Eduvest – Journal of Universal Studies
Volume 5 Number 2, February, 2025
p- ISSN 2775-3735- e-ISSN 2775-3727

THE APPLICATION OF COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN THE RPL PROGRAM OF THE BACHELOR AND MASTER OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES, FAJAR UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the application of Computer-Mediated Communication in the Recognition of Past Learning (RPL) Program for Bachelor and Master of Communication Science at Fajar University. By using interpretive qualitative methods, the informants in this study were lecturers in undergraduate and master programs. The data collection techniques were carried out by in-depth interviews and also using snowball sampling techniques, non-participant observation and document studies. The results show that interactivity in online learning is highly dependent on effective communication between lecturers and students. Lecturers use quizzes and discussions to ensure the material is conveyed clearly, and encourage students to share relevant work experiences. Active participation in discussions, presentations and assignments gives students better grades, incentivizing engagement. Technologies such as Zoom and WhatsApp mediate communication, with Zoom for face-to-face lectures and WhatsApp for informal discussions. A Learning Management System (LMS) is also used to upload materials and schedules. Additional training for lecturers and technology support for students are necessary for successful online learning.

KEYWORDS *Computer-Mediated Communication, Virtual Communication, Recognition of Past Learning (RPL)*

INTRODUCTION

E-learning is one of the real products of the significance of the development of information and communication technology. Learning techniques that utilize internet media and use hardware such as laptops, personal computers (PCs), tablets, or even mobile phones can also be called computer-mediated communication

How to cite: Mariesa Giswandhani, et al. (2025). The Application of Computer-Mediated Communication in The RPL Program of The Bachelor and Master of Communication Sciences, Fajar University. Journal Eduvest. *Vol 5* (2): 1765-1773
E-ISSN: 2775-3727

(CMC) approaches (Urrahmah, 2023). This has become commonplace to be utilized by various institutions, including universities to support the teaching process. Fajar University also adopts online teaching techniques by utilizing information technology innovations in the Recognition of Past Learning (RPL) program for Bachelor (S1) and Master of Communication Science (S2) levels. The RPL program itself is the recognition of a person's Learning Outcomes obtained from formal, non-formal, informal education, and / or work experience as a basis for continuing formal education and to equalize with certain qualifications.

The role of technology, especially instructional computer technology (ICT), has become very dominant in the era of globalization, this element is growing rapidly and the right interaction system is needed to unite it. The comprehensive approach is computer assisted language learning (CALL) which means systemic interaction in the teaching process including computer mediated communication (CMC) (Ritonga, et al, 2020).

CMC can be defined as communication interactions between people that occur using two or more electronic devices. Traditionally this term is known as communication that utilizes computer media (Prasetyo, 2019). The opportunity to communicate between students and teaching lecturers does not stop in the classroom, but by utilizing CMC the opportunity for the knowledge transfer process is not only limited to face-to-face in the classroom.

Considering that online learning offers high flexibility and accessibility, students have the convenience to access learning materials anytime and anywhere. However, the effectiveness of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in online learning is a topic that requires further study. Interactivity, user convenience, information reliability, and student engagement are some important factors that determine the success of online learning. Effective interaction between lecturers and students should be optimized to create a dynamic and productive learning environment. In addition, ease of use of technology is an important prerequisite to ensure that all learners can participate without technical barriers. The accuracy and currency of information must also be maintained to keep the material relevant and useful. Finally, motivation to actively participate should be enhanced through various strategies, such as rewards and constructive feedback, to encourage maximum student involvement in the online learning process.

Theory Overview

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer Mediated Communication or commonly referred to as CMC is usually interpreted as computer-mediated communication. The study of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) began to develop in 1987. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) as communication between people using or through computer media (Bugiarto, 2015). Julia T. Wood states that computer technology allows people to send and receive information faster. The scope of the concept of Computer Mediated Communication Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) provides an understanding of computer software that can be used in the communication process (Heryanto, 2018). With its development, the computer itself is used as a medium of communication directly following the development of

the computer generation. In the context of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), the computer in question is not only a personal computer (PC) or laptop, but all computer-based tools. According to Thurlow, CMC itself is dynamic, constantly changing, multifunctional, and multimodal. In the dynamic nature, communication that applies the CMC concept is considered a dynamic process where messages are not only in the form of words, but are much more fluid and depend on the context (Judhita, 2020).

The characteristics of CMC according to Murray are "communication that occurs between humans through computer devices". Murray sees the characteristics of CMC to be very important in the digital communication process (Amin, 2020). Furthermore, he also sees that if the lecturer / teacher wants to use some type of CMC *software* in the classroom, students must get information in advance about what is expected in the interaction. Specific norms also exist in CMC, such as the use of abbreviations, simplified syntax, and acceptance of initial errors such as the use of symbols, emoticons and phrases.

Another characteristic of CMC is that it enables collaborative learning activities to occur. CMC can encourage learners to take an active role and consciously discuss lessons and facilitate the negotiation of meaning between students and lecturers. Warschauer explained that there are two CMC models namely *Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication* (SCMC) and *Asynchronous Computer Mediated Communication* (ACMC). In SCMC mode, synchronous computer mediated communication is communication that is carried out directly using internet media intermediaries (online) simultaneously at the same time (Chandra, 2023). An example is when lectures take place online using communication media such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Whatsapp Video Call. One of the disadvantages of this SCMC model is that it is difficult for lecture participants to make eye contact with the image display of the interlocutor who may experience a less strong signal, or students can behave arbitrarily if presented with an avatar because it is not directly visible (turning off the video so that the self-image is not visible on the screen). But on the other hand, this provides an advantage for students who have a shy nature to speak in public directly can become active in online class discussions because they do not need to show themselves in real life.

Furthermore, ACMC is a form of online communication that is delayed or not simultaneous using a computer. ACMC model communication takes place at different places and times, an example in this study is when students access learning materials / modules on the *learning management system* page which at Fajar University is named Silaju. ACMC allows students to review the communication that will be sent. Another benefit of the ACMC model is that flexible communication can be read anytime and anywhere so that students are easy to repeat learning materials and can do assignments anywhere (Chandra, 2023).

Rice in Arnus said the technology in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) facilitates the exchange of semantic content between individuals and groups through telecommunications networks, which are processed through one or more computers. There are several dimensions in Computer Mediated Communication including.

1. Accessibility dimension

This dimension shows that the communication process that aims to communicate information through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can reach wide access.

2. Speed dimension

This dimension shows that the process when the sender conveys information through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can show the speed of the receiver in receiving information.

3. Dimension Amount (Quantity of Information)

This dimension indicates that the information sent to the recipient through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can fulfill the required amount of information needs.

4. Dimensions of Cognitive Effectiveness (Effectiveness of Acquiring Knowledge)

This dimension indicates that information sent to the recipient through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can effectively instill and enhance the required information knowledge.

5. Relevance Dimension (Information Suitability)

This dimension indicates that the information sent to the recipient through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can fulfill the level of conformity to the recipient's needs.

6. Motivating dimension (from Information)

This dimension indicates that information sent to recipients through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can create motivation to understand and apply it. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) patterns allow us to communicate assisted by computer-based communication tools supported by internet devices and applications (Arnus, 2016).

Recognition of Past Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Past Learning (RPL) is the recognition of a person's Learning Outcomes obtained from formal, non-formal, informal education, and/or work experience as a basis for continuing formal education and for equalizing with certain qualifications. RPL aims to reward learning experiences throughout one's life, without having to follow a formal curriculum. This approach is increasingly recognized as an important alternative in supporting lifelong learning.

In the context of prior learning, RPL provides individuals with the opportunity to demonstrate the competencies they have developed through work experience, training or volunteering. The process involves collecting and assessing concrete evidence that supports an individual's claim of competence. The result can be formal recognition, such as a certificate or academic credit.

RESEARCH METHOD

In carrying out this research, the researcher used an interpretive qualitative method. which focuses research on the subjective nature of the social world and understands the frame of mind of the object being studied. Interpretive qualitative

aims to analyze how social reality is formed and assumes that access to reality can only be applied through a construction (Gunawan, 2022). Then the researcher used purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is a technique for taking research data sources with various considerations. These considerations include the person who is considered to know the most about what we expect, or maybe he is the most controlling person so that it will make it easier for researchers to explore the object or social situation under study, the impact is that the resulting data is of high quality (Lenaini, 2021).

This research also uses snowball sampling technique. Researchers use snowball sampling techniques because they pay attention to certain considerations that are likely to be faced during research. These considerations, for example, the data obtained cannot fulfill the capacity. The snowball sampling technique is a technique of taking data sources which at first are few in number then become larger, this is because the few data sources have not been able to provide satisfactory data, so look for other informants who are used as data sources. How to get informants in this study using Purposive Sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a way of withdrawing samples by determining subjects based on specific criteria previously determined by the researcher (Hadi, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on analyzing the application of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the Bachelor and Master of Communication Science RPL Program at Fajar University. CMC, which includes all forms of communication that occur through computer devices or internet networks, has become an integral part of higher education, especially in the context of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program. RPL at Fajar University is designed to recognize and give credit for knowledge and skills acquired through previous work or study experience. With the increasing need for flexible and distance learning, CMC is becoming an important tool to achieve this goal.

This study found that the implementation of CMC in the RPL Program at Fajar University had some significant impacts, both positive and negative, which affected students' learning experience as well as teaching effectiveness.

1. Learning Effectiveness

a. Interaction and Collaboration: CMC has enabled increased interaction between students and lecturers, as well as between students themselves. Platforms such as discussion forums, email and instant messaging applications help create a collaborative and interactive learning environment. Students can communicate with lecturers directly for clarification and guidance, while online discussion forums allow for the exchange of ideas and joint problem-solving. However, time and space constraints often limit these interactions, especially in courses that require hands-on practice and demonstration of props. According to Vygotsky, knowledge is built through social interaction and dialog with more expert individuals or peers. Social constructivism emphasizes that learning is a social process that occurs through interaction and collaboration with others. In the context of CMC, platforms such as

discussion forums, email and instant messaging applications allow students to interact and collaborate, share ideas and solve problems together. These interactions create a collaborative learning environment where students can build their knowledge through discussion and exchange of ideas. However, limitations in space and time can hamper in-depth and constructive interactions, especially in courses that require hands-on practice. (Sugrah, 2019).

CMC allows students to observe, imitate, and model the behaviors and thoughts of their lecturers and peers through interactions on digital platforms. Students can learn from feedback provided in discussion forums or from clarifications provided by lecturers via email. However, due to technological and spatial limitations, opportunities for more in-depth face-to-face interactions and hands-on demonstrations can be limited, reducing the effectiveness of learning in contexts that require hands-on practice.

b. Material Accessibility: Digitally provided learning materials provide easy access for students. They can access the materials anytime and anywhere, which is very helpful for those who have busy work schedules or are in locations far from campus. However, technological limitations such as slow or unstable internet connections can hinder this accessibility. Providing learning materials in digital format is in line with the principles of educational technology that aim to improve accessibility and quality of learning. Digital materials can include text, images, videos, and interactivity, all of which can be accessed according to students' needs. However, inadequate technology, such as slow internet connections, can hinder access to these materials, reducing the benefits that should be derived from educational technology.

2. Challenges and Obstacles

a. Technology Limitations: Although CMC offers many benefits, technological limitations often become barriers. Internet connectivity issues, inadequate hardware, and lack of technological skills among some students can hinder the effectiveness of CMC. In addition, courses that require specialized equipment or practical demonstrations are difficult to adapt in a digital format. The digital divide reflects issues of uneven internet connectivity, inadequate hardware, and lack of technological skills among some students. These limitations can hinder the effectiveness of CMC, as not all students have equal access to the technology required to effectively engage in online learning. This is particularly relevant to courses that require specialized equipment or practical demonstrations, which are difficult to adapt in a digital format. Digital divide theory emphasizes differences in access to information and communication technology (ICT) among individuals or groups, which can be caused by economic, geographical, educational, or social factors (Hadiyat, 2014).

b. Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction: One of the major drawbacks of CMC is the lack of face-to-face interaction. This can lead to feelings of isolation and reduce opportunities to build strong interpersonal relationships between students and lecturers as well as between students. In communication science courses,

particularly broadcasting concentrations, practical courses that require props, face-to-face interaction is essential for practicing verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In communication science courses, especially broadcasting concentration, non-verbal communication skills are very important. Face-to-face interaction allows students to practice and receive feedback on their non-verbal cues, which cannot be fully conveyed through CMC media. The lack of face-to-face interaction in CMC can hinder the development of these skills, as non-verbal cues are difficult to capture and evaluate accurately in digital communication. Albert Mehrabian explained that communication does not only occur through words but also through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and voice intonation (Muspawi, et al., 2023).

3. Lecturer's role

a. Material Development: Lecturers play a key role in developing and delivering materials through CMC. The ability of lecturers to adapt traditional learning materials into engaging and interactive digital formats is critical to the successful implementation of CMC. However, not all lecturers have the skills or resources to develop materials suitable for digital formats, which can impact on the quality of learning. In relation to previous research, Mayer developed effective multimedia design principles to maximize understanding and retention of information (Putri, et al, 2018). This means that in order for access to material to be easily understood, it is necessary to utilize other technological media to create material that is more interesting and easy to understand.

b. Support and Guidance: Lecturers also act as facilitators who provide support and guidance to students. Through CMC, lecturers can monitor students' learning progress and provide constructive feedback. However, time constraints and high workloads may reduce lecturers' ability to provide adequate individualized support.

4. Student Satisfaction

a. Learning Experience: In general, students showed a high level of satisfaction with the use of CMC in the RPL program. They appreciated the flexibility and accessibility offered by CMC, although some stated that they missed the more personalized face-to-face interaction. Limitations in courses that were practical and required hands-on demonstration were also a source of dissatisfaction.

b. Technology Skills Enhancement: The use of CMC also helps students improve their technological skills, which is highly beneficial in an increasingly digitalized world of work. However, a lack of initial technological skills can be a barrier for some students, who require additional training to maximize the benefits of CMC.

Practical Implications

This study has several practical implications for the development and application of CMC in RPL programs and higher education in general:

1. Training and Development: Educational institutions should provide adequate training for lecturers and students to optimize the use of CMC.

This training should cover technical as well as pedagogical aspects to ensure that all parties can utilize the technology effectively.

2. Technology Investment: It is important for institutions to invest in adequate technology infrastructure, including a stable internet network and sufficient hardware. This will help reduce technological barriers that students may face.
3. Hybrid Approach: Adopting a hybrid approach that combines CMC with face-to-face sessions can be a solution to overcome the lack of personal interaction in CMC. Face-to-face sessions can be scheduled regularly to strengthen interpersonal relationships and support deeper learning.
4. Psychosocial Support: Providing psychosocial support to students who may feel alienated or have difficulty adapting to CMC is important. This can be done through counseling services or online support groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research opens up several areas that require further exploration:

1. Long-term Effectiveness: Further studies are needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of implementing CMC in RPL programs. This includes the impact on student learning outcomes, graduation rates, and post-graduation career success.
2. Cultural Influences: Further research could examine how cultural factors influence the acceptance and use of CMC. This is important for developing strategies that suit different cultural contexts.
3. Comparison with Other Learning Methods: Conducting a comparative study between CMC and traditional or other online learning methods will help identify the relative advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Computer-Mediated Communication in the Bachelor and Master of Communication Studies RPL Program at Fajar University shows that this technology has great potential to improve the quality and flexibility of learning. Despite facing some challenges, the benefits offered by CMC in terms of accessibility, interaction and technological skill development are significant. To achieve optimal success, educational institutions need to invest in technology infrastructure, provide adequate training, and adopt a balanced learning approach between technology and personal interaction.

This research makes an important contribution in understanding the dynamics and implications of the application of CMC in the context of higher education, as well as providing practical guidance for educational institutions that want to implement or optimize the use of CMC in their programs. Thus, Fajar University can continue to develop RPL programs that are innovative and responsive to the needs of students in this digital era.

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