

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF UZBEK STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF USING TELEGRAM TO COMMUNICATE WITH FOREIGN LECTURERS

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Abstract. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Uzbek undergraduate students using Telegram to communicate with foreign lecturers in a private international university in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. While mobile communication platforms are increasingly used in higher education, limited attention has been given to the subjective meanings students attach to Telegram-mediated academic communication, particularly in intercultural and multi-lingual learning contexts. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study examined the experiences of eight Uzbek students who regularly communicate with foreign lecturers through Telegram. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through phenomenological reduction, meaning-unit clustering, and thematic synthesis. The findings revealed four major themes: comfort in informality, linguistic negotiation, perceived distance, and trust-building presence. Students experienced Telegram as a flexible and emotionally accessible space that reduced anxiety, supported participation, and enabled quicker interaction with lecturers. However, the platform also exposed linguistic insecurities, uncertainty about tone and boundaries, and cultural differences in communication style. The essence of the experience lies in Telegram's dual role as both a bridge and a boundary: it strengthens connection and academic engagement while also highlighting the limitations of mediated intercultural communication. The study suggests that lecturers and institutions should recognize Telegram not merely as a technical tool, but as a socially and emotionally meaningful communication space that requires culturally sensitive and student-centered practices.

Keywords: *Telegram, Uzbek students, foreign lecturers, phenomenology, intercultural communication, higher education, digital learning, computer-mediated communication, linguistic negotiation, student engagement*

I. Introduction

Background of the Study

The integration of mobile communication technologies has changed the way lecturers and students interact in recent years particularly in universities. The popularity of instant messaging applications like Line, Messenger, Telegram, WeChat, and WhatsApp, has promoted accessibility, immediacy, and social presence that extend learning beyond the classrooms (Sevnarayan, 2023; Anderson, 2019). In Central Asia, Telegram's accessibility, group-based feature, and speed boosted its popularity as it aligned with students' communication activities daily (Abdullazoda, 2025).

Telegram has become part of Uzbek university students' life. Md Yusof and Abdullah (2025) highlighted that this digital app is informal but essential medium for sharing resources, organizing coursework, and maintaining dialogue between students and professors. However, this digital exchanges still remain complex in universities where lecturers deliver instructions in the English language. Eslami (2018) posited that the intercultural and linguistic aspects of these interactions present both opportunities for enhanced engagement and challenges concerning language proficiency, communication style, and power distance.

The current literature on educational technology in higher education frequently underscores functional or pedagogical outcomes, including motivation, satisfaction, and usability (Ibrahim et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2022). However, there exists a relative paucity of research concerning the subjective meanings and lived experiences that shape students' perceptions and interpretations of these interactions. A phenomenological approach facilitates

a transition from assessing tool efficacy to investigating the experience of the communicative act, the co-construction of meaning, and the emotional, linguistic, and cultural dimensions that influence these interactions.

Problem Statement

In Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, Telegram app plays an essential role in higher education system. In fact, it remains the main medium of communication among students. However, not much is known about how they feel about using it to talk to foreign teachers. Research experts highlighted that most of the studies related to the use of digital technologies were either quantitative or descriptive, and concentrated on usage frequency or academic results instead of meaning and interpretation (Zhao et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2016). There is a deficiency in comprehending the fundamental nature of communication in Telegram as an experiential phenomenon, specifically in how it facilitates feelings of anxiety, connection, distance, or inclusion, in intercultural educational settings.

Furthermore, there are also things that affect how Uzbek students talk and how they think about talking to people who don't speak Uzbek. Their ways of communicating are heavily shaped by cultural norms (respect, modesty, and hierarchy), as well as the fact that English is a foreign language for them. By looking deeply into its meaning, this mini study might provide an understanding of Telegram's teaching potential. Consequently, this paper will investigate the insufficient qualitative comprehension of how local students ascribe, experience, and interpret meanings to their use of Telegram for communication with foreign lecturers.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study aims to investigate and articulate the lived experiences of Uzbek students utilizing Telegram for communication with foreign lecturers in private international universities. By concentrating on students' narratives, this study aims to explore the fundamental aspects of these communicative experiences (emotional, linguistic, and relational significances) that emerge in digital intercultural interactions.

The study specifically aims to:

1. Describe the experience of Uzbek students communicating with foreign lecturers via Telegram.
2. Analyze how students perceive connection, comprehension, and engagement in these interactions.
3. Identify the impact of language, culture, and technology on how they talk to each other.
4. Determine the importance students attach to utilizing Telegram as a platform for education and relationship development.

The study attempts to provide a comprehension of Telegram communication as a social and interpretive phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

This paper theoretically provides a phenomenological analysis of digital interaction within a post-Soviet higher education context. This contributes to our understanding of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and cross-cultural learning. Abdullazoda (2025) highlighted that when it comes to promoting cross-cultural dialogue between local students and expatriate faculty, there is a need to investigate the role of digital communication platforms. The findings of this study may enhance broader dialogues within the domains of educational communication studies, second-language acquisition, and digital pedagogy. It will elucidate the formulation of meaning in multilingual, mediated academic environments. It will provide insights into the construction of meaning within multilingual, mediated academic contexts.

Moreover, this mini study seeks to offer pragmatic guidance to universities and educators in designing and administering culturally-sensitive and more effective channels of communication.

Teachers can use Telegram and other apps like it to make the classroom feel more welcoming by showing students what they have done in real life. This could help students feel less anxious about talking to other people and help them do better in school.

Meanwhile, the study is also expected to assist foreign teachers in learning about the problems they might have in teaching and even knowing how to get along with students from the area.

This study seeks to improve institutional digital-transformation policies by highlighting the importance of informal communication tools in promoting student engagement and self-directed learning.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is delimited to Uzbek undergraduate students enrolled in a private international higher education institution in Tashkent, the TMC Singapore Institute, who have regular experience communicating with foreign lecturers through Telegram. It only looks at the student's point of view and uses Telegram as the way to talk to each other, leaving out other platforms like WhatsApp, Teams, or LMS/Moodle. The study is confined to the academic communication context, excluding general social interactions.

Firstly, since this is a phenomenological mini research, the sample size was limited to eight (8) participants to focus on depth rather than breadth. This limits generalization to the wider student population. Secondly, it is good to note that the participants' recollections and descriptions may be influenced by memory bias or language limitations when expressing experiences in English. Thirdly, because the researcher is also a foreign lecturer in the local context, researcher positionality may influence interpretation. However, reflexivity and bracketing procedures were used to minimize bias. Lastly, because Telegram's technology and cultural norms are always changing, the results are only a snapshot of what it was like to go to school in Uzbekistan at that time.

The paper seeks to explore a deficiency in comprehending the Uzbek students' lived communicative experiences utilizing Telegram to interact with foreign lecturers, a phenomenon located at the convergence of digital learning, intercultural communication, and language usage.

II. Review of Related Literature

As colleges and universities adapt new digital technologies, mobile communication platforms have become essential channels for interaction between students and instructors. Anderson (2019) and Lowenthal et al. (2017) argue that applications such as Microsoft Teams, Telegram, and WhatsApp make learning more immediate, flexible, and collaborative. According to Garrison (2020), these tools foster stronger connectivity and engagement, yet they also blur the line between academic and personal spaces, introducing new emotional and cognitive pressures for users.

In Uzbekistan, where online learning is rapidly expanding, digital communication technologies have taken on an even more vital role in supporting teaching partnerships and international collaboration (Abdullazoda, 2025). Most of the research that has been done so far looks at how these tools work in the classroom or how they work technically, not how people actually use them. Because of this, we don't know much about how students really use these digital spaces and see them as places to talk and work things out.

The most popular way for Central Asians to talk about school is through Telegram. People like it because it's easy to use and helps them learn together. The app makes it easy and quick to share information, which keeps students and teachers interested, motivated, and connected (Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2023; Sevnarayan, 2023). Zhao et al. (2022) also found that Telegram helps EFL students feel less anxious, which makes them more confident and willing to participate.

Telegram's lack of formality could also change the way people communicate with each other. Students may perceive the platform as liberating while exercising caution regarding tone and politeness in communications with lecturers (Sevnarayan, 2023). However, not many qualitative studies have investigated how students themselves experience them even though there is proof that these exchanges are good for students. For example, how they understand digital interactions, do they feel close or far away, and are they able to cope up with language and cultural differences.

Uzbek students and foreign lecturers interact in intercultural communication contexts, where meaning is co-constructed through shared norms, symbols, and expectations (Ting-Toomey, 2018). Past studies on EFL contexts indicated that linguistic insecurity and perceived power distance frequently affect student interactions with foreign educators (Guilherme, 2012). Hofstede's (2011) framework elucidates these tendencies as students may avoid direct disagreement and adopt more deferential tones in collectivist and high power-distance cultures.

Digital platforms, meanwhile, can help break down some of these barriers by letting students talk to each other at different times, which gives them time to think before they respond (Ouchene, 2021). However, written messages can still make students feel vulnerable because they worry about getting things right, the tone, or being misunderstood. To create more welcoming learning spaces, it's important to know how these cultural and emotional dynamics show up in Telegram conversations.

Phenomenology provides a methodological framework for examining communication as a lived experience rather than merely a technical process or medium of exchange. Based on the philosophical ideas of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (Krell, 1982), it looks at how experiences happen in consciousness and tries to show the essence of meaning as it is lived and seen (Moustakas, 1994; Greening, 2019). This interpretive perspective emphasizes that meaning is not an immutable attribute of messages but is perpetually co-constructed through relationships, emotions, and contextual factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In digital learning environments, phenomenology elucidates the influence of communication technologies on the experiential aspects of interaction, specifically how students perceive connection, immediacy, and presence, even within mediated contexts (Hong, 2019). This perspective sees Telegram not just as a way to send information, but as a place where people are always negotiating their relationships, feelings, and meanings.

In this context, the current study goes beyond a functional evaluation of Telegram's capabilities. It examines the experiences of Uzbek students in their interactions with foreign lecturers, focusing on the manifestations of cultural distance, linguistic negotiation, and emotional engagement within a digital medium that both connects and isolates participants.

Digital platforms such as Telegram are transforming higher education by facilitating broader participation and accessibility (Sevnarayan, 2023; Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2025). Second, intercultural communication in multilingual contexts introduces linguistic and cultural complexities that affect students' perceptions and interpretations of messages (Guilherme, 2012; Ouchene, 2021). Third, phenomenology has been employed to investigate lived experiences in online learning; however, there exists a scarcity of studies focusing on Central Asia or Telegram as a platform for intercultural academic communication.

III. Methodology

Research Design

This mini study used a qualitative phenomenological design to look into the lived experiences of Uzbek university students who use Telegram to talk to foreign teachers. The aim of this design was to comprehend how students experience, interpret, and assign meaning to communication through Telegram within their linguistic, cultural, and educational contexts.

The phenomenological perspective corresponds with the study's emphasis on subjective comprehension, highlighting students' experiences in Telegram-mediated communication and the nature of those experiences. This methodology was particularly suitable for analyzing cross-cultural academic communication, as it enabled participants' perspectives to elucidate the intricacies of interaction, belonging, and meaning-making across digital and linguistic divides.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- RQ1: What is the essence of Uzbek students' lived experiences of using Telegram to communicate with foreign lecturers?
- RQ2: What is it like for Uzbek students to communicate with foreign lecturers through Telegram as part of their learning experience?
- RQ3: How do students experience and interpret their interactions with foreign lecturers on Telegram in terms of connection, understanding, and participation?
- RQ4: How do students perceive the influence of language, culture, and technology in shaping their communication experiences on Telegram?
- RQ5: What meanings do students assign to their use of Telegram in building relationships and engaging with foreign lecturers?

Context and Respondents

The research took place at TMC Institute Singapore, a private international university in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where Telegram is extensively utilized as an educational and communication tool. The context is important because Telegram is both a social and academic tool. Students and teachers use it to make announcements, ask questions, give feedback, and have informal learning conversations.

There were eight Uzbek undergraduate students who were taking classes in English from foreign teachers. The sample size is in line with what Creswell and Poth (2018) say about phenomenological studies that value depth over breadth. Every participant had at least one semester of experience talking to foreign teachers through Telegram. Students from various fields (e.g., Business, Education, and ICT) were included to guarantee a diversity of viewpoints while remaining pertinent to the study's emphasis on intercultural communication.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method was utilized to select participants capable of offering comprehensive, pertinent, and diverse insights regarding the phenomenon being examined. The criteria for selection were as follows:

1. The participant is an Uzbek citizen who is currently a student at TMC.
2. The participant regularly uses Telegram for at least a semester to talk to foreign teachers for school or learning purposes.
3. The participant is willing to talk about their experiences and take part in an interview.

After being identified, potential participants were contacted in class. They got a copy of the interview questions that explained the study's goals, how to keep information private, and that participation was optional.

Data Collection

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. This let participants talk about their experiences in their own words and let the researcher ask more questions to get more information and clarity. The interviews were done in person on campus and lasted about 20 to 25 minutes each.

An interview guide was created based on the research sub-questions and included open-ended prompts.

Data Analysis

The analysis utilized the phenomenological approach articulated by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2016), concentrating on discerning the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The analytical process progressed through multiple interrelated phases.

First, the researcher set aside any personal beliefs or experiences they had with Telegram so they could look at the data with an open mind and without bias.

Second, each transcript was read several times, and important statements that shed light on the participants' experiences were taken out and given the same weight.

Third, the important statements were put into meaning units and grouped into thematic clusters. This showed patterns like comfort in informality, linguistic negotiation, perceived distance, and trust-building. These clusters were utilized to delineate the participants' experiences, encompassing the emotions, perceptions, and contexts that defined interactions on Telegram.

Fourth, the researcher analyzed the experience by looking at contextual factors like cultural communication styles, language skills, and the use of technology to communicate.

Finally, the last synthesis combined the textural and structural descriptions into a single story that showed the essence of Telegram-mediated communication to connect and limit people, where linguistic and cultural boundaries are both crossed and strengthened.

The preceding text delineates the methodological framework of the study, outlining the qualitative phenomenological design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The selected methodology facilitated a comprehensive examination of the ways in which Uzbek students experience and interpret Telegram-mediated communication with foreign lecturers.

IV. Results and Discussion

Through phenomenological reduction and the clustering of meaning units, four principal themes emerged that encapsulate the essence of Uzbek students' experiences when communicating with foreign lecturers via Telegram: (1) comfort in informality, (2) linguistic negotiation, (3) perceived distance, and (4) trust-building and presence. These interconnected themes illustrate how digital interaction fosters both inclusion and nuanced disconnection in transnational learning environments.

Axial and Selective Coding Analytical Table

Open Codes (Significant Statements)	Meaning Units	Axial Categories (Thematic Clusters)	Conditions/ Causal Factors	Actions/ Interaction Strategies	Consequences/ Outcomes	Selective Code (Core Category Contribution)
"Telegram feels relaxed"; "Easier to text... than speak in class"; "I could ask small questions without feeling stupid"	Ease, reduced anxiety, lowered formality	Comfort in Informality	Telegram affords casual, rapid, low-stakes interaction; hierarchical norms loosen in digital space	Students message more frequently; initiate queries more confidently; adopt informal address norms	Psychological safety increases; participation rises; however, boundary-blurring creates uncertainty	Telegram creates a hybrid communicative space that feels safe yet ambiguously academic
"Didn't know if I should say 'Hi sir' or just type"; "Sometimes lecturers were too direct"	Boundary ambiguity	Comfort in Informality	Cultural expectations of academic hierarchy; lecturer tone differences	Students experiment with tone; adjust their politeness strategies	Occasional discomfort; need for constant recalibration	Reveals tension between digital egalitarianism and cultural power distance
"I check my grammar three times"; "I rewrite messages"; "Emojis and voice notes help"	Language monitoring; compensating for linguistic insecurity	Linguistic Negotiation	Varying English proficiency; desire to appear competent/professional	Rewriting, editing, switching languages; using emojis, voice notes, translation tools	Enhanced clarity; reduced anxiety; but reinforces feeling of linguistic vulnerability	Telegram becomes a collaborative linguistic space shaped by insecurity and creativity
"If my English failed... I asked another student first"; "Mixed Uzbek, Russian, English"	Code-switching; peer linguistic support	Linguistic Negotiation	Multilingual environment; collectivist cultural norms encouraging peer-help	Reliance on peers; language-switching to maintain coherence	Strengthened peer networks; maintained engagement	Highlights collective coping within digital intercultural communication
"When there was no answer, I thought maybe my question wasn't good"; "Direct writing feels cold"	Emotional uncertainty; absence of nonverbal cues	Perceived Distance	Asynchrony; lack of immediacy; cultural variations in directness	Students interpret silence; compare online and offline warmth; re-check messages	Heightened self-consciousness; misinterpretation of tone	Shows the limits of digital presence despite technical connectivity
"Foreign lecturers write directly"; "Maybe they are angry"	Cultural misreading; tone ambiguity	Perceived Distance	Differences in communication norms; time-zone/privacy constraints	Students adjust expectations; reflect on cultural differences	Increased awareness but also occasional relational strain	Digital space amplifies cultural gaps , complicating relational closeness
"I felt known"; "Teacher cared because she always answered"; "Proud when teacher sent voice message"	Feeling recognized; emotional connection	Trust-Building & Presence	Consistent responsiveness; empathetic tone; personalization	Lecturers send voice notes; greet students; give feedback	Trust, belonging, motivation, sustained engagement	Telegram fosters relational presence that substitutes for physical proximity
"Regular interaction built trust"; "Even without meeting, I felt close"	Continuity of communication	Trust-Building & Presence	Repeated micro-interactions; positive reinforcement	Routine messaging; personalized exchanges	Sense of relational stability and safety	Demonstrates embodied digital presence through repeated micro-cues

Table 1. Telegram-Mediated Communication Between Uzbek Students and Foreign Lecturers

Theme 1: Comfort in informality

Most people said that Telegram was a "relaxed space" where they could talk to their teachers more freely than they could in formal emails or classrooms. Students liked that the platform was quick and easy to use. They said things like, "It feels easier to text on Telegram than to speak in class," and "the teacher becomes more like a mentor or friend."

This relaxed atmosphere made people less anxious and more willing to speak their minds, especially those who were scared of talking to people face-to-face. One student said, "I could ask small questions without feeling stupid because it's just a message." Telegram's

asynchronous communication also helped participants carefully write their messages by giving them time to think about the content and tone.

But the comfort of being informal came with stress. Some participants said they felt too familiar or unsure about boundaries at times, especially when the lecturers were more direct in how they talked. One student said, "Sometimes I didn't know if I should say 'Hi sir' or just start typing."

Telegram's casualness made people feel safe and encouraged them to join in, but it also made old hierarchies less clear. It was a hybrid communicative space that was neither fully academic nor purely social, and people had to constantly work out what the rules were (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

Theme 2: Linguistic negotiation

Language proficiency had a big impact on how students communicated with each other. A few people said they had to rewrite messages several times to make sure they were clear and correct. One person said, "I check my grammar three times before I send it because I don't want to look unprofessional." Others said that emojis or voice messages helped make up for language gaps: "Sometimes I send voice notes; it feels more natural than typing in English."

For people who spoke more than one language, Telegram became a place where English, Uzbek, and Russian mixed to make sense. Some students said they switched languages in the middle of a conversation when they thought they weren't getting through: "If my English failed, I texted another student in Uzbek for help and then wrote back in English."

Linguistic negotiation showed both weakness and power. Baek et al. (2017) emphasized that students actively addressed language gaps using digital resources like emojis, translation tools, and peer support, turning Telegram into a collaborative linguistic space instead of a place of deficiency.

Theme 3: Perceived distance

Even though Telegram made it easy to connect, some people said they felt "distant" or "unseen" at times. Sometimes, when lecturers didn't answer right away, it made students feel even more insecure: "When there was no answer, I thought maybe my question wasn't good." Some people thought that writing was not as warm as talking to someone in person: "Even with smiley faces, you can't always feel the tone."

Students also said that cultural misunderstandings or differences in time zones could have caused this distance. One participant said, "Foreign lecturers write very directly. Sometimes I think they are angry, but they are just being clear."

The perceived distance made the limits of mediated connection clear. Telegram connected people across distances, but it couldn't fully recreate the feeling of being there right away. Without non-verbal cues, it was hard to interpret relationships, and cultural norms often got in the way (Gunawardena, 2013).

Theme 4: Trust building and presence

Over time, regular conversations on Telegram helped people get to know each other and trust each other. Students reported cultivating "a sense of presence" and "feeling known" through consistent interactions. One person said, "Even though we never met in person, I felt like my teacher cared because she always answered my questions and encouraged me."

Experiences of responsiveness and empathy increased engagement and motivation. Participants said that trust grew not only from getting help with schoolwork, but also from small things like greetings, reactions, or personalized feedback. One person said, "I felt proud all day when my teacher sent me a voice message saying 'well done.'"

Archard (2014) argued that B=building trust through Telegram shows how technology can help people feel like they belong. Even though they were physically apart, regular interaction created a "embodied sense of connection" that went beyond the screen and made people more emotionally involved in a transnational learning setting.

Selective Coding (Core Category)

Dimension	Description
Central Process	Students continuously negotiate closeness and distance while communicating across cultural and linguistic boundaries.
Integrating Mechanism	Telegram enables immediacy, informality, and relational presence while simultaneously highlighting linguistic insecurity, boundary uncertainty, and cultural gaps.
Outcome	A lived experience characterized by simultaneous empowerment and constraint — the essence of digital intercultural communication in Uzbek higher education.

Table 2. Telegram as a Dual Space of Connection and Limitation

The Essence of the Experience

When you look at all the themes, the main idea of Telegram-mediated communication among Uzbek students is that it is both a way to connect and a way to limit. The platform provided a more equal and emotionally safe place to interact, but it also made people more sensitive to language, hierarchy, and interpretation. Students viewed Telegram as both a conduit that promotes intimacy, autonomy, and trust, and a barrier that highlights linguistic insecurity and cultural remoteness.

From a phenomenological perspective, this duality embodies the lived experience of digital intercultural communication: simultaneously connected and cautious, empowered yet self-aware. Students navigate their academic identities and sense of belonging in a digitally mediated global university environment through this oscillation (Bolliger & Inan, 2012).

V. Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of Uzbek university students communicating with foreign lecturers through Telegram, revealing how digital interaction facilitates both connection and limitation in intercultural higher education settings. Based on phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016), the analysis identified four interconnected themes — comfort in informality, linguistic negotiation, perceived distance, and trust-building — that collectively demonstrate how Telegram operates as more than just a technical platform. It manifests as a dynamic communicative milieu wherein emotions, identities, and significances are perpetually contested.

The results corroborate previous assertions that digital technologies augment flexibility and collaboration in higher education (Anderson, 2019; Lowenthal et al., 2017; Garrison, 2020) while simultaneously obscuring the distinctions between academic and personal domains. In Uzbekistan, Telegram has become an important tool for cross-border learning partnerships (Abdullazoda, 2025; Md Yusof & Abdullah, 2025; Sevnarayan, 2023), but this study shows that there are some subtle cultural and linguistic tensions that come with using it. Students' experiences demonstrated the persistent impact of collectivist communication norms and power distance (Guilherme, 2012; Hofstede, 2011), even in a context that appears egalitarian in the digital realm.

Phenomenologically, the study enhances comprehension of how mediated communication influences perceptions of presence and belonging (Hong, 2019) and how meaning is collaboratively constructed through interaction, emotion, and interpretation (Ting-Toomey, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this way, Telegram both connects and strengthens boundaries at the same time, allowing people to participate while reminding them of the limits of language and culture.

The fundamental nature of the phenomenon resides in this duality of connection and limitation. Telegram makes it easy to communicate quickly, easily, and with people you know, but it also reveals weaknesses in language, hierarchy, and interpretation. Educators and institutions must acknowledge these dynamics to create more inclusive and empathetic digital learning environments that address not only technological functionality but also the human experience of communication.

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