

# TRAINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS THROUGH CMC-ELT BLENDED MODEL: A CASE STUDY OF ONLINE MA TEFL PROGRAMME OF AIOU

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## ABSTRACT

*The recent developments in technology have brought revolution in all the spheres of life especially in the field of distance education. Its potential impact on distance education delivery system has been greatly accentuated through the development of computer-mediated communication (CMC) which included internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web. CMC not only facilitated the students at campus but also at distance and new means of education like educational technology and e-learning were introduced. Integration of CMC with distance education needs a basic infrastructure, trained faculty and technical skills of the students. CMCs based instructions have been experimented in distance education and specifically in professional education programmes in developing countries. AIOU is also building up the infrastructure for offering CMC-based education and especially teacher education programmes. A CMC-ELT blended model was conceived and implemented on two courses of MA TEFL programme of Allama Iqbal Open University. The results and students performance reflected cost-effectiveness, enhanced access to study materials and improved students' learning.*

**Keywords:** Computer-mediated communication, Distance education, English language teaching.

## Introduction

Distance education evolved through various phases including correspondence systems, print and broadcast systems, multimedia systems, online systems, etc. Each generation has offered the potential

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for a progressive increase in learner control, opportunities for interaction, and in possibilities for learner choice. Correspondence courses were offered in the late 1800s to provide education to individuals who could not join regular institutions due to geographical, social, or cultural constraints. The first generation of distance education was marked with print-based correspondence education and that was the only mean of interaction between teacher and students. British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) started educational programmes through radio broadcast in the 1924. Since then, radio has been used in reaching scattered and rural population. Experiments with television began in the 1930s but it took 20 years to become popular. Therefore, the second generation was characterized by a blend of print and broadcasting approach. The UK Open University used a range of media for distance education for the first time besides the print medium. The third generation of distance education was based on two-way communication and used CMC technologies for interaction. Students were provided print or multimedia textbooks with access to internet resources. They had opportunities to communicate with the tutors and native speakers via e-mail. These opportunities for interaction offered by the emergence of CMC were central to the third phase model of distance education. White (2003:15) comments that the hallmark of this generation was "greater and enhanced communication opportunities between the teacher and learners, and between the learners themselves, either individually or in groups". This led to the development of a virtual learning environments based on audio/video conferencing. According to Bates (2005:7), "third generation systems are sometimes described as knowledge-based, more constructivist approach to teaching and learning, dependent on student dialogue and discussion, and relatively flexible web-based administrative services". Fourth generation offered a wide variety of learning opportunities for distance education programmes which allowed students further choices about where, when and how to learn. The advent of CMC and its impact on the design of distance education increased the potential for interaction and collaborative work among students. Integration of technology in education introduced new terms, like e-learning, distributed learning, mixed more, blended and hybrid learning. The traditional form of distance education that used print, audio and video materials was supplemented with CMC for providing more opportunities for interaction and collaboration. White (2003:7) says that "the social and technological changes that prompted expansion are also transforming the nature of distance learning. They have resulted in new contexts for learning, new ways of learning and new roles and responsibilities for participants".

Computer played a significant role in the second and third generations of distance education whereas in the fourth generation its impact has been of fundamental importance by providing a wide variety of the instructional uses of computer in distance education through Internet. This change also created new context for learning which is an interconnected community of learners rather than an isolated series of individual learners.

Pakistan's socio-economic situation has prevented a high enrolment in formal education by rural people, females and workers. The idea of establishing distance education system was developed to address this problem. As a result, the world's second Open University was established in Pakistan by federal charter in 1974. AIOU is first of its kind in this region, is a unique institution because of its philosophy, system, approach, functions and overall structure. AIOU is pioneer institution in the fields of mass education, female literacy, teacher education, and media-based distance education. AIOU has been using technology in various programme/ courses at various levels. Distance education in Pakistan is still mostly dependent on print and broadcast media and a major move is needed to transform educational landscape by using technology which can dimensionally multiply the scarce resources available in the country. By integrating technology with distance education, the AIOU can provide a next generation educational delivery programme and multiply the efforts of the Ministry of Education a, Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University and Higher Education Commission.

The Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, offers English language courses and Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programme. The MA TEFL is a two-year (60 credit hours) programme spreads over four semesters. The students have to attend 12 classes for each course. The students failing to attend the required number of classes are declared fail even if all the other requirements of the course have been fulfilled. They have to write four assignments for each of the courses. The fourth assignment is based on projects on which they have to give presentations. At the end of each semester, they have to appear in the final exam for each of the courses they study. In online MA TEFL programme, students were provided access to online study material, tutorials, submission of assignments and feedback by respective tutors.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Judge the effectiveness of the CMC-ELT Blended Model.
- ii. Analyse the students' performance enrolled in online ELT courses.

## **Research Questions**

- i. Was the CMC-ELT Blended Model appropriate in distance education context in Pakistan?
- ii. Was the CMC-ELT Blended Model helpful in improving students' learning enrolled in online ELT courses?

## **Research Design**

The researcher adopted a quantitative research framework to analyze the effectiveness of CMC in English language teaching programme in distance education in Pakistan. The experimental study was conducted during Autumn 2007 semester.

## **Research Tool**

The researcher used survey, AIOU results and pre- and post-tests for collecting the data. Survey was used to get information about students and their habits regarding use of computer and internet. AIOU results, pre- and post-tests were used for assessing the performance of the students.

## **Population**

The population consisted of 664 students enrolled in MA TEFL programme. It consisted of 47.2% male and 52.8% female; 69.5% were from urban and 30.5% from rural areas.

## **Sample**

A group of 27 students was selected randomly from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Abbotabad and Chakwal regions. The researcher selected these regions because these were the main regions located in the centre of the country and they also reflected diverse population. Islamabad is the federal capital and represents population from all regions of the

country. Rawalpindi and Chakwal are located in Punjab whereas Abbotabad is located in Khyber Pakhtoon Khwah (KPK).

### **Theoretical Framework**

There is a long list of CMC or e-learning models based on needs analysis which were designed to engage the students in meaningful tasks, quick feedback, reflection through discussions with tutors and peers, assessment, and discussion to create a community of teachers and students. The basic characteristics of the models were clear learning outcomes in terms of the subject matter or skill to be learnt, the instructional method. The role for technology involved a simulation of a process and the automatic presentation of problems that were carefully graded in difficulty. However, a few models have been selected for discussion leading to researcher's CMC-ELT Blended model.

Salmon (2004) introduced a five-stage model for fully online teaching and learning. The model describes how to motivate online participation of students, to build learning through online tasks which he termed as e-tivities, and to pace learning through various training stages. First stage describes prerequisite of the course and induction of participants, second stage guides individuals establishing their online identities, third stage exchanges students' information, fourth stage initiates course-related discussions, and fifth stage, real reflection and personal development occur in the achievement of goals.

The UK Open University (UKOU) initiated a VLE project in 2004. Because of its distance education mode of operation, a number of large-scale systems had been developed prior to the advent of VLEs. The tools it already possessed were: discussion and conferencing, authentication, template driven content delivery, blogging, audio conferencing, assignment handling and assessment. The UKOU developed an e-learning strategy which had direct resonance with the VLE project. From a VLE perspective these strategic directions favoured certain approaches; for example, in order to show leadership in modern pedagogy, an open source or service oriented approach was preferable to a commercial, proprietary solution, as it allowed flexibility in approach, and also demonstrated a degree of technical engagement with the VLE community (UKOU website).

