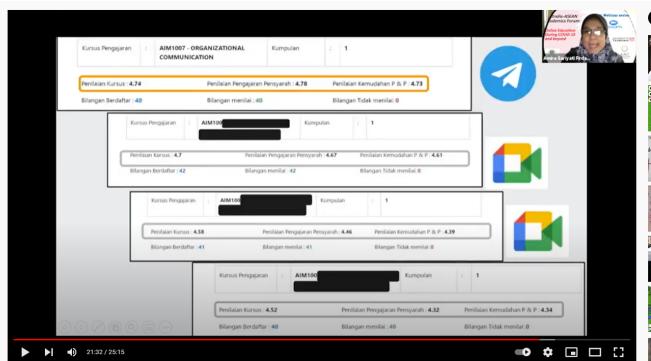
So that, just now, was about the class. So now, I am actually going to talk a little bit about the, I mentioned earlier on that one of the affordances that Telegram offers is that it allows us to have breakout rooms. So, many people are actually thinking about, you know, what if you want students to be in small groups, you want them to have small discussions. Well, this is actually a feature that is possible, because it's really very simple. All you have to do is just create a group and tell students to go into that particular group. So, one of the easy ways to do in a class where maybe there are many students, this particular class, I think, it's actually a different class. But this particular class had about 100 students. So, what I did was that I just asked students, I created 12 groups based on each month, and I just asked students to, and for each of the 12 groups, I posted in the main communication platform or the main communication group, I posted the invitation links to those groups. And I asked students to just click on the link of the month in which they were born. And so, students were all grouped based on their birthday month. There are many other ways of doing it, of course, but that was an easy and simple way.

So, one of the important, I think, aspects of doing online teaching is that we need to consider that students are alone by themselves. So, to allow them to have this social presence, to feel the presence and a sense of belonging with their classmates. If you're in a class of 50 usernames, that's really hard to do. Students tend to be pretty creative. I mean, they tend to create their own groups. But when they don't, it's helpful to facilitate that in the classroom by putting them into smaller groups of, say, three to five people. So they have a sense of teamship. They have a sense of having a small group that they can seek help from or just talk to, rather than posting a question out in the main group where there is 50 or 100 other people. And they're not even sure if anyone's going to answer them. But when they post a question or have a discussion in a small group like this, the other group members tend to reply.



So that is, this is just, that's basically a bit of an example of what I was trying to show for the pedagogy of care. Now, this is also another example of a pedagogy of care that promotes interactivity between students. So, in my conversations with students, I use a lot of stickers, gifs, emojis. And the students tend to do that too, as well. And just like Kim early on, here, the student is calling me miss. And here, another student is calling me Dr. But I actually tell my students from the very beginning of class, do not call me doctor. Do not call me madam. But rather, I prefer if the students call me Ka-Mira, or Ka-Ka. Ka is the short version of the word Ka-Ka, which in the Malay language means big sister. And very often, among friends, if we're friends with someone who's slightly older than us, a female, we may address them as Ka or Ka-Ka. So, I tell the students to address me as such. And for the international students, who may not understand what that means, I have a little bit of an explanation about that at the beginning of the semester, so that they do understand.

So, this particular platform here, on the communication channel, it facilitates the virtual classroom, the noisy classroom. You can imagine that, where everyone's talking. And it allows for direct access to the lecturer, and also for interactivity with other students. And it also creates social presence, which is also done via the small breakout groups of three to five that I mentioned earlier.



Now, I'm actually quite bad with visual communication, so I can, I hope this is not too horrendous to look at. But I just wanted to share that, so, I wasn't sure whether, the students seemed to enjoy having the Telegram class. And when I did ask them, they did say, some said they like it. I didn't really have any complaints about it except at the early on, the first time that I did it, I actually had two or three lessons all in one long lecture channel. And the students told me that it was really hard to scroll up and down trying to find a particular lecture. So, that was actually what caused me to decide that maybe I should break each and every topic into a separate Telegram channel, so that it's easy for students to go back and review whatever that they need to review, rather than scrolling up and down for something that they were looking for three weeks ago. So, this is actually, so, at the

end of the recent semester, which ended in June, this is the student evaluations that I received for this class. So, this is the evaluation for the course. This one here is evaluation of the instructor's teaching, basically my teaching. And this is evaluation of the facilities. And this, I teach in the department of media and communication, first year students. And during the second semester, first year students all take in total four media and communication or departmental courses. So, these are the results of the Telegram course on organisation communication. This here, these three others, are the student evaluations of the other three first-year courses that they took. So, I didn't really do a research per se. But it's safe to say that whatever students that took this class, that took my class, are also the same students that took and evaluated the three other classes. It's basically the same group minus one or two students additional or students who may have missed the class last time or decided not to take it this semester.

So, as you can see, the Telegram class got the highest student evaluation in all three dimensions, course evaluation, instructor's teaching and also facilities provided. Now, that's not to say that the other courses aren't also well evaluated. But I think it does say something that students, somehow, there's not scientific basis to this, but it seems like the Telegram class does work when compared to the other three classes, which I believe were mainly delivered via Google Meet meetings or video conferencing. So, that's all that I wanted to share with all of you.