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INCORPORATING TELEGRAM MESSENGER INTO THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY PROCESS TO IMPROVE WRITING AND SPEAKING ACCURACY

The study examines the possibilities of using the cross-platform Telegram Messenger in the process of foreign language teaching and learning in big mixed-ability classes at technical universities. It focuses on the ways Telegram can be used to improve students' writing and speaking accuracy, facilitate language acquisition, individualize the learning process, and increase students' motivation. This research has led to the conclusion that the application of Telegram Messenger for the foreign language study at universities helps to create a favourable learning environment for enhancing the management of large mixed-ability classes, increasing language acquisition, developing writing and speaking perfection. The results of this research may be applied for further studies into developing different language skills using various messengers during online and offline lessons.

Key words: *Telegram Messenger, teaching foreign languages, writing & speaking accuracy, technical universities.*

Introduction. Nowadays it is impossible to imagine the effective teaching of a foreign language without the use of modern cloud-based mobile and desktop technologies. Students, as the most progressive part of society, are extremely interested in using the latest developments in the field of IT in the process of studying any subject and a foreign language in particular.

In our research, we hypothesise that application of Telegram Messenger in the study process, as one of the most popular messaging application among students, can improve students' writing and speaking accuracy, facilitate language acquisition, individualize the learning process, and increase students' motivation. The relevance of this study is based on the need to find new forms and methods of work that meet the requirements of today, motivate students, and facilitate active involvement of students of technical universities into the process of learning a foreign language.

Analysis of relevant research. In this study, we continued our previous research on using Telegram for teaching different aspects of language. It was proved that Telegram facilitates teaching grammar (Boiko & Volkova, 2020, p. 135) and vocabulary in large mixed-ability classes. It presents an opportunity to give tasks to students not only of various kinds but also of different difficulty levels for performing individually, in pairs or in groups which encourages all

students to be active at their English lessons, improves their performance and motivates them.

Implementation of new instant messaging applications in the study process in tertiary education is a noticeable and promising tendency. Many modern studies were devoted to the investigation of opportunities for using mobile technologies to enhance teaching and learning processes in education (Fojtik, 2015; So, 2016; Sung, Chang, & Liu, 2016; Yinka & Queendarline, 2018; Havrilova & Iaburov, 2019), to assess attitudes towards the use of mobile applications in education (Al-Emran, Elsherif, & Shaalan, 2016; Camilleri, 2016), to evaluate the relevance and validity of the use of “SMART technologies” in teaching foreign languages (Glyva & Dovhopolova, 2019), to assess the influence of educational technology integration on teachers’ self-efficiency (Saienko, Lavrysh & Lukianenko, 2020), and problems of their integration in the educational process (Titova, 2016). It was proved that modern mobile technologies could be successfully used for teaching pronunciation (Cavus, 2016), for facilitating vocabulary acquisition (Heidari Tabrizi & Onvani, 2018), for supporting creativity in higher education (Iksan & Mohd Saufian, 2017), and for improving ESP learners’ general performance (Alkhezzi & Al-Dousari, 2016; Iksan & Mohd Saufian, 2017; Akobirov & Vokhidova, 2018).

According to *Mobile App Ranking* (Top Google Play apps in Ukraine, 2020), one of the most popular instant messaging applications in Ukraine is Telegram. ‘Telegram is a cloud-based mobile and desktop messaging app with a focus on security and speed.’ It is an application that allows users to communicate, exchange written and recorded spoken messages, media of different formats and sizes, ‘as well as create groups for up to 200,000 people or channels for broadcasting to unlimited audiences’ (Telegram FAQ, n.d). Moreover, it can be installed and operated on several mobiles, tablets, computers or laptops.

There are some publications aimed at exploring the possibilities and perspectives of using Telegram Messenger in the teaching process. In particular, the research done by the Nigerian teachers (Yinka & Queendarline, 2018) confirms the widespread use of Telegram by university students in the process of mastering academic subjects, and also the effectiveness of using this application in teaching. Based on the research, some recommendations were made on the wider use of Telegram in the educational process to improve the quality of university education.

In their research Ibrahim et al. (2016, p. 8), Bodnenko et al. (2018, p. 22) prove that Telegram has considerable advantages for the enhancement of learning and teaching because information and downloaded files do not disappear

when you change a mobile device or desktop computer. Besides, there is a possibility to download large files of different formats which makes it possible to organize students' independent and group work at lessons as well as out of the class.

Other researchers Iksan and Mohd Saufian (2017), not only investigated the use of Telegram in the learning process, but also collected data through surveys and discussions in this mobile application. In the course of their study, the classes were conducted not in the traditional form, but via the application using various forms and methods of work aimed at encouraging students to express their own opinions freely. The scientists concluded that in the process of mastering the subject using Telegram, students also gained new experience, showed more creativity, communicated more eagerly, felt more comfortable from a psychological point of view. The use of the application in educational activities received favourable feedback from students participating in the study.

However, the use of Telegram Messenger for foreign language teaching in large mixed-ability classes at technical universities has not been researched by scientists, as this messenger has only recently become popular worldwide. It should also be noted that studies on its use as a teaching tool are more common in Asia and Africa, where Telegram is becoming quite popular (Akobirov & Vokhidova, 2018).

Aim of the Study. The purpose of this study is to research the possibilities of using Telegram Messenger for teaching English in large mixed-ability classes to full-time students of a technical university, with the aim of developing writing and speaking accuracy, vocabulary and grammar competence along with attention to details, activity, independence in the learning process, and also to justify the feasibility of using this application in the process of teaching university students.

Research Methods. The study was conducted employing mixed research methods. The quantitative research methods such as polls, testing, ranking, scaling of results were applied to collect and process data of the polls and tests results, the students' grades received for writing entrance and final tests. The qualitative research methods (the content analysis and its expert assessment) were chosen to interpret the obtained results. In particular, we had to prove that the use of Telegram Messenger could improve students' performance in writing and speaking.

The research was conducted among the first and second-year students aged 17-19 studying at the Chemical technology department of National Technical University of Ukraine 'Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute'. It was performed for seven months (from September 2019 to May 2020). Four groups of students

comprising 86 students participated in the experiment. Our research does not violate ethical norms, all the students participated voluntarily in the study.

The study consisted of four stages. At the first stage the anonymous opinion poll with close-ended questions was conducted a) to find out the most popular mobile and desktop applications that are used by students for everyday communication and information exchange, b) whether students use mobile applications, and which ones, for educational purposes. The respondents chose the answer from the offered options. The following questions were asked:

1. Which messengers and mobile applications do you usually use for everyday communication with your family and friends?

a. Viber b. Facebook messenger c. WhatsApp d. Instagram e. Telegram f. Email

2. Which messengers and mobile applications do you usually use to exchange information connected with the education process?

a. Viber b. Facebook messenger c. WhatsApp d. Instagram e. Telegram f. Email

At the second stage, there were created four study groups in Telegram, as the most popular messenger. They were given the short titles containing the name of the studied subject and the code of each class. After that, the entry tests were performed to assess and analyse students' initial writing and speaking skills, as well as their general grammar and vocabulary knowledge. During the experiment, two university groups of students (control group A) used Telegram only for solving organizational issues and the other two university groups (experimental group B) used Telegram at their lessons as a means to exchange organisational information and also as an educational platform.

At the third stage to confirm our hypothesis, there were conducted final tests to assess students' skills and the comparative analysis of the results obtained at the beginning and the end of the term. And at the final stage, the opinion poll with close-ended questions was done to obtain information about the usefulness of Telegram Messenger in the English language study process. The questions were the following:

1. The use of Telegram is really helpful for solving organisational issues connected with English lessons.

a. Agree b. Don't agree c. Partly agree

2. The use of Telegram for the development of English language skills is

a. Very helpful b. Helpful c. Slightly helpful d. Not helpful

The analysis of data was organised into two stages. At the first stage, the first opinion poll and the entry test were performed and analysed. At the

second stage, the final test and the second opinion poll took place. The opinion polls were conducted with the help of Telegram Polls. The entry and final tests consisted of three parts: part one was aimed at checking grammar and vocabulary competence, part two at competence in writing and in part three monologue and dialogue speaking skills were checked. Part-one of the entry and final tests was done using Google Forms Test service. All the answers were automatically processed, calculated, systematised, and graphically presented. The writing task (writing a composition) was also performed in Google Forms and each work was checked by two teachers independently. The answers of the students in the speaking part of the test were recorded and evaluated by two teachers. The results were analysed and compared by the investigators.

Conducting the research we gave the students of group B tasks that had to be performed in the Telegram group chat and were aimed at the development of their language skills, writing and speaking perfection. For example, after reading a professionally-oriented text, the students continued its discussion in the Telegram group chat. They were asked to make up questions to the text or to formulate true and false statements in pairs or individually and write them in a chat. Then, after correcting all mistakes the students in small groups or pairs were asked to answer all the questions sent via Telegram to the chat of the group or decide if the statements sent by other students were true or false.

During our research we widely used Telegram for watching videos and describing pictures and graphs as our classrooms do not have appropriate facilities for their demonstration. Therefore, students in group B did not use black-and-white paper copies of pictures and graphs but were able to analyse them in detail on their gadgets receiving them via Telegram. Due to the functions offered by Telegram their classwork and homework included videos with tasks to them.

The chat in the study group in Telegram was also used to simulate real-world correspondence on a scientific forum: students individually or in pairs wrote the topic of their research, and then answered 1-2 questions posed by other students following the rules of business etiquette, using indirect questions and phrases expressing their opinion. Here we were able to observe one more advantage: in real life students will not only write articles to scientific journals, reports or business letters but also perform business communication which is quite often conducted in a form of short messages exchange in different messengers or in a form of short formal and semi-formal emails written quickly on their phones. Thus, they had a possibility to practice these skills.

While working on the development of monologue speech, when students give their own presentations on a certain topic, especially in large groups, they often do not receive a thorough analysis of their speech. Some students have problems with the performance in front of a large audience or may not be critical about the quality of their performance. In these situations, we suggested they record their speech and upload it to the group chat as their homework. After that each student of the group had to watch a certain number of entries and write a short response to them or fill out a checklist to answer questions reflecting the quality of the presentation. The feedback was sent to the group chat as a document, message or photo of a text written by hand (as it was agreed). During the class, the teacher analysed typical mistakes made in speeches and written feedbacks paying special attention to positive examples and one or two students with the highest-rated reports presented their speeches to the class.

Telegram was also used in group B to stimulate foreign language communication out of the class. The students were encouraged to communicate in their Telegram group in English discussing all issues connected with the process of studying the language. It is important to emphasize that students were able to send questions or messages to their teacher or other students at any convenient time. The main requirement was that the post had to be in English. The teacher also asked students to discuss a specific topic during a week in the group chat. The topic for discussion was an article, a report, or a message from a student; even the issues related to the organization of the study process at university were successfully discussed. The main principle in selecting a topic was its relevance and controversy.

By the end of the term the students in group B more actively participated in texts or topics discussions, could formulate their own questions to check the topic or reading comprehension, and compose quizzes for grammar and vocabulary revision without much effort. Due to the additional speaking and writing activities which involved using Telegram they produced novel essays and speeches at the final tests, while the students from group A mainly reproduced the texts from the textbook. The students in group B became more critical to their own oral and written speech and as the result, its quality improved which was proved by the final test results. They became more accurate about grammar and spelling of their posts as they were seen and analysed by the whole group (even when the analysis and assessment were not the tasks). They became more attentive because their work could have been assessed and corrected at any time by other students or their English teacher. The system of assessment became more transparent and objective as the results of students' individual and pair work were visible for

everyone in the English language group. Their responsibility, attention to details and independence also increased.

Results. In Figure 1 you can see the screenshots of the first polling of students before the experiment. It showed that 100 % of students usually use Telegram Messenger for everyday communication with their family and friends and 92 % of students use it to exchange educational information. Other popular messengers and mobile applications are Viber and Instagram which are widely used by students along with common email services.

Thus, Telegram Messenger, as the most popular application, was chosen for research as the platform for exchanging educational information and organising study activity in the chat groups created in this application.

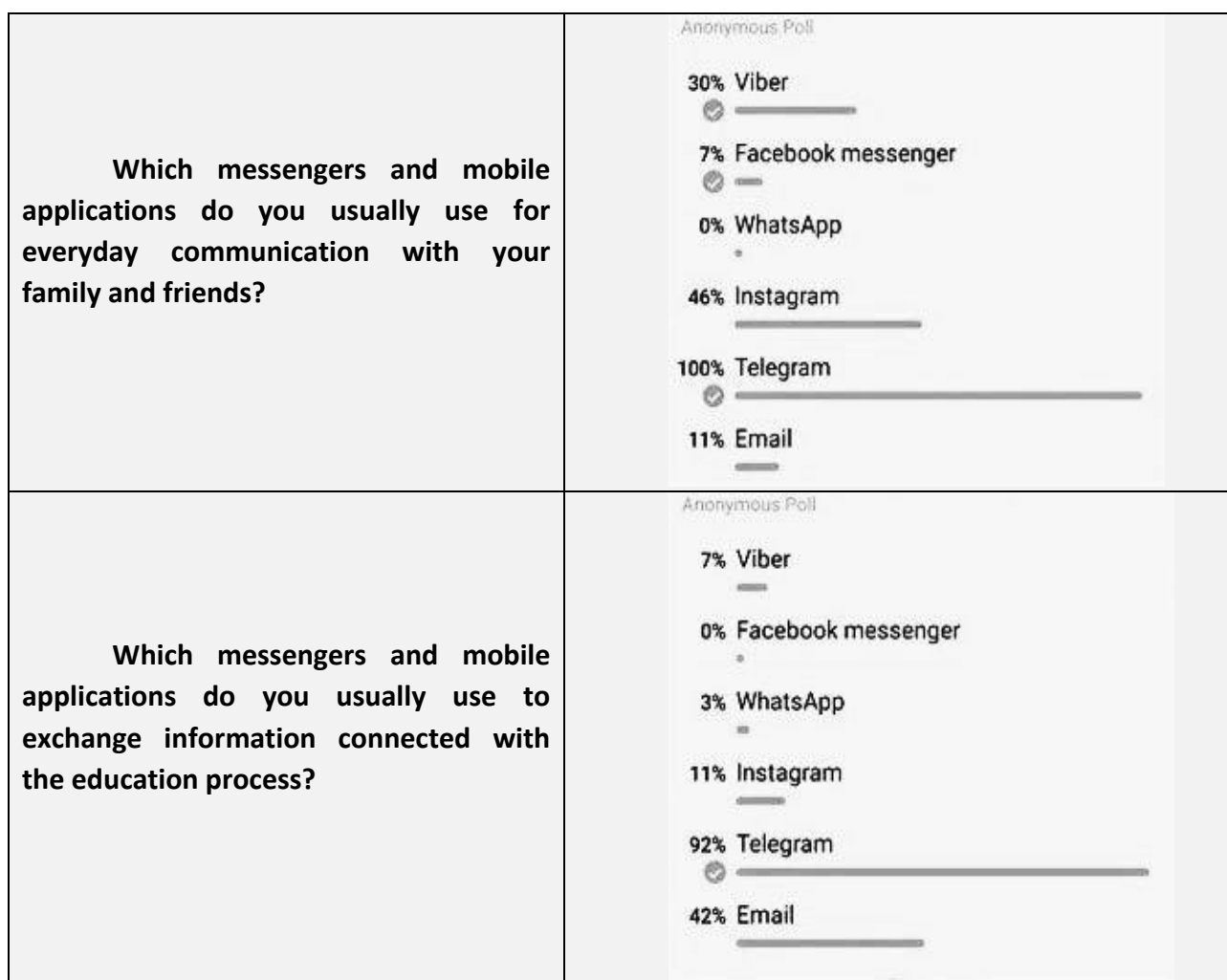


Figure 1. The student responses to the survey questions

During the experiment, two groups of students (control group A, 42 students) used Telegram only to exchange information between the teacher and students (home tasks, pictures for description, recommended literature) and also used conventional books. Other two groups (experimental group B, 44 students) apart from using conventional books were given tasks which required

the use of Telegram at the lessons as an educational platform, not only as a means to exchange organisational information. The comparison of the results of the entry tests performed at the beginning of the academic year and the final tests demonstrated that writing and speaking accuracy increased and the number of spelling and grammar mistakes in the students' speech reduced by 9 per cent in *group B* in comparison with the entry test, while in *group A*, the results improved by 2 per cent (Table 1).

Table 1

The results of the entry tests & the final tests in the control group and the experimental group

Tests	10 points / 100% (Maximum number of points/percentage)	
	Control Group A	Experimental Group B
Entry tests	6.7/67%	6.5/65 %
Final tests	6.9/69%	7.6/76%

According to the poll conducted at the end of the first term (Figure 2), 96 % of Group A and Group B students agreed and 4 % of students partly agreed that using Telegram in the study process helps them a lot in organisational issues connected with English lessons. The poll conducted among the students of group B, who performed exercises on-line at their English lessons, demonstrated that 58 % of students agree that Telegram Messenger is *very helpful* in developing language skills, 34 % believe that it is *helpful*. Thus, 92 % of students positively assessed the use of Telegram Messenger at English lessons (Figure 2).

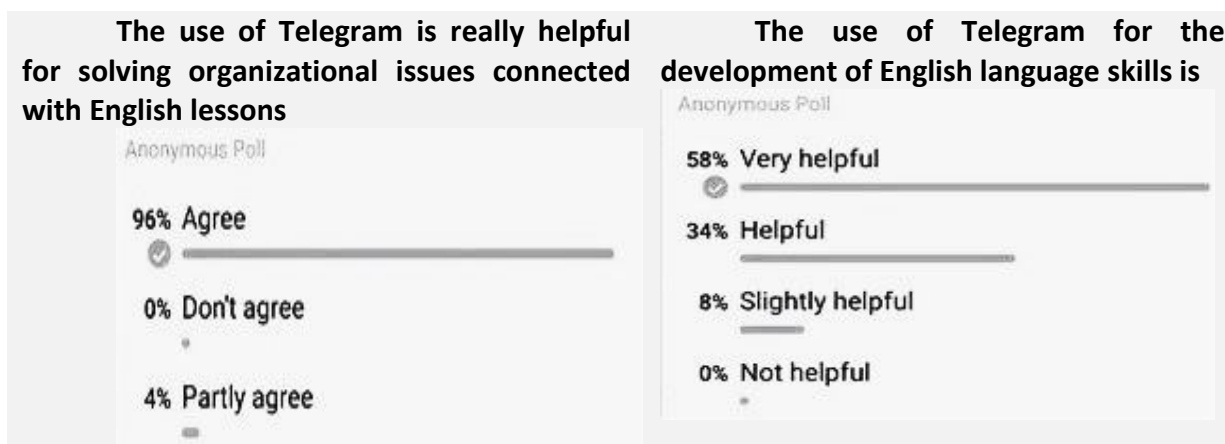


Figure 2. The students' feedback on the benefits of using Telegram

The results of the research confirmed our hypothesis that Telegram Messenger can be used not only for solving organizational issues but also for studying purposes to improve students' writing and speaking accuracy (which was demonstrated by the final test results), and individualize the learning process in big mixed-ability classes, as using Telegram in classes which are not equipped with computers and projectors gives an English teacher a possibility

to make lessons more interesting, applying varied types of tasks which can be conducted with the help of the messenger.

The basic functions offered by Telegram that could be exploited by teachers at both English and non-English lessons, even with the limited use of IT in the classroom, include the creation of study groups not only to inform students on different educational and organizational matters but also for a teacher or an assigned student to leave homework there, take and upload photos of handouts and the material presented on the blackboard to the groups, and also to upload audio and video files used during classes, both for absent students and for those who need more time to understand and memorize the material. A number of various exercises, for using in Telegram, aimed at the formation of speaking and writing skills and achieving greater accuracy can be developed by educators and students themselves to diversify English lessons in big mixed-ability classes.

Owing to Telegram Messenger it is possible to achieve greater individualization of learning, and be sure that all students have access to study materials. While using Telegram we sent study materials and the description of student homework directly in Telegram chat groups. We noticed that there was a decrease in the number of students who were not prepared for lessons. During our experiment the number of students in groups A and B who were not ready for their lessons decreased sharply from September to December resulting in 99 % readiness for classes (we mean that all study materials were obtained and all tasks were performed by students in time). An improvement in the quality of preparation was observed since both the tasks and the studying materials were on the same device, which is always with a student. Also, this application helps to organize more effectively the interaction between a teacher and a student, since the student can ask questions any time, and a teacher can answer them when they have a possibility.

Using Telegram helps to shift the focus from the teacher to the student, the student becomes an active participant of the learning process. They can learn, teach others by sharing educational materials, giving useful links, and advising classmates. It is important to encourage students to share useful additional materials in the chat out of the class, to encourage other students to view them and express their opinion on their usefulness and relevance.

In addition to the variety of class activities, the possibility of a more individualized approach to students and saving resources, the use of this application has another significant advantage – it allows a teacher to look at the students' previous answers before planning the next class, identify common mistakes, organize work aimed at eliminating them.

Conclusions. The possibilities offered by Telegram Messenger are really wide: the use of this application has great potential in teaching foreign languages, as its most prominent feature is diversifying learning activities. It is a tool for boosting activity and independence of students. The results obtained during the experiment prove our hypotheses and allows us to state that the use of Telegram during English language lessons in large mixed-ability classes increases speaking and writing language accuracy of students, enhances their language acquisition. Also, it gives the possibility to involve all students into active work, individualizing the learning and reducing the number of organizational problems.

Our research provides the platform for further studies into developing students' language competences using different messengers and social networking sites in online and offline settings.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Бойко Светлана, Волкова Елена. Внедрение мессенджера Telegram в процесс изучения иностранного языка для повышения уровня грамотности письменной и устной речи студентов.

В исследовании рассматриваются возможности использования кроссплатформенного мессенджера Telegram в процессе преподавания иностранных языков в больших разноуровневых группах технических университетов. Основное внимание уделяется применению Telegram для повышения грамотности письменной и устной речи студентов, оптимизации процесса изучения иностранного языка, индивидуализации обучения и повышения мотивации студентов. Результаты данной работы могут быть использованы для дальнейших исследований относительно развития языковых навыков с использованием различных мессенджеров во время онлайн и офлайн уроков.

Ключевые слова: мессенджер Telegram, обучение иностранным языкам, грамотность устной и письменной речи, технические университеты.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Бойко Світлана, Волкова Олена. Упровадження месенджера Telegram у процес вивчення іноземної мови для підвищення рівня грамотності писемного та усного мовлення студентів.

У дослідженні розглядаються можливості використання кроссплатформного месенджера Telegram у процесі викладання іноземних мов у великих різнорівневих групах технічних університетів. Основна увага приділяється застосуванню месенджера Telegram для підвищення грамотності писемного та усного іншомовного мовлення студентів, оптимізації процесу вивчення іноземної мови, індивідуалізації навчання та підвищення мотивації студентів. Дослідження проводилося в Національному технічному університеті України «Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського» з вересня 2019 року по травень 2020 року. Під час дослідження, у якому брали участь студенти першого та другого курсів хіміко-технологічного факультету, у месенджері Telegram було створено чотири навчальні групи з англійської мови для вирішення організаційних питань. Дві з них – експериментальні групи, що також виконували в месенджері спеціально розроблені вправи й завдання з метою підвищення грамотності свого писемного та усного мовлення, розширення словникового запасу, закріплення граматичного матеріалу, удосконалення навичок усного й писемного спілкування іноземною мовою. Порівняння результатів вступного та підсумкового тестів продемонструвало, що грамотність письма та мовлення зростає, а кількість орфографічних та граматичних помилок в усному та писемному мовленні студентів в експериментальних групах зменшилася більшою мірою в порівнянні з контрольними групами. Результати дослідження продемонстрували, що введення месенджера Telegram у навчальний процес активізує навчальну діяльність студентів, розширює спектр інструментів контролю й самоконтролю студентів, розвиває самокритичність, об'єктивність та впевненість, суттєво знижуючи кількість орфографічних, граматичних і словникових помилок. Це дослідження привело до висновку, що застосування месенджеру Telegram, як одного з додаткових інструментів для вивчення іноземної мови в університетах, допомагає не тільки полегшити управління великими різнорівневими групами студентів технічних університетів, але й підвищити рівень засвоєння іноземної мови, сприяє розвитку навичок письма та мовлення. Результати даної роботи можуть бути використані для подальших досліджень щодо формування мовленнєвих навичок та вмінь із використанням різних месенджерів під час онлайн та офлайн уроків.

Ключові слова: месенджер Telegram, навчання іноземним мовам, грамотність писемної та усної мови, технічні університети.