

The Effectiveness of Using Telegram App in Learning English as a Foreign Language among Secondary School Students

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Abstract: Digital media technology including social media applications have become an inseparable part of most students' everyday life. The increasing advancement of new technologies has made it easier to integrate them into the education system. Today, learners can use social media applications such as Telegram, Twitter, or Instagram to improve their English language skills and knowledge. This study aims to investigate Saudi secondary school students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of a social media application called (Telegram) as a tool to learn English as a foreign Language (EFL). The research follows a qualitative methodology in which 15 secondary school students were interviewed online to recount their experiences of using Telegram app as a means of supporting their learning of EFL. A thematic analysis technique was used to analyze data obtained from the interviews. Findings revealed that most students perceived Telegram app to be an effective tool for English language learning specifically in the writing skill. These findings played a critical role in helping the researcher draw the argument about the effectiveness of Telegram app in teaching and learning English language.

Keywords: digital media, social media, MALL, Telegram app, EFL, perceptions, secondary.

فاعلية استخدام تطبيق التليجرام في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طالبات المرحلة الثانوية

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المستخلص: لقد أصبحت تكنولوجيا الوسائط الرقمية بما في ذلك تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي جزءًا لا يتجزأ من الحياة اليومية لمعظم الطلاب. كما أن التقدم المتزايد في تطبيقات التكنولوجيا الحديثة أدى إلى تسهيل دمجها في نظام التعليم والتعلم. حيث يمكن للمتعلمين اليوم استخدام تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي مثل تليجرام أو تويتر أو انستجرام لتحسين معرفتهم ومهاراتهم في اللغة الإنجليزية. وهدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على تصورات طالبات المرحلة الثانوية في السعودية ومواقفهم تجاه استخدام أحد تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي المسماة تليجرام (Telegram) كأداة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. واتبعت البحث المنهج النوعي حيث تم إجراء مقابلات عبر الانترنت مع 15 طالبة في المرحلة الثانوية لسرد تجاربهم في استخدام تطبيق (تليجرام) كوسيلة لدعم تعلمهم للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تم استخدام طريقة التحليل الموضوعي لتحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من المقابلات وكشفت النتائج أن معظم الطالبات يرين أن تطبيق (تليجرام) أداة فعالة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وتحديدًا مهارة الكتابة. لعبت هذه النتائج دورًا مهمًا في مساعدة الباحثة في توضيح الجدل حول فعالية تطبيق (تليجرام) في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوسائط الرقمية، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، تطبيق تليجرام، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مرحلة التعليم الثانوي.

1- Introduction

The invention and increased use of digital technology and social media have changed human lives dramatically. Teaching and learning foreign languages is one of the areas that have changed due to these inventions. Nowadays, learners can easily access any information across the internet, interact with others who are miles away from them, making it easy to teach and learn through the internet. Learning through the internet has made it easy for learners to learn at any time or place. Today, almost every individual can access information on the internet using their mobile phones, laptops, or tablets. Learning English as a second language has become easy with mobile apps and online sites such as Telegram app. Most learners and teachers have turned to these technologies to increase their knowledge and familiarity with the language. Through these new forms of communication, the process of learning a second language has become less time-consuming, less tedious, and more interactive. Several research studies have proved the efficacy and usefulness of Telegram app in the field of English language teaching and learning in tertiary education (Heidari-shahreza & Khodarahmi, 2018; Abu-Ayfah, 2020). Therefore, the researcher tried to apply the study for secondary school students to find answers for the following Research Questions:

- 1- What are students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of Telegram application in learning EFL?
- 2- What are English Language skills that have been improved through the Telegram application?
- 3- What are students' perceived advantages and disadvantages of learning EFL through Telegram application?

2- Literature Review

Digital media technology is not a limited term, but rather a broad term that involves all kinds of web programs, gadgets, applications, websites, social media channels, etc. (Altawil, 2019). The 21st century has seen expanded use of modern technology and multimedia applications, which have changed our behaviors and attitudes (Alahmad, 2020). Institutions are trying to offer flexible programs aiming to meet students' needs. The programs are aimed to deliver tailored courses that meet the different learners' aspirations and accommodate the different learning styles emerging in the modern digital age (Giannikas, 2020). Today, people have access to a wide range of information than ever before, and "mobile technologies offer a new paradigm in connectivity, communication and collaboration in our everyday lives" (McQuiggan et al., 2019). In recent years, there has been an increased use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) combined with social media platforms. In addition, the emerging of internet services and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications has made it easy to learn a second language remotely from anywhere in the world. The outcome of this usage has increased interactions and eased communications in all areas, including the educational purposes (Wilson & Margus, 2020).

Subsequently, researches related to the effectiveness of social media in teaching and learning have increased.

Learning a second language can be tedious, time-consuming, and requires high interaction; therefore, incorporating digital technology is essential. Through the Telegram app, learners have more access to the English language input, their interests are looked into, and there are increased opportunities to interact with other learners (Akobirov & Vokhidova, 2018). Additionally, instructors can access the necessary tools needed to arrange the learning content. Today, the invention of social media and English use of almost all social networks have provided learners with increased accessibility to a more authentic language than the language taught in the classroom (Ozer & Kilic, 2018, p. 2917). Advancements in speech recognition technologies, online dictionaries, social networking sites, and visual features have enabled learners of foreign languages to develop their language skills.

Mobile phones are the most used technological gadgets compared to laptops and tablets. According to Ozer and Kilic (2018), mobile phones' high usability has become rapidly integrated into EFL teaching. Both learners and educators use technological gadgets to achieve the objectives of educational purposes. The countless number of English learning apps can be downloaded on the phones, has made it easy for learners to learn a language anytime and anywhere (Ozer & Kilic, 2018, p. 2915). Telegram is one of the most common mobile applications used by foreign language learners. It is a cloud-based application that allows users to exchange images, videos, or files without occupying the mobile device storage (Abbasi & Behjat, 2018). According to Telegram official website, by 2018, the Telegram Company reported that the app had over 200 million users every month (Durov, 2018). This high number shows that more people opt to learn the English language through the online platform rather than traditional ways of learning. The app attracts many users because of the numerous features other than being an education platform (Ghobadi & Taki, 2018). Previous research states that the Telegram app has been very instrumental in teaching and learning the main four skills of English language along with vocabulary and grammar (Abu-Ayfah, 2020). For example, a recent study conducted by Abu-Ayfah (2020), has investigated the perceptions of Saudi college students regarding Telegram app effectiveness for English language learning. The study followed a quantitative research method in which 300 college students were given a questionnaire as a data collection instrument. Findings showed that Telegram app has been an effective tool in learning EFL as perceived by most college students (Abu-Ayfah, 2020). Another research study conducted by Tabrizi and Onvani (2018), examined the impact of using Telegram app on learning English vocabulary by Iranian EFL beginner learners. The researcher used a quasi-experimental research design with 31 students, in which vocabulary were taught in two different ways: 4-weeks by telegram app and another 4-weeks by the traditional face to face instructions. By comparing students' grades of the two methods, results showed that learning vocabulary by a social media app (Telegram) was more effective than the traditional way (Tabrizi & Onvani, 2018, p. 14). Additionally, a study by Akobirov and Vokhidova

(2018) concluded that teaching foreign languages using the Telegram app proves to be very useful than teaching in classrooms. Moreover, Abbasi and Behjat (2018) investigated the impact of storytelling with Telegram app and found that the experimental group outperformed the control group on a speaking complexity test. The use of Telegram has played a critical role also in helping learners improve their pronunciation. Additionally, it has also enhanced their writing ability (Abbasi & Behjat, 2018). Another research study conducted by Aghajani and Adloo (2018), found that learners in the Telegram cooperative writing groups scored higher grades compared to those in face-to-face groups. They claimed that the app allowed personalization and flexibility, therefore influencing a positive attitude from them (Aghajani & Adloo, 2018). Telegram app has also proved effectiveness in acquiring new vocabulary among EFL learners. A study conducted by Ghaemi and Golshan (2018), investigated students' attitudes about learning new vocabulary via Telegram app. Findings of the study ensured that short messages services (SMS) available in the Telegram app had a very positive impact on acquiring new vocabulary among students (Ghaemi & Golshan, 2018). On the other hand, pronunciation remains to be one of the main challenges in the aspect of teaching and learning English. The reason behind the noticeable improvement in pronunciation might be the accessibility for students anytime and anywhere (Nimmagadda & Krishnaveer, 2018). Some of the advantages associated with Telegram app include proper communication of class content and sending of information, enhancing feedback and collaboration, and improving concise writing (Vahdat et al., 2020). The app's usability in teaching English has played a critical role in improving learner's pronunciation (Abu-Ayfah, 2020). The ability to give and respond to feedback and comments also improved the process of learning. Additionally, most learners portrayed a positive attitude towards learning the language through the social platforms.

Considering the studies mentioned above, it might be implied that social media network is an instrumental tool that can help English learners improve their target language skills. Telegram's different features are instrumental in teaching the skills of the language and its components, such as vocabulary and grammar. Many of these studies focused on the effectiveness of teaching and learning the English language through the Telegram app. Other social media networks have also proven instrumental in improving learners' pronunciation and encouraging group work during the learning process. Unfortunately, few studies examined how learners perceive the use of the Telegram app in learning EFL in the Saudi context. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct the current study to investigate Saudi secondary school students' perceptions regarding the usefulness of Telegram app in learning EFL.

3- Methodology and Data Collection

3-1. Research methodology

The research followed a qualitative approach to elicit student's perceptions of using Telegram app in language learning.

3-2. Participants

Participants of the study were 15 female secondary school students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for the academic year 2020. The participants were public school students who were in their third year of secondary school (both scientific and literary streams) as shown in the figure (1) below.

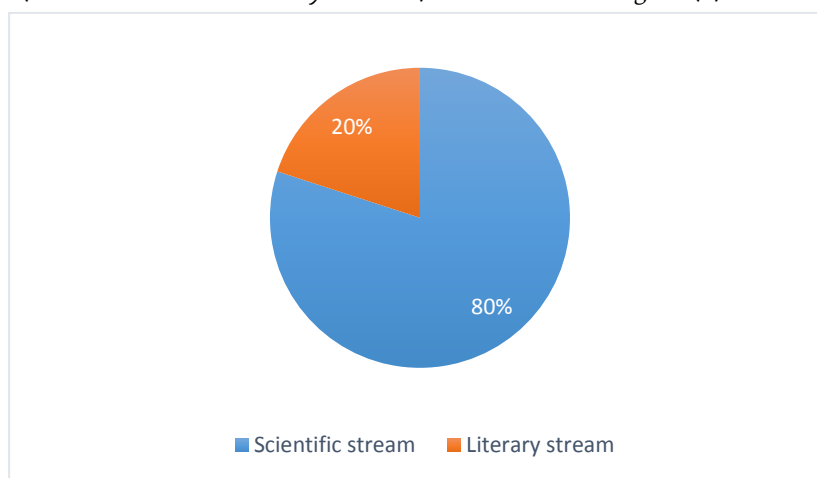


Figure (1) the participants' streams

The researcher selected those participants in particular because the students were already familiar with Telegram app as they use it to promote learning EFL with their teacher and classmates outside the classroom, therefore, there was no further explanation needed for the interview questions.

3-3. Data collection:

The researcher conducted semi-structured online interviews using Google Forms. The participants were required to answer multiple open-ended questions that inquired about their perceptions and opinions regarding the usefulness of Telegram app in supporting their EFL learning (Appendix A). The interview questions were sent via Telegram app by their English teacher. To evaluate the interview questions' content validity, the questions were reviewed by experts who contributed their recommendations and feedback for improving the validity of the interview questions.

3-4. Data analysis

The qualitative data of participants' responses were coded into themes and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Common themes, codes and patterns identified were compared to meaningfully answer

the research questions of the study, thus to reveal the effectiveness of using Telegram app in learning English as a foreign language.

4- Results.

The purpose of the interviews is to gain an insight on the usefulness of using Telegram app as a tool to enhance English language learning among secondary students in Saudi Arabia. The interview questions were a reflection of the research questions which aimed to find students' perceptions, impact of the app on their English language skills, and perceived advantages and disadvantages of using the app in learning EFL. Interview data was analyzed to examine research questions. 15 secondary school students were interviewed online after the consent of their English teacher. Semi-structured interviews were applied with each student for this study. According to (Merriam, 2009, p. 114), the semi-structured interview that is "guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined", is the best standard interview for finding answers to the current research questions. To analyze data for the current study, the researcher followed the iterative data analysis, by reading the whole transcribed interview responses for finding a general common theme (Salman, 2017). Then reading the transcripts line by line to find meaningful connections by making notes, highlighting key codes and organize them into themes (Salman, 2017). Examples of key codes used in the study are: knowledge, self-esteem, skills, collaboration, motivation, usefulness, accessibility, ubiquity, engagement, and communication.

4-1.Common themes:

Table (1) demonstrates common themes that appeared in the participants' responses. It also shows codes and key words that emerged from analyzing participants' responses. Identified themes were 1. Impact of using Telegram app in learning English as a foreign language. 2. Improvement of language skills. 3. Advantages of the Telegram app. 4. Disadvantages of the Telegram app.

Table (1) Common Emerging Themes

| Emerging Themes | Codes and key words |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Impact of using Telegram app in learning English as a foreign language. | Instructional tool Effective Helpful Useful Convenient Self-esteem Motivation Interactive Fun |

| Emerging Themes | Codes and key words |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improvement of language skills | Vocabulary Writing Reading Grammar Listening Speaking |
| Advantages of the Telegram app as perceived by students | Ease of use Free Increased motivation Ubiquity Ease of communication Immediate feedback Learn from other's mistakes Privacy Engagement Collaboration Accessibility |
| Disadvantages of the Telegram app as perceived by students | Network connection Distraction with other apps No enough storage |

4-2. Interviewees' responses:

The interview consisted of four questions:

1- How does using Telegram app as an instructional tool helped you in leaning EFL?

For the first interview question, almost all students agreed that social media applications, particularly the Telegram app, has played a critical role in improving their English language. Some key words identified were: useful, helpful, effective, motivating, and beneficial. One student expressed that Telegram app can be a very effective instructional tool and has a vital role in active learning. Another student said that the app motivated her to speak English with confidence. Three students agreed that Telegram made it easy to communicate with the teacher and classmates as communication is one of the ways to learn a new language. Another student reported that learning the language through Telegram app was more convenient than attending regular classes. Moreover, one student believed that Telegram app is a source of learning English. She stated that: "Telegram has different channels for English learning, I can find almost everything I want to know more about, it's a really a helpful app for everyone who wants to learn English". Furthermore, a student said that Telegram app is interactive, fun and encourages cooperation among students.

2- What are the English Language skills that have been improved via using the Telegram application?

For the second interview question, the predominant language skill that was developed via Telegram app was writing as reported by the majority of students. One student stated that: "we write a lot in the app, so I think it helped me to build correct structure of sentences and learn new vocabulary". This result is consistent with previous studies (Abu-Ayfah, 2020; Ghaemi & Golshan, 2018). Another student mentioned that: "we get to talk with a lot of people who speak the same language and they help us improve through chatting". In the second rank comes the vocabulary and reading skills as reported by students. On the other hand, only few students thought that the app helped them develop their grammar, and listening skills. Moreover, only one student reported that Telegram app has helped her improve her speaking skill. The figure (2) below shows the skills improved via telegram as perceived by students.

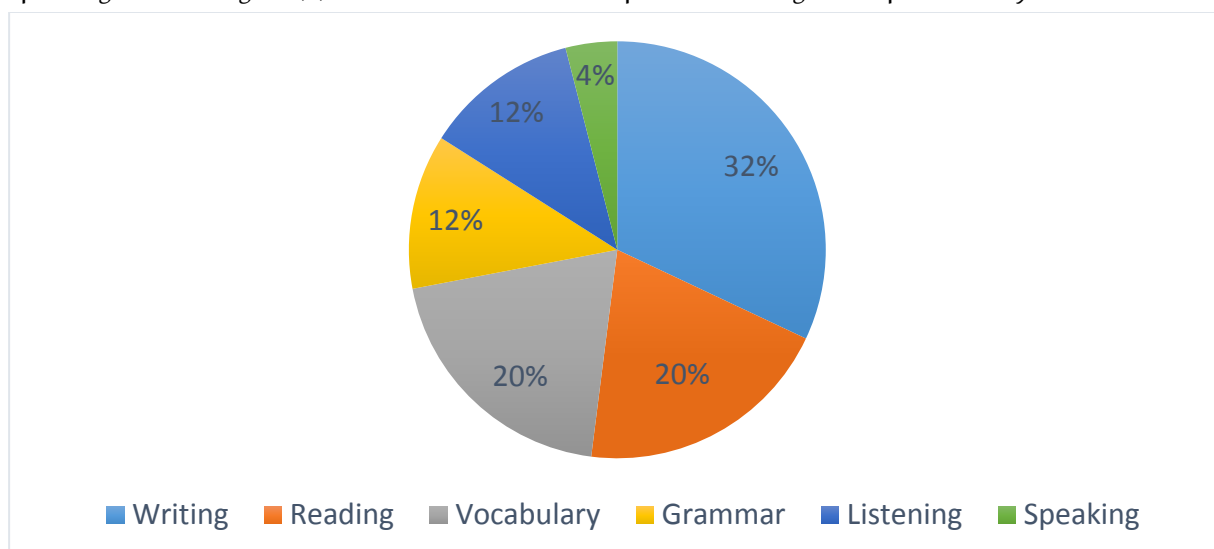


Figure (2) skills improve via Telegram app

3- What are the advantages of learning EFL through Telegram application?

For this interview question, students mentioned several advantages of the Telegram app. The majority of them agreed that the app is free and very easy to access and use. Two students said that it has privacy feature because it doesn't show the teacher or participants' phone numbers like other social media application such as What's app. A number of students mentioned that it is very easy to communicate with teacher and get immediate feedback. Moreover, one student stated that the app increases motivation to learn English and it helped her to learn from her classmates' mistakes. Another student stated that long video or audio learning materials can be sent and downloaded very easily. Furthermore, two students agreed that learning material are stored in the app and can be accessed 24/7, which is a good feature. For this question, 15 students provided 21 responses, many students mentioned more than one advantage as shown in table (2) and figure (3) below.

Table (2) advantages of Telegram app as perceived by students

| Advantages | Frequency | Percent % |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| A way of Communication with others | 3 | 14.3 |
| Free Application | 3 | 14.3 |
| Helpful and good application | 3 | 14.3 |
| Sharing and storing documents | 3 | 14.3 |
| Available 24/7 | 2 | 9.5 |
| Easy and simple | 2 | 9.5 |
| Learning source | 2 | 9.5 |
| Private | 2 | 9.5 |
| Other* | 1 | 4.8 |
| Total | 21 | 100.0 |

*one student said that this application is a Safe one.

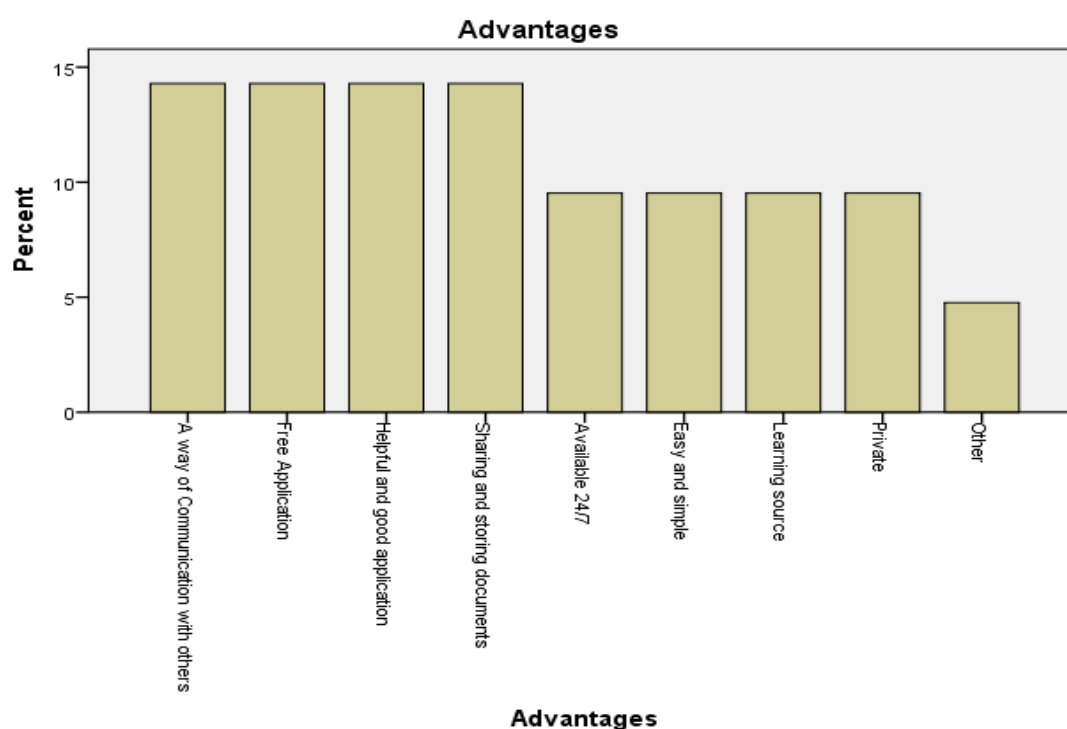


Figure (3) Advantages of Telegram app

4- What are the disadvantages of learning EFL through Telegram application?

For this question, there were 15 students with 16 responses, one student had mentioned two disadvantages. The average was 1.067 response per one student. A large number of students didn't find any disadvantages in the app, however almost 31% of the students expressed that the problem is with the network connection not with the app itself. On the other hand, two students mentioned that they easily

get distracted with other social media apps or other websites. Moreover, one student mentioned that storage was not enough. As shown in table (3) and figure (4), there were 16 responses for this question, as one student mentioned two disadvantages.

Table (3) disadvantages of Telegram app as perceived by students

| | Disadvantages | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | No Disadvantages | 8 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| | Internet Connection | 5 | 31.3 | 31.3 | 81.3 |
| | Distraction with other Apps | 2 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 93.8 |
| | Other* | 1 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 16 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

* One student said that storage was not enough

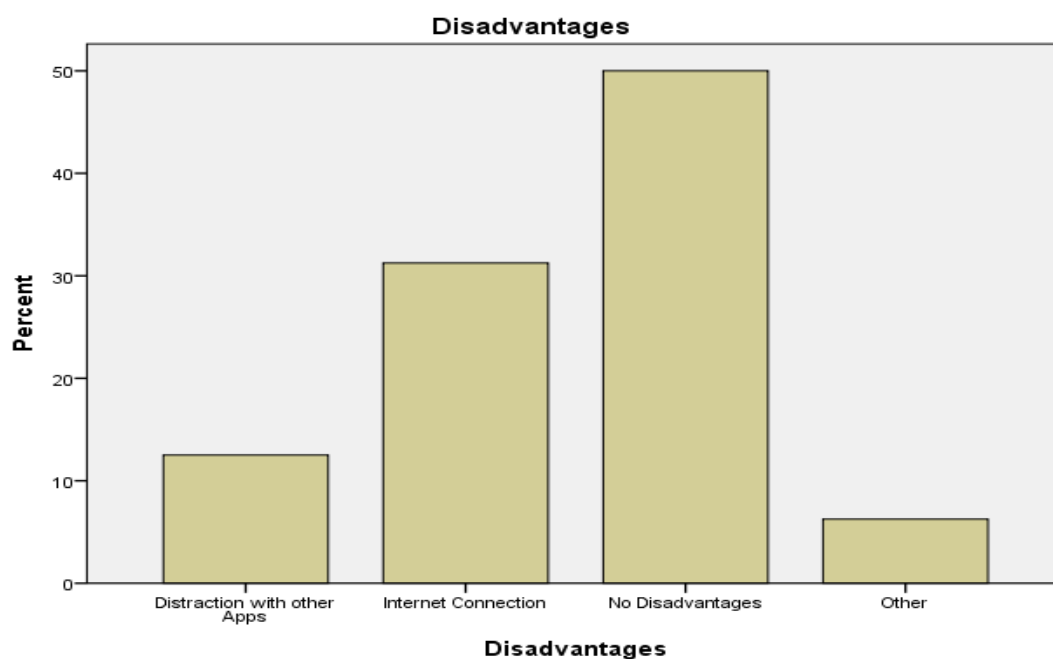


Figure (4) disadvantages of Telegram app

5- Discussion:

Based on the findings, teachers need to adopt learning apps and sites to improve the learning and teaching process. As suggested by the above mentioned studies, these new teaching methods of learning foreign languages have numerous benefits compared to traditional methods. Learning English and other foreign languages have become comfortable with the invention of social media. Learners can learn new vocabulary, grammar rules and pronunciation just by clicking on any social networking site (Akobirov & Vokhidova, 2018). As mentioned above, Telegram is one of the most useful apps that has helped learners

learn to speak and write the language. The learners can also use social media for a long time without getting exhausted from textbooks and classrooms.

Telegram and other learning apps have proven to be more effective due to several features such as easily accessible, ubiquity, and enhancing collaboration and feedback. Additionally, personalized content to cater to students' own needs makes them more appealing to learners. In light of the findings, the learning apps should be incorporated into learning institutions to enhance the learning process. Mobile apps, such as Telegram, can be adopted by educators to complement traditional learning (Ghobadi & Taki, 2018, p. 152). Students will be able to learn the language even when outside the classroom setting. Technology plays a vital role in providing students with opportunities to practice and improve their language skills outside the classroom.

Learning using mobile apps and the internet has also been associated with certain disadvantages. Students are likely to get distracted by other content available on the internet. Additionally, not all apps available on the internet have been designed by language experts, and therefore students could learn the wrong things if exposed to such apps. Therefore, teachers should work with their learners to identify genuine learning apps and sites such as Telegram. They should also encourage students to be responsible learners who are not distracted by other things while learning the English language (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). Some learners are unable to harness the learning technologies effectively and therefore need guidance from their teachers. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to train learners on how to use the technological apps before integrating them into language teaching.

6- Conclusion.

Based on the findings obtained, this study concluded that increased technology advancements have made it mandatory for teachers and learners to employ new ways of learning foreign languages. Telegram app is one of the learning tools that teachers might use to support students' language learning development outside the classroom. Some of the advantages of these apps include flexibility, ubiquity, ease of access, ease of use, and the ability to enhance learners' motivation (Abu-Ayfah, 2020). Moreover, Telegram app appeared to be very helpful in receiving valuable feedback from the teacher or peer feedback. Most students preferred using learning technologies to learn English. Therefore, teachers should integrate these new learning methods in the school curriculum as a complementary way of helping students gain more knowledge and skills of the English language.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol with EFL secondary students

Theme #1: Impact of using Telegram app in learning English as a foreign language

- 1- How does using Telegram app as an instructional tool helped you in leaning EFL?

Theme #2: Improvement of language skills

- 1- What are the English Language skills that have been improved via using the Telegram application?

Theme #3: Advantages of the Telegram app

- 1- What are the advantages of learning EFL through Telegram application?

Theme#4: Disadvantages of the Telegram app

- 1- What are the disadvantages of learning EFL through Telegram application?

Appendix B

Semi structured interview Raw Data Matrix:

| Sample Excerpt from Individual student | Codes |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Student 1:</p> <p>"I can say it is very helpful. It makes it easy to communicate with my teachers and classmates and communication is one way of learning. I think the skills that have been developed are writing, vocabulary and grammar. We write a lot in the app, so I think it helped me to build correct structure of sentences and learn new vocabulary. Through Telegram, we can share pictures or videos. It's a great app, I haven't had any problems with it "</p> | <p>Knowledge skills ease of use communication helpful</p> |
| <p>Student2:</p> <p>" Telegram has been very helpful for me to learn English, it has all different channels for English learning, I can find almost everything I want to know more about, it's a really helpful app for everyone who wants to learn English. I think Telegram developed my writing. It helps you with building the structure of sentences. The app is available at any time and you can learn whenever you want to. The app itself doesn't have a specific problem. Most problems are with networks"</p> | <p>Helpful Learning resource Improvement Ubiquity Knowledge</p> |

| Sample Excerpt from Individual student | Codes |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Student3:</p> <p>"Telegram app is very useful, interactive and informative; it encourages students' active learning. Also it is fun and encourages cooperation. It developed my reading & writing, because we get to talk with a lot of people who speak the same language and they help us to improve it through chatting. I don't believe there are disadvantages, I find it helpful. It's available at any time, it saves notes, pictures & videos automatically. And sharing lessons is easier.</p> | <p>useful</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Active learning</p> <p>Collaborative learning</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Ease of use</p> |