IMPACT OF THE TELEGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA APP ON DISTANCE LEARNING: VIEWS OF HEAVILY SCHEDULED PROFESSIONAL POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN EDUCATION (PGDE) STUDENTS, UEWTECHIMAN STUDY CENTRE.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to seek the views of PGDE distance students of the Techiman Study Centre on the impact of the Telegram App on student learning. The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed method design strategy, which is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data. Questionnaire and interviews were instruments used to collect data for the study. Questionnaire and interview guide were the instruments used to collect data for the study. The population for the study was all ninety-five (95) PGDE Distance Students of the Techiman Study Centre. Simple random sampling technique was used to select seventy-six (76) students from the population, the sample size conforms with the sample size formula for finite population postulated by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The selected samples were required to fill an online instrument for the purpose of the study. Fifty - eight (58) of the respondents successfully completed the online questionnaire. The response rate was 76%. Out of the fifty-eight (58) respondents, seven (7) were traced to respond to the qualitative questions for the study. Online questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection from the respondents. The questionnaire was uploaded into an online data collection platform (Survey monkey) for easy access by the students. The link to the online instrument was uploaded to respondents via the telegram app. Data obtained from the online questionnaire were analyzed. Data from the individual interviews were analyzed thematically. A striking finding of the study was that the use of the app motivated the students to learn. In conclusion, the telegram app proved to be a very impactful learning app for distance learning. According to the respondents, with the aid of the app, they have developed an increase in their attitude towards learning, a reduction in stressful learning, increased use of social media app and increased passion for virtual learning. The study recommends the adoption and integration of the telegram app for distance learning owing the resultant impact is has on student learning.

KEY WORDS: Social Media, Telegram, Distance Learning

Background

Fortunately, many tertiary institutes in Ghana have started to use Internet and WWW to support teaching or learning with the understanding that technology can be a better vehicle to support the education of the new era because internet education enable dissemination of teaching materials easily in most cases and the irony of this is that, some tertiary institutions in Ghana which are still lacking in this technology for teaching context; hardly can their education rationales be seen of the construct which are consistent with the aforementioned paradigm shift in most of their educational processes. On the other hand, it is a pity that potentials of the Internet and WWW have still not been maximized to the fullest in the tertiary educational sector in Ghana and makes learning uninteresting by sidelining it away from the technological demands for educating contemporary technology thirsty students.

It is worth noting that the tremendous technological developments in internet technology have brought us an unprecedented excitement and opportunity in education and supports the fact that technology, for that matter social media has and continues to be a magnetizing platform for 21st Century lecturers and students for interaction and as such can be used to facilitate teaching and learning processes. It is therefore imperative for higher institutions of learning like UEW and with special reference to the Centre for Distance Education to adopt a social media platform to augment its tutorials and also for effective learning.

There is a gradual paradigm shift in the delivery of distance education in Ghana that is a shift from dependent on print and media to integration of ICT. Tertiary institutions in Ghana are scaling up on the use of ICT in teaching and learning, the University of Education, Winneba is not an exception. This is in line with the five-generational stages of distance learning as indicated by Taylor (2001). The scale up in ICTs has created a platform for an unimaginable demand for social media platforms.

As such, this pilot study on the use of telegram social media platform as a form of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for tutorials and learning is to prove that virtual kind of learning if well utilized with internet and WWW technologies at the Institute for Distance and eLearning with specific reference to the Techiman Study Centre, will go a very long way to enhance teaching and learning.

This study is therefore meant to project the significance and benefits of the Telegram social media platform with respect to its impact as a form of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to the Institute of Distance and eLearning (IDeL), Techiman Study Centre.

Statement of the Problem
Several factors play key roles in the academic achievements of higher institutions of learning. Whereas some of the factors are institutional, others can be attributed to the students. In the case of UEW distance learning, delays in the dispatch and receipt of learning modules at the various study centers and rescheduling of tutorials go a long way to impede the pace of teaching and learning. Poor health, loaded work schedules and other social commitments on the part of the distance education students also impedes the pace of teaching and learning and go a long way to explain some of the reasons why several distance students absent themselves from tutorials through-out the semester and only resurface for quizzes and end of semester examinations. The case of heavily scheduled working students with special reference to students who are Bankers, very busy Business professionals, Force and Health workers; fall within this category of challenge. Inadequate time for

studies to enable them to cover their lost times to catch up with colleagues was their main challenge. In view of this, an immediate pilot intervention exercise was adopted to address this challenge of busy scheduled students of distance education in PGDE at the Techiman Study Centre of the University of Education, Winneba, using the Telegram App to enable them catch-up with colleagues and complete learning modules on time. Therefore, it has become necessary to seek the views of these students after using the Telegram App to support their learning, relating to the impact of learning using the Telegram Social Media App.

Research Objective
To seek the views of heavily scheduled professional Post Graduate Diploma in Education Students on the impact the telegram app has on student learning.

Research Question
What are the views of PGDE Distance Students of UEW, Winneba Study Centre on the impact of the telegram app on their learning?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Evolution of Distance Learning
Distance learning over the years, have evolved through several generational stages. Taylor (2001) identified five main generational stages when it comes to the evolution of distance learning, namely the 1st Generation, 2nd generation, 3rd generation, 4th generation and the 5th generation. 1st generation is characterized by the correspondence model where the mode of teaching and learning is via print. With the 2nd generation stage, institutions of learning adopt the multimedia model which is characterized using print, audio tapes, video tapes, computer-based learning and interactive video. The 3rd Generation which is a buildup on the 2nd generation stage is known as the tele-learning model which is characterized using audio tele-conferencing, video conferencing, audio graphic communication, broadcast TV/radio and audio tele-conferencing. The last of stages when it comes to distance education evolution is the 5th generation which is characterized by the intelligent flexible learning model which has interactive multimedia online.

The University of Education Winneba and for that matter the Institute for Distance and eLearning associates itself with the 4th generational stage of distance education.

Telegram as a Social Media App
According telegram.org, Telegram is a messaging app with a focus on speed and security. It is super-fast, simple and free. The desktop version was first lunched in the year 2013. Telegram can be used on all devices at the same time, with messages sync seamlessly across any number of your phones, tablets or computers and connects from most remote locations. In most cases, typing texts on cell phones can be cumbersome for some users due to the minute nature of their keyboard and visual challenges, leading to multiple typographical errors which are capable of misleading students in certain educational concepts during virtual lessons. As such, Telegram Desktop App becomes a substitute. The best thing about Telegram Desktop is that it facilitates easy usage of computer keyboard and easy correction of typographical errors and automatically syncs messages from your phone with your computer using Telegram's encrypted cloud. All it takes is to install it and log in to your account and all messages, documents, photos and videos will be synced for you from the secure

cloud. Thanks to Cloud Drafts, a user can even start typing on his/her phone, and then continue on the desktop when one reaches home or work. With the telegram app, there is no need for emails. Telegram Desktop is many times faster and handles attachments like a pro. One has to simply share his/her t.me/username with those who want to reach you. Simply opt for Gmail bot (https://t.me/gmail) if you are interested in looking for an easy way to get your emails right in Telegram. This helps one to stay in touch with those who insist on using antique methods of communication.

Application of Social Media in Tertiary Institutions

According to Chan, & Leung, (2016) Popularity of social media draws attention of educational researchers and the use of social media (such as Facebook, blogs and Twitter) in the tertiary educational context has been studied. The following are examples of research that showed students' positive attitudes towards social media used in tertiary institutions.

Rambe (2012) studied Facebook posts in a university course and found that more students communicated administrative type posts and concluded that teachers should involve learners in critical engagement, instead of allowing students to receive teachers' content passively.
Irwin , Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, (2012) also studied four university courses using Facebook and 78% of the students thought Facebook was an effective learning tool that enhanced discussion, interaction and access of posted assessments and lecture notes.

McCarthy (2010) found that 95% of students in the survey agreed that Facebook assisted them in the development of peer relationships and appreciated the collaborative discussion in the online environment whiles Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) revealed that about 70% of university students using Facebook had positive attitude towards learning and felt the use of social network could motivate learning. In addition, Ophus and Abbitt (2009) performed a survey in a university course in which Facebook was used to facilitate sharing among students and 95.5% of students felt communication with others was improved.

Top (2012) also examined the sense of community including blogging in a university course and indicated that respondents had moderately felt the sense of community, and perceived learning had a stronger relationship with the sense of community. With Deng and Yuen (2011), self-refection, self-expression, social interaction could be supported by blogs that sustained students' sense of togetherness and reflected their own practices as students.

Deed and Edwards (2011) studied the behaviors of 400 university students using an unrestricted blog and concluded that generally students accomplished the assignments with an unrestricted blog efficiently and Huang, Huang and Yu (2011) examined the effects of using blogs in a university course and found 79% of the students agreed that they did not feel pressure to use blogs to present their thoughts. Sim and Hew (2010) conducted a review on the use of blogs in higher educational environment and found that students liked to use blogs for formative purposes particularly.

Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) compared the engagement scores two groups of university students and found that the group using Twitter has higher engagement scores than the one without the usage of Twitter. It was suggested that Twitter could improve better contacts between teachers

and students and prompt feedback and active learning could be promoted.

Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009) integrated Twitter into a university course and found the advantage of Twitter over traditional teaching methods was enhancement of social presence. In addition, Twitter could support connection with a professional community of practices and informal teaching and learning. Borau, Ullrich, Feng, &Shen, (2009) explained the experiences of using Twitter in a language course in the university and found that 70% of the students agreed that effective language skills could be developed with Twitter.

Impact of Social Media in Education

According to Khaama Press (2014) of Wednesday November 19, the positive impact of social media on education reveals that with Google and education, Google has helped over 20million students in their education using their tools. Also, by spending so much time working with new technologies, students develop more familiarity with computers and other electronic devices. With the increased focus on technology in education and business, social media will help students build skills that will aid them throughout their lives through the manipulation of the electronic gadgets at their disposal. In addition, talents got discovered faster, students who were good at programming got their name out their easily, student who were good in music, got their videos out and shared leading them to their dreams. A lot of the students were able to inform public about their issues using social media which brought awareness and helped solve a lot of problems and the ease with which a student can customize their profile makes them more aware of basic aspects of design and layout that are not often taught in schools.

Raut, &Patil, (2016), also argued that the Social Media has a negative impact on education as a result of the popularity of social media and the speed, at which information is published, has created a lax attitude in students towards proper spelling and grammar. This reduces students' ability to effectively write without relying on a computer's spell check feature.

Our ability to retain information has decreased, and the willingness to spend more time researching and looking up good information has reduced, due the fact that we got used to the ease of accessibility to information on social media. In addition, students, who attempt to multi-task, checking social media sites while studying, show reduced academic performance. Their ability to concentrate on the task at hand is significantly reduced by the distractions that are brought about by YouTube, Facebook or Twitter. Because of the lack of body signals and other nonverbal cues, like tone and inflection, social networking sites are not an adequate replacement for face-to-face communication. The degree to which private information is available online and the anonymity the internet seems to provide has made students forget the need to filter the information they post. Most students do not constantly evaluate the content they are publishing online, which can bring about negative consequences months or years down the road.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed method design strategy, which is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data. To obtain the necessary information concerning the impact of the telegram app in Distance

Learning at the Institute for Distance and eLearning (IDeL) of the University of Education Winneba, a descriptive survey was adopted for the study. The population for the study was all ninety-five (95) PGDE Distance Students of the Techiman Study Centre. Simple random sampling technique was used to select seventy-six students from the population. The sample size conforms with the sample size formula for finite population postulated by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The selected sampled were required to fill an online instrument for the purpose of the study. Fifty - eight (58) of the respondents successfully completed the online questionnaire. The response rate was 76%. Out of the fifty-eight (58) respondents, seven (7) respondents were traced to respond to the qualitative questions for the study. Online questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection from the respondents. The questionnaire was uploaded into an online data collection platform (Survey monkey) for easy access by the students. The link to the online instrument was uploaded to respondents via the telegram app. Data obtained from the online questionnaire were analyzed and presented in tables and charts.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
The analysis of responses in relation to the research question. This analysis and discussion of the research results are presented in two sections; the socio demographic characteristics of respondents and discussion in line with research question.

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
The researchers were interested in a number of demographic characteristics of the respondents namely their age, sex and occupation.

Age Distribution of Respondents
The age of students who participate in a distance learning programme to a greater extent informs the kind of learning technologies that need to be deployed. The researchers therefore deemed it appropriate to categorize the respondents into age groups. The categorization of the age groups of respondents is presented in figure 1.
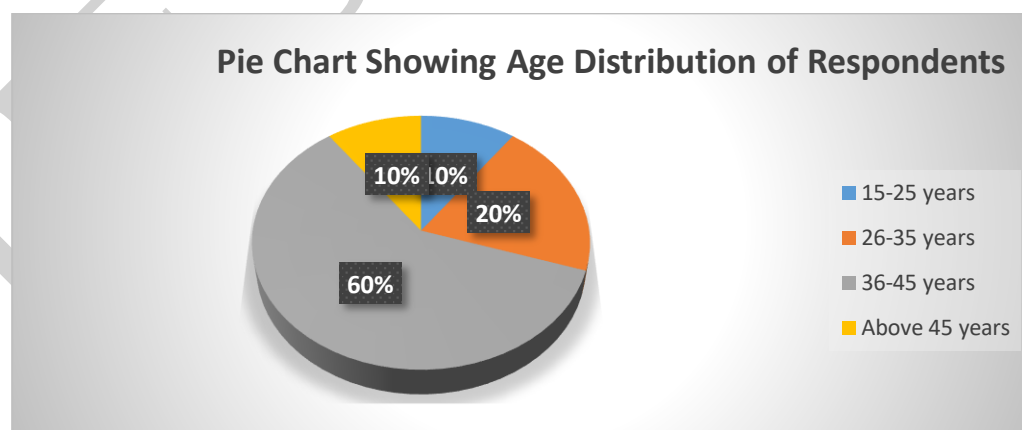Figure 1 displays the age distribution of the respondents.

Figure 1: Age distribution of Respondents.

From figure 1, most of the respondents (60%) who participated in the pilot study were between the ages of 36-45 years, followed by those within the age brackets of 26-35 years (20%), then 15-25

years (10%) and the remaining 10% were those above 45 years. This means that most of the distance post graduate diploma in education students were between the ages of 36-45 years and hence had much time to contribute to the improvement of Ghana's education by serving longer years before the retirement age of sixty.

Gender Distribution of Respondents

There were more males than females among the heavily scheduled professional Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students from the Techiman Study Centre of IDeL who participated in the study. Figure 2 displays the gender distribution of respondents
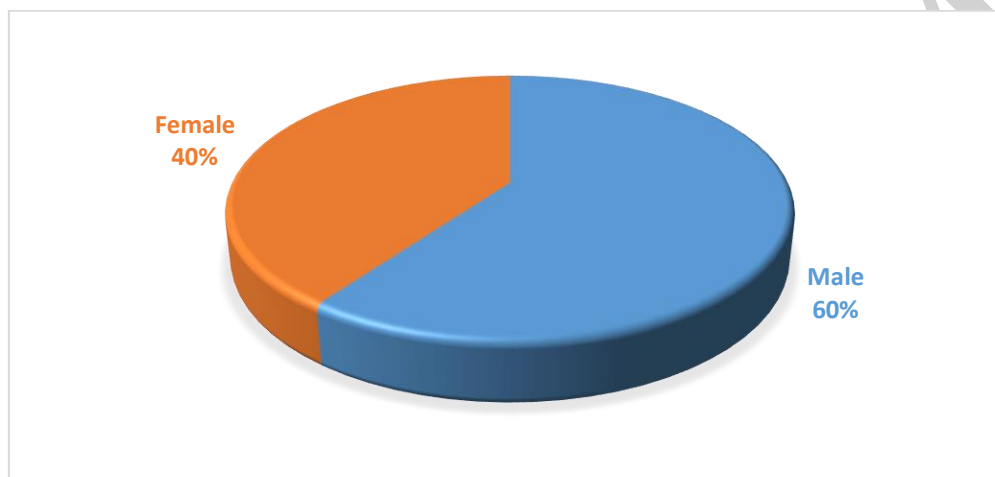
Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

More than half (60%) of the students who participated in the pilot study were males whilst the remaining (40%) were females.

Occupational Distribution of Respondents

The researchers were equally interested in knowing the kind of work that these heavily scheduled distance students are engaged in. Figure 3 gives a vivid description of the various occupations of the respondents. Their occupations included banking, force work, health work and business. Engaging in these occupations at the same time schooling can indeed be very involving. Some of the respondents indicated that they come all the way from Tanoso, Kintampo and its environs in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana to attend tutorials at the Techiman Study Centre on weekends.
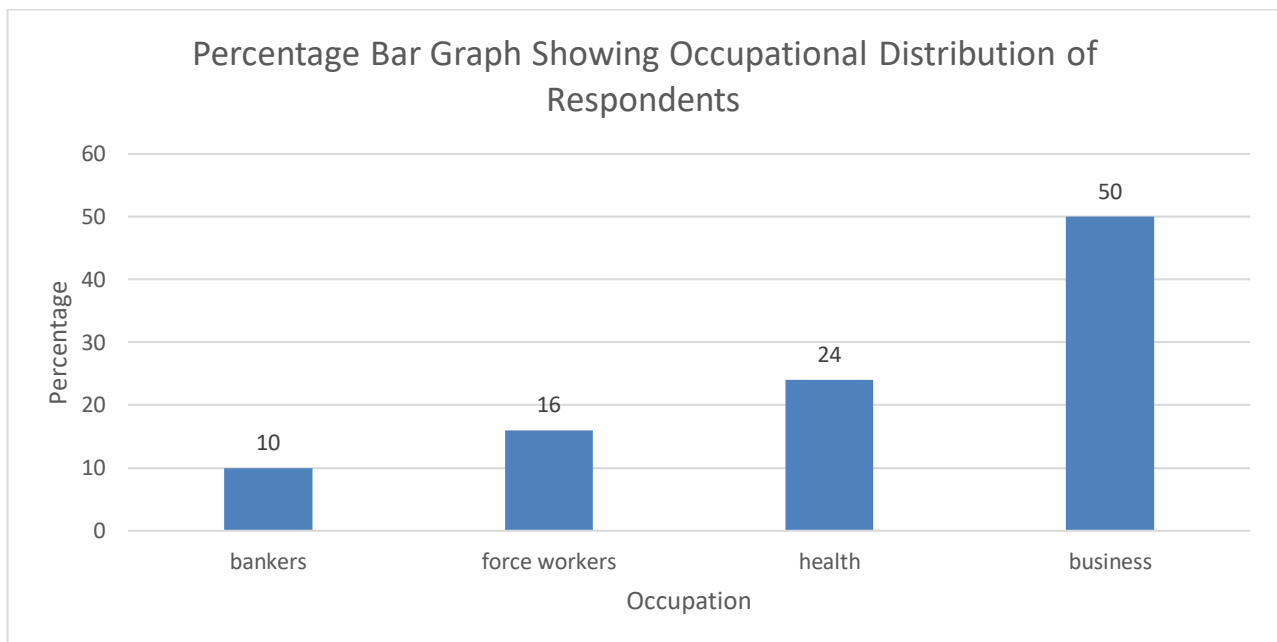
Figure 3: Occupational distribution of Respondents

Owing to the business inclined nature of the study area (Techiman), it was not surprising that fifty percent of the sampled respondents were into business, 24% of them indicated that they were health workers, whist the remaining 10% mentioned that they were bankers. These aforementioned occupations apparently demand a lot from these student workers who are unable to carry their heavy learning modules and even make time during working hours to open these books in an attempt to learn. The impact of the telegram app for learning would be felt most by these workers, compared with their less busy scheduled colleagues. These constituted the occupational distribution of the respondents who participated in the study.

B. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was designed to seek the views of respondents on the impact of telegram on their learning. The impact of the app on learning is concentrated in four areas; attitude towards learning in general, stressful learning, passion for virtual learning and use of social media app (telegram). Table 1 displays their responses.

Table 1: Respondents views on the Impact of Telegram App on their learning

Impact	Increased	No impact	Decreased
1.Attitude towards Learning	46 (80%)	12 (20%)	0
2.Stressful learning	0	6 (10%)	52 (90%)
3.Use of social media app (telegram)	58 (100%)	0	0
4.Passion for virtual learning	58 (100%)	0	0

According to 80% of the students, their attitude towards learning had increased owing to the introduction of the telegram app in teaching and learning. This finding is not surprising as it is confirmed by the studies of Turoff, (1995), that teaching approach is moving from lecturing monotonously to facilitating students' autonomous and independent learning, learning style is shifting from passive learning to active and collaborative learning among others.

Another impact of the telegram app on student learning is that it reduces the stressful nature of learning. According to 90% of the respondents, their professions are very stressful in nature, adding that up with learning is cumbersome. They however attested that the use of the telegram app in learning makes learning less stressful for them.

They added that the use of the telegram app has made them to rely solely on the app for most of their learning and social media engagements. This means their interest levels for the virtual learning has increased. They indicated that they are advocating for other lecturers to integrate the app in their teaching and learning. All in all, the passion of virtual learning has been heightened by the integration of the telegram app in teaching and learning. According to all the students who participated in the pilot study, their passion for virtual learning has been heightened by the introduction of the telegram app in their learning process. These findings are in consonance with the findings of Ololube (2006) when he indicated that "availability of virtual learning can accomplish seven objectives when properly utilized. This includes the fact that it promotes interest and vocabulary development in students and also "provides experiences not easily obtained through other learning strategies and contributes to the efficiency, depth and variety of learning".

From the qualitative point of view, the following are the responses that were given by the respondents with respect to the impact of the telegram app on the learning experience.
A question was asked to find out from the respondents if the app in any way motivated them to learn as compared with their normal learning process. Peter, a businessman, had this to say about the telegram app with respect to the impact it had on his learning experience:

"Indeed, the telegram app makes learning appears to be like normal chatting or discussions on social media platform. Although regulated, we are made to express ourselves to the maximum and ask questions with comfort."

This means that learning appears like chatting on social media which is in line with responses for statements 1, 3 and 4 on table 1. The study agrees with the works of Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, (2012) who studied four university courses using Facebook and 78% ofthe students thought Facebook was an effective learning tool that enhanced discussion, interaction and access of posted assessments and lecture notes.

In another instance, a question was posed to find out from the respondents how effective the telegram was in supporting their academic relationship with their lecturers. John, a busy banker had this to say about the impact of the telegram app:

"The app is more than effective. It is an avenue for shy students (Those who do not contribute in class) freely, to express their view because they are not seeing the lecturer face to face. The Lecturer also gives prompt feedbacks on all questions ask and in case a student wants to have a private academic discussion with the lecturer outside the platform, the telegram app has provision for that. This makes the lecture to identify address our individual challenges."

John's response means provision is made for both fast, slow and shy learning students on the telegram platform and they students get prompt feedback from their lecturer. This translates into the responses for statements 1 and 4 on table 1 which in no small way conforms with the works ofJunco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) who compared the engagement scores two groups of university students and found that the group using Twitter has higher engagement scores than the one without the usage of Twitter. It was suggested that Twitter could improve better contacts between teachers and students and prompt feedback and active learning could be promoted.

In another instance, the researchers sought the views of the respondents to find out whether the telegram app had in any way addressed some of their learning challenges when it comes to distance education. Francis, another banker had this to say about the telegram app:

"Yes it has. Instead of carrying heavy learning modules to work for studies during break, my learning slides can be accessed on my cell phone, Digital tablets, laptop or desktop computers. No one even knows am studying but rather thinks am just on a social media platform."

Another respondent had this to say about the impact of telegram:
In fact it supports learning at anywhere, anytime and at your own learning pace, provided you have your internet bundle activated. This enables us to finish learning our modules on time despite the late arrival of learning modules

Francis's statement throws light on the fact that with the aid of the telegram app, learning is less stressful and students get to enjoy privacy, which confirms with responses for statements 2 & 3 on table 1. The last respondent's comments goes a long way to mean that unimpeded learning and timely delivery of learning modules goes a long way to increase students attitude towards learning, and heightened student passion for virtual learning which is inconformity with statements 1 and 3 on table 1.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, the responses of the heavily scheduled students of the Techiman Study Centre of the Institute for Distance and eLearning points to a positive impact of the telegram app on their learning. They highlighted increase in their attitude towards learning, a reduction in stressful learning, increased use of social media app and increased passion for virtual learning.

RECOMMENDATION
The study recommends the adoption of the telegram app for distance learning, the study has shown a positive impact of the app on student learning in the areas of their attitude towards learning, reduction in stressful learning, increase usage of social media and increased passion for virtual learning.

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