Teaching English as a Foreign Language:

Bridging the Gap in Online Distance Teacher Training:

Angela Govender 2008

Teaching English as a Foreign Language:
Bridging the Gap in Online Distance Teacher Training

by

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Abstract

The evolution of computer networks and the Internet has transformed the world. Digital communication technologies offer exciting options and new challenges for Open and Distance Learning (ODL). This dissertation presents a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) training pilot* in order to investigate and critique the use of Learning Management Systems distance-driven teacher development programmes.

Globally, English language learning is in high demand. Conventional contact training is unable to reach sufficient numbers of aspirant teachers to ensure quality and to promote access. The study uses design-based research as a means of unravelling the complex relationships between theory, best practice, and implementation in both ODL and TEFL. It concludes by recommending foundational institutional changes as the most appropriate means to effective distance and computer-assisted education

Key Terms

Language learning, language teaching, online learning, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, teacher training, language acquisition, Open and Distance Learning, generations of distance learning systems, e-learning, computer-mediated instruction, online pilot, Learning Management Systems, myUnisa.
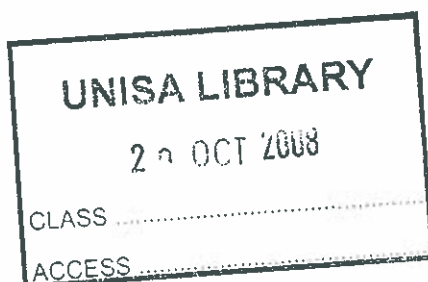
Declaration

I declare that *Bridging the Gap in Online Distance Teacher Training: Teaching English as a Foreign Language* is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Ms Angela Elaine Govender

April 2008
Date

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Abbreviations

CAI:	Computer Aided Instruction
CMC:	Computer-Mediated Communication
CMI:	Computer-Mediated Instruction
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
ELT:	English Language Teaching
HSDPA:	High-Speed Downlink Packet Access
LMS:	Learning Management System
myUnisa:	A Learning Management System on the UNISA website used to connect UNISA learners and teachers
NQF 6:	The National Qualification Framework level 6, which is commensurate with the learning outcomes of first year university
ODL:	Open and Distance Learning - learning that is accessible to all and that is delivered via distance
OUUK:	The Open University of the United Kingdom
PBL:	Project/Problem Based Learning
SAIDE:	South African Institute for Distance Education
TBL:	Task-Based Learning
TEFL:	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TEFLA:	Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults
TESOL:	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TP:	Teaching Practice
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA:	The University of South Africa
URL:	Uniform Resource Locator

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Chapter 1: Bridging the Gap in Distance Teacher Training

1.1 Best practice in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

This dissertation reports on the development, implementation and evaluation of an online teacher-training pilot, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Online, at the University of South Africa (UNISA) — an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution. The pilot stems from the need to train English foreign language teachers through distance education and ultimately to bridge the gap in teacher training at a distance.

More and more the ability to speak and understand English is a prerequisite for access to knowledge, skills and socio-economic opportunities. This has resulted in the expansion of English Language Teaching (ELT) provision worldwide, which in turn has been accompanied by the development and diversification of qualifications in TEFL (Randall & Thornton, 2005:15; Nixon, 2003:87). Many tertiary and private institutes offer similar courses over and above their usual teaching degrees in the disciplines of Applied Language Studies and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (O'Donoghue, 2001)[1]. Although UNISA is a provider of Master of Arts degrees in Linguistics and in TESOL, since 2005, it has also offered a part-contact, part-distance, certificate course in TEFL[2].

Contact TEFL courses are particularly sought after by new entrants to the profession who wish to work in the private EFL sector for a short period of time, typically to

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[1] Royal School of Arts/University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (RSA/UCLES) offers the most popular TEFL course, the CELTA, and Trinity College maintains the Trinity TEFL while UNISA offers the TEFLA.

[2] The certificate in TEFL is a 240 notional hour course at NQF level 5. It incorporates the study of English grammar with the theory and practice of English foreign language teaching. The course comprises a distance component of about 80 hours. Attendance at practical workshops is compulsory.

Chapter 1: Bridging the Gap in Distance Teacher Training

1.1 Best practice in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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'travel and teach' during a 'gap year' or immediately after university. For them, intensive contact TEFL courses present several advantages. Quick turnovers and certification usually in 4-5 weeks[3], are all that is required by most language schools internationally. First language speakers of English then become employable without undertaking extensive study.

TEFL contact courses are 'hands-on' because they include the important provision of an intensive teaching practice component (TP) for each trainee[4]. This means teaching experience and individual feedback for the trainee from the trainer, which encourages an ongoing process of practice and critical reflection. In TP, trainees are expected to teach EFL learners, to observe their peers teaching, and to discuss the lessons with the trainer and other trainees. Kolb (1984) defines this method of integrating practice with critical reflection as experiential learning. Ur (2004) extends Kolb's theory of learning in her enriched reflection[5] model. She argues that providing relevant input[6] or valuable sources of information, opportunities for practice and critical reflection are key components of teacher training (2004:6-8). In this dissertation, I follow Ur's model by showing that experiential learning and 'learning by investigation and doing' forms the basis of successful pedagogy in TEFL courses.

Teaching does not occur in a vacuum. Teaching language is not a predictable science. Language learning, especially in adults, is complex and unpredictable. It relies on several, changeable human variables such as motivation, linguistic aptitude, age, environment, existing knowledge and first language interference. Richards and Rodgers (1986:VII) claim that a proliferation of language teaching approaches and methods have emerged over the last century arising from ongoing debates concerning the complexities of language learning. The existence of various and differing teaching and

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[3] All intensive contact courses entail 4-5 weeks of contact training.
[4] The term trainee in this dissertation refers to all enrolled learners in pre-service TEFL courses.
[5] Ur's model of learning, along with others, is discussed in Chapter 2 with the aim of deciding on a suitable approach for TEFL Online.
[6] Input is the term teacher trainers use to describe training sessions or readings on EFL concepts. They are not termed lectures for good reason; trainees are not lectured to, instead they are expected to examine and to discuss the input provided while the trainers act as facilitators.

learning approaches proves that no single generic method is suitable for all language teaching contexts. Successful language teachers, despite or over and above the approaches they use, should continually seek to create positive conditions for learning. This implies flexibility, seeking to understand individualised learning styles, and an ability to adapt lessons accordingly.

It follows from this that best practice in TEFL courses should promote autonomy in teachers, particularly in the skills of self-reflection and evaluation. With these skills built-in, teachers are able to make informed decisions about their teaching practice based on context, lesson content and learners. Walsh (2006:137) encourages the fostering of critical reflection and self-evaluation in training TEFL teachers since it has 'considerable value as a process of conscious-raising and enhanced understanding.'

According to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, skills such as critical reflection and self-evaluation are higher-order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956). Shulman (2007:2) asserts that 'Critical reflection on one's practice and understanding leads to higher-order thinking on the form of a capacity to exercise judgement in the face of uncertainty and to create designs in the presence of constraints and unpredictability.' These higher-order thinking skills cannot be provided to trainees or taught in a direct manner. Instead they are fostered by trainers and by the approach and structure of the TEFL course. The intensive courses, although short, aim at fostering higher-order skills in trainees. Nevertheless, while trainers play a vital role in TEFL, trainees are at the heart of the learning process. They are not passive receivers of knowledge; rather they are active. They make relevant and appropriate decisions about their teaching in each TP session and justify their choices afterwards. This idea of active, involved trainees subverts the notion of traditional teacher-fronted tuition where the teacher is the ultimate provider of knowledge. Successful TEFL courses are learner-driven and therefore learner-centred.

1.2 Best Practice in Open and Distance Learning

Parallels can be drawn between best practice in ODL and in best practice TEFL training where learner-centredness and flexibility are integral (Hodgson et al 1987; Evans, 1994). The White Paper on Education and Training describes the differences between distance education and ODL by defining open learning as:

> ... an approach which combines the principles of learner-centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems (Department of Education, 1995).

Traditional correspondence institutions concentrate on behaviouristic and teacher-centred modes of learning. The institute and the learning package are foremost in the education cycle whereas ODL places the learner at the centre (Evans & Nation, 1989; Pityana, 2004). According to Trindade et al (2000) and Hodgson et al (1987), good ODL practice is characterised by sufficient and effective learner support mechanisms; reliable communications; learner-centred pedagogy; facilitated learning; opportunities for learner interactivity; flexible and varied assessment options; and the use of multimedia.

For distance education institutions such as UNISA, realising ODL goals necessitates a re-thinking of current practice. As the White Paper claims:

> South Africa is able to gain from world-wide experience over several decades in the development of innovative methods of education, including the use of guided self-study, and the appropriate use of a variety of media, which give practical expression to open learning principles (Department of Education, 1995)

In his book, *Learning and Teaching in Distance Education*, Peters (1998:162) likens UNISA to a 19th century correspondence university. Even though UNISA attempted to improve practices in 1995, Peters still criticises the University for its lack of learner support, and the poor integration of technologies and multimedia. Learner 'study packages' of print-based materials are the norm at UNISA. Attempts have been made at supplementing printed study material with audio cassettes, video tapes, limited online content, occasional Video-conferences, optional tutorial groups, and, most recently, by providing a Learning Management System (LMS)[7]. But they do not form part of an integrated delivery approach, in other words, an ODL approach. UNISA's distance model does not allow for learners to connect frequently and meaningfully with tutors and fellow learners. Learners are separated from the system and at a distance.

Trindade et al (2000) illustrate the success of other ODL institutes around the world. For example, the China Central Radio and Television University delivers course content through satellite transmissions to classrooms. Learners also work with teachers via wide-band terrestrial cable communications (2000:5). In Europe, most ODL systems use an instructional design that not only produces high quality materials with embedded audio, video, multimedia and interactive materials, but also fostersautonomous learning. The Open University in the United Kingdom (OUUK) has recently expanded their website to include free educational courses and materials (http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/)[8]. According to Trindade et al, many ODL systems in the United Sates of America have integrated textbooks with live instruction through Video conferencing. However, these creative approaches require expertise to design and to develop and they are expensive to implement (Trindade et al 2000:14-15). For UNISA, integrating current and creative ODL systems is a challenge. The institution relies on government funding and needs to provide affordable education in the developing

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[7] The LMS at UNISA (myUnisa) was created as an electronic platform to connect learners to courses and to tutors.

[8] OpenLearn: Learning Space is an online initiative at the OUUK. The website hosts free educational resources from several courses at the University.

contexts of South Africa, specifically, and Africa, generally (SAIDE[9], 2006). In the current economic and infrastructural circumstances, the full implementation of best practice remains an ideal.

This should not stop UNISA from exploring non-traditional methods of delivery, such as the use of technology to reach a wide student body and to be competitive in a global market[10]. The latest technologies, such as digital communications and networking, (the Internet and the World Wide Web), allow for creative distance education courses. Computers, communication, and video technologies make managing space and time much easier by 'bringing learning virtually any place on Earth and at any time' (Picciano, 2001:2-4).

Universities committed to ODL have progressively developed and introduced new technologies to facilitate and increase access to education and training (Taylor, 2001:2). Distance education has progressed through different generations of learning systems, from first to fifth generation. The first and second generation distance learning systems, based on a correspondence (printed texts) and multi-media model (printed texts with audio and video technologies), respectively, focus on the delivery of learning materials (Heydenrych & Louw, 2006:19). Third generation, the telelearning model, utilises telecommunication technologies for synchronous communications, whilst the fourth generation, the flexible learning model, focuses on the use of the Internet for the online delivery of courses. The fifth generation — the intelligent flexible learning model — expands on the fourth generation by exploiting and increasing the features of the Internet for online delivery (Taylor, 2001:2). Table 1.1 demonstrates the prevailing trends in distance learning systems with the use of technology.

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[9] SAIDE, the South African Institute for Distance Education, describes the state of distance education in South Africa in their reports *Overview of Distance Education* (2006), and *Lessons in the Application of Educational Technologies in South Africa* (2000).

[10] At the OUUK, for example, international advances in web communications are continually researched because the institution has to compete internationally (Bach et al 2007:24).

Table 1.1: Five generations of distance education.

Models of Distance Education	Associated Delivery Technologies
First Generation The Correspondence Model 1700s – 1900s	• Print
Second Generation The Multi-media Model 1900s to mid-fifties	• Print • Audiotape • Videotape • Computer-based learning • Interactive video
Third Generation The Telelearning Model Late fifties to early eighties	• Audio-teleconferencing • Video conferencing • Audiographic Communication • Broadcast TV/Radio and Audio-teleconferencing
Fourth Generation The Flexible Learning Model Late eighties to early nineties	• Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer-mediated communication
Fifth Generation The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model Late nineties to new millennium	• Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer-mediated communication, using automated response systems • Campus portal access to institutional processes and resources

Online learning emerges from third generation distance learning systems. It is an interactive and communicative approach to learning and teaching which combines the Internet and Computer-mediated instruction (CMI). The benefits include the ability to provide asynchronous (learning at one's own pace and time) and synchronous (fixed online classroom time) learning modes, interactive multi-media technologies, platforms for learner discussions, connections across space and time, and instant or quick evaluation and feedback from tutors (Caldwell, 1980; Bach et al 2006). As in TEFL, discovery, interactivity, autonomy and critical reflection are at the core of cutting-edge ODL systems. At the same time, online learning offers creative opportunities for TEFL. However, a prerequisite is easy access to, and use of, technology. Distance learning systems which incorporate online connectivity are only available to the technologically able and privileged.

1.2   A Case for an Online TEFL course

In the field of TEFL, online learning and teaching at a distance offer numerous opportunities. For trainee teachers this equates to the flexibility to learn asynchronously at one's own pace, in one's own environment. Online courses are reported to be particularly well-suited to meeting the needs of trainees who cannot attend contact courses due to personal responsibilities. The self-directed format and general flexibility of online learning allows the pursuit of courses without compromising work and family obligations. These courses tend to reach a wider audience. However, with flexibility comes responsibility. Trainees are expected to manage their own learning. Here, personal discipline is not enough. Positive motivation, inscribed in the course, its delivery, and in the learning experience as a whole, is necessary to overcome any sense of isolation which may be created by the lack of peer and/or tutor support (Bach et al 2007). Embedded support in online courses is essential to maintaining motivation. This takes the distance out of distance education.

Even though the number of online TEFL courses has increased (Nixon, 2003), so far they have not successfully bridged the gap between traditional learning and online distance learning systems. Most online TEFL courses are designed according to first

and second generation distance learning praxis, merely using technologies as a faster means of course material dissemination. However they are packaged, the written word and the tutor's instruction remain central. This is not aligned with 21st century best practice with its emphasis on interactivity and communication. If we are to bridge the gap then trainees should be at the heart of course design, that is, the online TEFL course should be as trainee-centred as successful contact TEFL courses are.

In this dissertation, I maintain that it is essential to investigate the strengths of current teacher training strategies and the capabilities of online technologies to deliver these. Further, I argue that an evolved online TEFL course should, at the very least, be based on third generation ODL best practice, while striving to meet the core intellectual and practical values of the discipline through innovation, research and critical reflection. The re-thinking, not re-packaging, of current pedagogy is crucial in online learning and in TEFL.

1.4 Researching TEFL Online[11]

The research approach in this dissertation is informed by design-based research methodology. Wang and Hannafin define the critical characteristics of design-based research as:

> ... a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to contextually-sensitive design principles and theories (2005:6).

The pragmatic, iterative, integrative and contextual nature of design-based research is appropriate for this study in that it involves the design and creation of an intervention

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[11] TEFL Online is the name of the online TEFL pilot on this study.

as well as extending theories for a real-life problem. In this case, this translates to the design, development and implementation of an online TEFL pilot to address the following research questions:

1. *How can we effectively develop language practitioners who are critically self-reflective[12] through online learning and teaching?*
2. *What constraints emerge when implementing an online TEFL course through a Learning Management System?*

The procedural steps in design-based research involve the identification of the problem and research questions. They include tentative design measures that address the problem. On the basis of these measures a project, intervention or course is developed. The research concludes with findings from evaluating the product[13].

In this dissertation, the study involves a TEFL Online pilot, included on the accompanying CD, which attempts to address the research questions. In turn, instructional design guidelines are determined by investigating relevant theories in teacher education and online delivery. After implementation, the pilot is evaluated so as to draw recommendations for future online TEFL courses. Figure 1.1 illustrates the process.

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[12] EFL teachers need to be reflective in that they have to think about the efficacy and appropriateness of their planning and teaching. At the same time, they need to be reflexive in as much as they need continually to examine the attitudes, assumptions and actions that constitute their teaching methods and styles for particular learners and groups.
[13] The Association for Information Systems website describes characteristics of design-based research. See http://www.isworld.org/Researchdesign/drisISworld.htm#ovrDesRsch.

Fig 1.1: A schematic summary of the design-based research process.
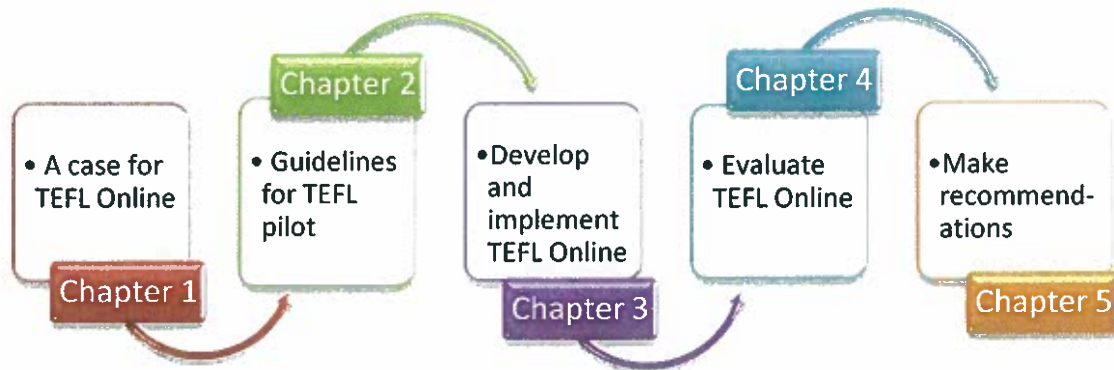
1.4.1 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected primarily through qualitative methods, although the pilot itself had strong theoretical and design components. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature in the interdisciplinary fields of online learning and teaching, and teacher-training pedagogy, in the context of ODL, which provides guidelines for the design and development of the pilot. Together with implementation, these are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes the evaluation phase while Chapter 5 discusses online TEFL training in ideal circumstances.

The chapters draw on empirical sources, including information collected from the practical experience of delivering the pilot, questionnaires, interviews with participants and external observations on design and implementation. Each chapter needs to be read against the designed course either as it is replicated on CD or accessed via myUnisa on the Internet. The different mechanisms for gathering data are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Research methods used in this study.

Research methods	Description
a. Literature review	This entails a review of the relevant books, journals and newspaper articles, electronic documents and papers in the field of teacher education and online teaching and learning.
b. Implementation of pilot	A pilot, TEFL Online was designed according to design guidelines suggested in Chapter 2, and implemented using a sample group of learners.
c. External observers	External observers involved in the field of online learning and TEFL were asked to review of the usability of the online TEFL pilot and the website.
d. Participating learners	1. Questionnaires – On completion of the pilot, learners were asked to complete a questionnaire, regarding their experiences on the online TEFL pilot. 2. Interviews – Learners were interviewed, following the completion of the questionnaire. They were asked to elaborate on their comments in the questionnaires and their general experience of the pilot.
e. Reflections	Data regarding the design, implementation and facilitation of the online TEFL pilot was recorded in a journal by the e-facilitator.

1.4.2 Subjects in the Study

The participants in the study were volunteers. They were drawn from a small selection of registered UNISA learners or employees. Overall, out of fifteen volunteers, twelve submitted their application forms and ten were chosen. Participants who could not access the myUnisa website due to expired student numbers were excluded. During the implementation phase two participants withdrew from the pilot which left eight active participants. As this study is qualitative, it was appropriate to limit the study to a small

trial group. Gold (2001:54), Duncan (2005), Engvig (2006) and Little et al (2005:360) all advocate small online groups (between six and 30 participants[14] for every facilitator).

As table 1.2 shows, the participants[15] stemmed from a fairly homogenous group. They are all white South Africans with some experience in education; six of them are employed as educators, three work in private enterprise and one is employed. They range in age from 20 to 50 years old and are made up of eight females and two males. Four participants reside in Gauteng, two in the Eastern Cape, one in the Western Cape, two in Limpopo and one in Mpumalanga. While six participants are first language English speakers, four of them are first language Afrikaans speakers who speak English as a second language. A common thread that tied all the participants together was that they were interested in the field of TEFL and had had no previous online learning experience. A less homogenous group would have allowed for a wider representation of the South African population. Nevertheless, homogeneity mimics the actual intake of these types of courses here and overseas. Moreover, it opens opportunities for research into the meeting the needs of groups that are linguistically, culturally, socially and/or educationally diverse.

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[14] This figure is debatable depending on the type of online course. Most constructivist online courses where interaction is embedded, are restricted to small groups. In TEFL contact courses, the ratio is 1:12 trainees.
[15] I refer to the volunteers in the TEFL Online pilot as participants.

Table 1.3: The demographic of TEFL Online participants.

No	Age group	City	Gender	Highest qualification	Occupation
1	20 - 30	Pretoria	Female	B.A. Hons	Language teacher
2	20 - 30	Tzaneen	Female	Grade 12	Learner teacher
3	20 - 30	Uitenhage	Female	B.A	Learner teacher
4	20 - 30	Lydenburg	Female	BEd	Management
5	20 - 30	East London	Male	B.A. Hons	Educator
6	30 - 40	Ermelo	Female	Masters	Secretary
7	30 - 40	Port Elizabeth	Female	B.A	Administrator
8	40 - 50	Pretoria	Female	Masters	Lecturer
9	40 - 50	Johannesburg	Female	B.A. Hons	Unemployed
10	40 - 50	Pretoria	Male	Doctorate	Education consultant

1.4.3 Limitations of the Study

This study is constrained by several external limitations. Firstly, the scope was limited to a specific area in the interdisciplinary field of teacher education and CMI. For this reason, a decision was taken to concentrate on a segment of TEFL — first language acquisition and foreign language learning — in order to create an introductory online TEFL pilot rather than an entire course. The intention was to develop a general instructional design framework for a deliverable, full-length online TEFL course after investigating a measurable subsection of the course as a prototype.

Secondly, the pilot was constrained by the capabilities of an existing LMS, myUnisa, which was launched in 2006. The design and implementation of TEFL Online had to be adapted to the LMS; structural and functional changes were not possible.

Thirdly, the study was limited to UNISA employees or existing learners as only they could access UNISA's internal online facilities.

Fourthly, the sample population comprised mainly strong speakers of English. While no attempts were made to review their English language abilities, I assumed that participants with English as a first or second language would cope with TEFL Online. Similarly, computer literacy was a prerequisite for the pilot since participants were expected to access the Internet and navigate their way without individual tuition.

Lastly, the researcher, designer and online facilitator were the same person. This is acceptable in design-based research where the need to close the gap between researchers and practitioners is of utmost importance (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). An advantage is that the researcher is able to reflect on the entire process having been involved in every step of the research and design.

1.5 The Importance of Researching TEFL Online

The findings from this study are significant for several reasons. The factors and constraints identified in the online teacher-training pilot in terms of design, implementation and evaluation constitute a significant step towards designing an evolved and effective online TEFL course.

Secondly, this study contributes towards research in the interdisciplinary fields of teacher education, CMI and ODL. The findings open a realm of further questions, particularly centred on the suitability, accessibility and feasibility of Learning Management Systems for online TEFL courses: Are they compatible in terms of pedagogy and general logistics? Do they promote the principles of learner-centredness which inform effective TEFL courses?

Lastly, and significantly, the findings provide an insight into the effectiveness and limitations of online learning within an ODL context. The recommendations could be

used towards designing future ODL online courses. As more people turn to the World Wide Web for education and information, more needs to be done to investigate further generations of learning technology and the advantages they hold. In the case of UNISA, TEFL Online is a significant initiative towards developing experts and teachers in the field of Applied Language Studies. According to the final report of the 1990 UNICEF world conference, and UNESCO's goal of Education for All by 2015[16], there is a huge demand for quality pre- and in-service teacher education training programmes, especially in developing countries. Third generation distance learning systems, if successful, could assist in attaining these goals. From an African perspective, the education of teachers through CMI equates to a nation of empowered professionals who can participate in the global community (Saleh & Pretorius, 2006).

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[16] One of the goals of the Education for All (EFA) campaign is to bring education to people in developing countries. See http://www.unesco.org/education/efa for more infomation.

Chapter 2: An Approach for TEFL Online

2.1 The Design Phase of TEFL Online

Technology used for CMI should serve learning. Technology is a tool in distance learning, not the message in itself (De Villiers, 2007; Trindade et al 2000). The technological tools chosen should support the learning approach. An initial, crucial step for an online course is the selection of a sound pedagogical approach, which informs the development phase. A sound pedagogy determines the aims, outcomes, of the course. In addition, the methods and content designed should relate directly to the objectives. A comprehensive approach also assists course designers to handle problems that may arise from formative and summative evaluations. If course designers are aware of the aim of the course and the methods used to achieve the aim, they can improve the course (Lee & Owens, 2000). It follows that the theoretical approach of the TEFL Online pilot should be transparent and comprehensive.

In this chapter the investigation of the theoretical approach is set against the background of prevailing trends in teacher education and CMI. Firstly, four significant models of teacher education are critically discussed. These models include the traditional craft, the applied science, the reflective practice, and the enriched reflection model. Secondly, the discussion is placed within two schools that feature both in online learning and teaching, namely, objectivism and constructivism. As a result of the critical discussion, key design guidelines are extrapolated for the TEFL Online pilot.

2.2 Models of Teacher Education

According to Wallace (2001), three models of teacher education have influenced TEFL training: the craft, the applied science and the reflective practice models. Recently, however, Ur's (2004) enriched reflective model has added a new dimension to teacher-training pedagogy. Each of these models is informed by a particular learning tradition, which show marked parallels to different theories of language acquisition.

An imitative relationship between language learner and expert is postulated in the craft model, which is represented in Figure 2.1. The expertise resides in the experienced practitioner. The novice or trainee learns by observing the expert, imitating techniques, and following his/her instructions and advice. This process ensures that the craft passes on from generation to generation. An example of the craft model in teacher training is the practice of placing trainees with experienced cooperating teachers. The trainee observes and assists the expert teacher and learns by imitation. The trainee may also work on increments of certain tasks before moving onto bigger tasks (Bailey, 2006).

Fig 2.1: The craft model of professional education (Wallace, 2001:6).
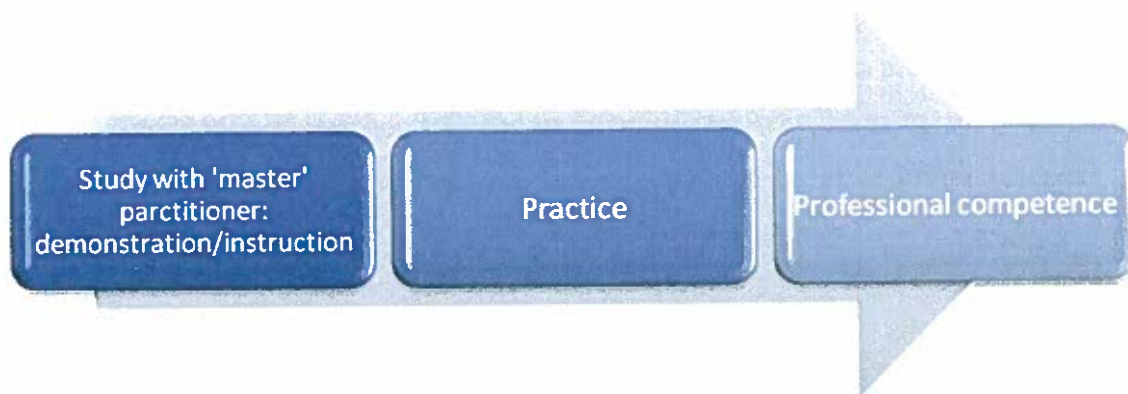
Wallace (2001), Stones and Morris (1972), and Bailey (2006) criticise the craft model because it is conservative and limited to a static society where little or no change in teaching practices occurs. It is particularly inappropriate for the field of language learning where new methodologies based on recent research in the discipline of linguistics have emerged and are still emerging. As Bailey claims, the craft model may be useful in learning the technical skills of teaching, but it is unsuitable for

contemporary methods of language teacher training since '... over the years, language teaching has moved beyond being a collection of techniques. These days the profession is influenced by theories and research findings too' (2006:151). Following this line, I would argue that observation and imitation, devoid of reflection and discussion, are insufficient for TEFL. Language is an unstable medium and learners do not behave predictably. Consequently, the importance of examining the thinking processes that underpin the expert's behaviour and techniques should not be overlooked. Similarly, a wide range of individualised factors which affect learning play a key role in determining acquisition. A competent teacher needs to have a sound grounding in both the theory and the practice of language teaching and learning. As Wallace states, viewing teaching as a craft dismisses the need for, and exploration of, scientific knowledge.

The applied science model (Figure 2.2), stems from the achievements of empiricism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wallace states that, 'Within this framework, practical knowledge of anything is simply a matter of relating the most appropriate means to whatever objectives have been decided on. The whole issue of the practice of a profession is therefore merely *instrumental* in nature' (2001:8). In practice, this means that experts in the relevant field conduct research using scientific knowledge to achieve certain clearly defined objectives and eventually amass theoretical and practical knowledge on the subject. The findings from the research are conveyed as theoretical knowledge to teacher trainees or practitioners who have to apply these theories in classroom practices. Trainees receive up-dates on any further research through in-service workshops.

Fig 2.2: The applied science model of professional education (Wallace, 2001:9).
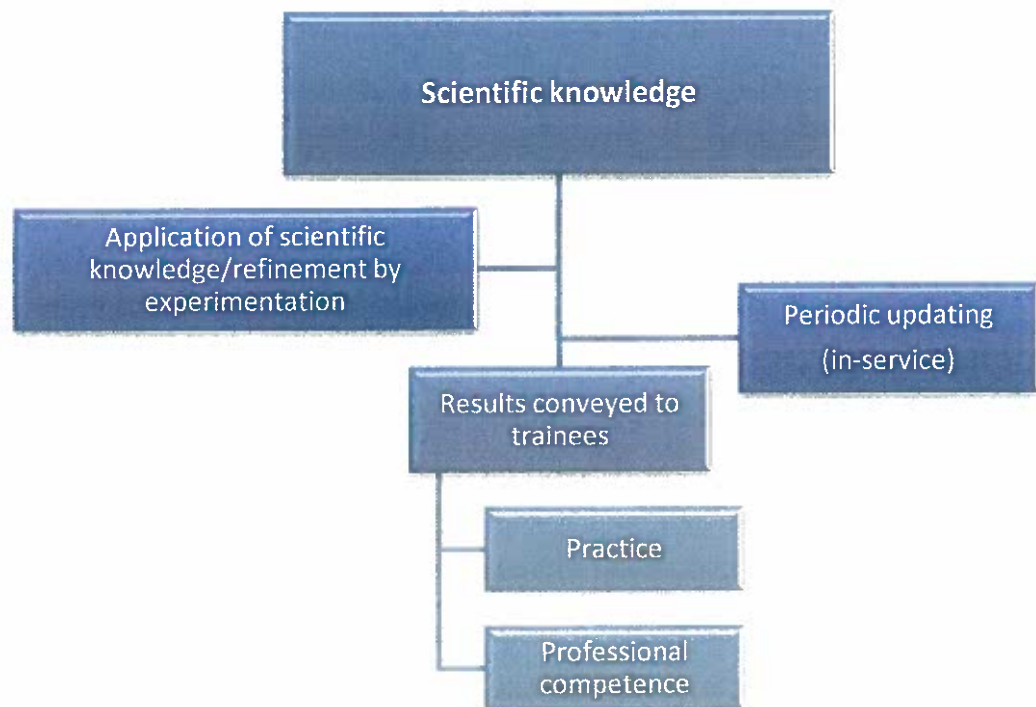
Schon (1983:36) criticises the applied science model for perpetuating a hierarchy in education: 'It was to be the business of the university-based scientists and scholars to create the fundamental theory which professionals and technicians would apply to practice... . But this division of labour reflected a hierarchy of kinds of knowledge which was also a ladder status'. In this model, there is an apparent disparity between research and practice. The theory stems from outside the classroom, from experts who have conducted the research and collected the empirical data. The practitioner cannot affect the theory by conducting formal research or by applying the findings of their classroom practices. Only the expert has the exclusive right to the privilege of research and forming theoretical knowledge. Consequently, experts are distanced from practitioners and practice.

Applied Language Studies is one of the disciplines that has arisen from nineteenth and twentieth century empiricism. Furthermore, scientific models accord well with earlier theories that saw language acquisition as the mechanistic application of rules (grammar) to vocabulary and ideas. Furthermore, the scientific paradigm is eminently suitable for teaching and learning that relies on the quantification of knowledge within

strictly delineated parameters. The current emphasis on communicative competence stresses functional acquisition over theoretical knowledge. Thus, while science may provide an adequate model for learning how to teach linguistic structures, it is probably inadequate if the emphasis is shifted to receptive and productive language skills.

Wallace (2001:9-11) also warns that many practitioners may not understand the empirical data if they are not directly involved in the process of generating it. This will affect the implementation. The emphasis on knowledge and expertise in the applied science model lies with the researcher and the trainee is a mere follower or practitioner. Even though there is merit in ongoing empirical research as advocated by the applied science model, I would suggest that practitioners play a vital role in applying new theory since they are at the heart of teaching. They are involved in applying and testing the theory, which makes them variables in the research. The exclusion of their voices is an exclusion of their influence in the research and, consequently, the theory. A strong argument can be made for closing the distance between the researcher and the practitioner, who should in ideal circumstances be the same person or have an understanding of the field, the research and the learners. The scientific model undermines the position and contribution of the trainee teacher.

Unlike the previous two models, Wallace's reflective practice model (Figure 2.3), foregrounds the role of the trainee by emphasising their influence on (and interpretation of) theory and scientific research in 'received knowledge' and 'experiental knowledge'. The reflective practice model is a continuous process in which the trainees' background knowledge, experience from their practice, and their reflections are strong motivating forces in developing professional competence. According to this model, trainees are important as experts in the learning process since they are active in every stage.

The reflective practice model comprises three stages. In Stage 1, Wallace (2001:50) emphasises the trainees' background knowledge since 'people seldom enter into professional training situations with blank minds and/or neutral attitudes. This is true of the profession of teaching, where the trainees have been exposed to the practice of the profession, either willingly or unwillingly, during their most impressionable years.' In

terms of mental constructs, factors such as personality, beliefs, ideas, attitude, social and cultural identity, learning background and learning style influence the trainee's practice and reflection. It is safe to conclude, then, that the teacher trainees' assumptions about language learning and teaching play a vital role in eventual practice.

Stage 2, the professional development stage, occurs when 'received knowledge' and 'experiential knowledge' combine into the trainee's practice and reflection cycle. This combination forms a reciprocal relationship; the former informs the latter and vice versa. The last stage, the ultimate goal of the course, is two-fold: firstly for trainees to meet the minimum requirements of the course, and secondly, to develop professional competence as a point of departure from which to continue professional development.

Fig 2.3: The reflective practice model (Wallace, 2001:15).
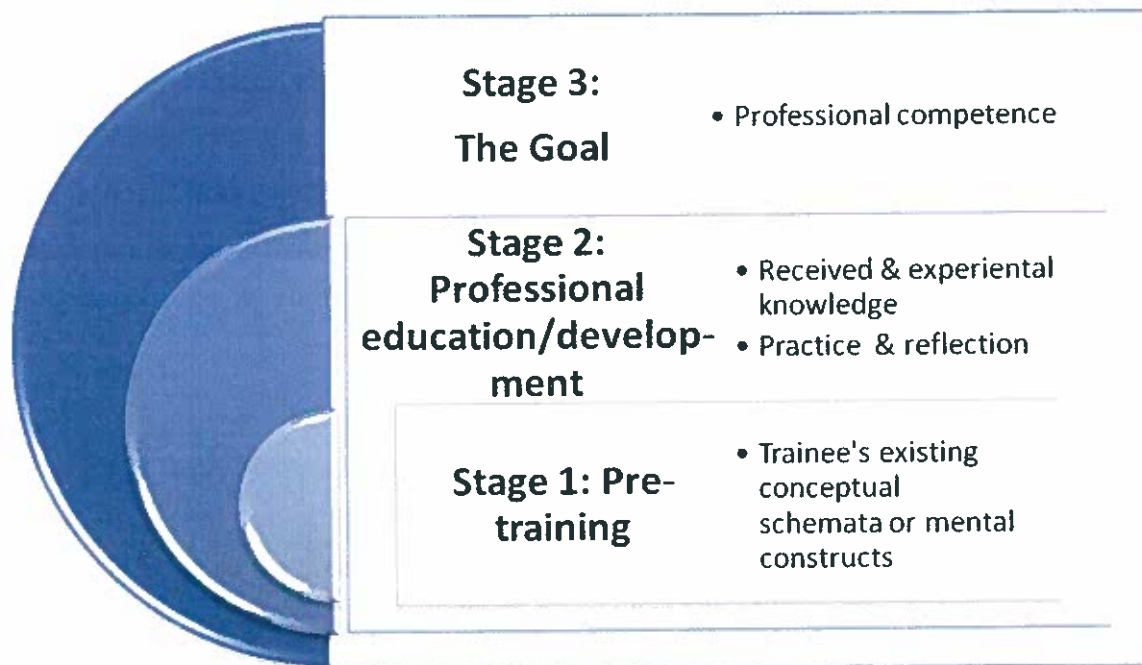
While this model appears to be visionary in comparison to the more rigid models, its success cannot be taken for granted. Many variables come into play. Firstly, the trainer and trainees should have similar understandings of the approach and the methods used to achieve the goal of professional competence. Secondly, the trainee's background, 'received' and 'experiental' knowledge should positively influence the training or a divergence will exist. The model seems to over-emphasise the trainee's background

knowledge by underplaying the received knowledge that is derived from the trainer. Thirdly, there is a need for structured practice and reflection exercises that foster effective critical reflection in trainees. Lastly, there should be definite and reasonable outcomes for professional competence. The reflective practice model is not entirely unsuitable. However, a more recent and evolved model has emerged in language teacher training: the enriched reflection model (Ur, 2004:6-7).

2.2.1 A Case for Enriched Reflection

Effective teaching-training courses should include meaningful exposure to language learners in teaching practice. Only through continuous teaching practice are trainee teachers able to examine their assumptions about teaching and learning while adapting and constructing new teaching beliefs (Williams & Burden, 1997). Schon (1983) calls the process of 'thinking on our feet' and drawing on tacit knowledge, 'reflection-in-action'. The process of making the tacit knowledge explicit is 'reflection-on-action'. Teacher trainees need to reflect on new input, which comes from the course, the trainer, and their teaching practice in order to produce meaningful output. The reflective practice cycle, I argue, is the life-blood of effective teacher training. Wallace supports this view:

> By and large, practice is valuable for professional education and development to the extent that it is reflected upon.... Development implies change, and fruitful change is extremely difficult without reflection. The unthinking or rote application of innovation is an invitation to disaster. All too often, teachers attempt an approach or technique, which has been reduced to a formula, with obviously no understanding of the rationale of the method or technique being used or its application in the particular context. The teacher has not been given, or has not taken, the opportunity to think the thing through, and to think it through in terms of her own context. (2001:54)

Intensive and extensive TEFL courses[17] include an essential practical component where trainee teachers are exposed to, and practice teaching on, authentic language learners. Ur (2004:5-6) claims that teachers estimate personal TP as the most significant element in their development. While I agree that TP is vital in teacher-training courses and in teacher development, practice alone without critical thought and reflection is merely an accumulation of lessons. This resonates with the craft model where the consolidation of practice through imitation is important. In TEFL, unguided practice is not without merit. Discussion and examination of practice before and afterwards, leads to an ongoing process of development. Thus, critical reflection is crucial to the art and science of teaching which is in its essence a continuous process of learning (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Brookfield also supports the notion of critical reflection in teacher training and reasons that 'critical reflection urges us to create conditions under which each person is respected, valued, and heard. In pedagogic terms, this means the creation of democratic classrooms. In terms of professional development, it means an engagement in critical conversation.' (1995:27). Critical reflection grounds us emotionally and assists us to make informed decisions, develop a rationale for practice and enlivens our classrooms. If we consider his compelling reasons for reflection, then we must admit that critical reflection is foundational to teacher development.

Critical reflection does not happen in a vacuum. These skills have to be fostered in trainees. I would argue that external input such as training sessions and readings from expert trainers guide the reflective process. Appropriate external input assists the trainee to make sense of their teaching experience and ultimately produces appropriate output towards the goal of professional competence. Ur (2004:7) illustrates this point in the formulation of her enriched reflection teacher-training model, which evolved from Kolb's earlier experiential learning model (1984:42). Kolb maintains that experiential learning supports a recursive cycle wherein trainees expand on the knowledge gained in each stage. His cycle continues from concrete experience to reflective experience to

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[17] A typical TEFL syllabus taken from the TEFLA course at Unisa, features in Appendix 1.

abstract conceptualisation and then to active experimentation. Cunningham (1994:44-45) points out that Kolb may over-emphasise past experience: 'Little of what we need to do in the future can be based solely on an analysis of past experience.' Similarly, not everything needs to be or can be learned through experiential learning. For example, the effect of Aids can be (and is preferably) learnt through facts and evidence. Further as Cunningham (1994:45) states, research evidence[18] does not support Kolb's learning cycle. Additional variables that affect learning need to be considered.

Ur augments Kolb's model with external sources of input and consequently emphasises the value of guidance. She maintains that there is value in observing and learning from experienced teachers (as in the craft model), and from experts, readings and research (as in the applied scientific model). But her model (Figure 2.4) includes the influence of external factors at each stage. These factors consist of input such as observations, transcripts, videos, anecdotes (which she labels vicarious experience), descriptions of other people's observations, theoretical positions of language teaching, and other teaching experiments from professionals or trainees.

Fig: 2.4: Ur's enriched reflection model (2004:7).

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[18] James (1980) shows in her research on using Kolb's learning cycle that managers in a corporate setting prefer facts and statistics and not experiential learning.

Fig: 2.4: Ur's enriched reflection model (2004:7).
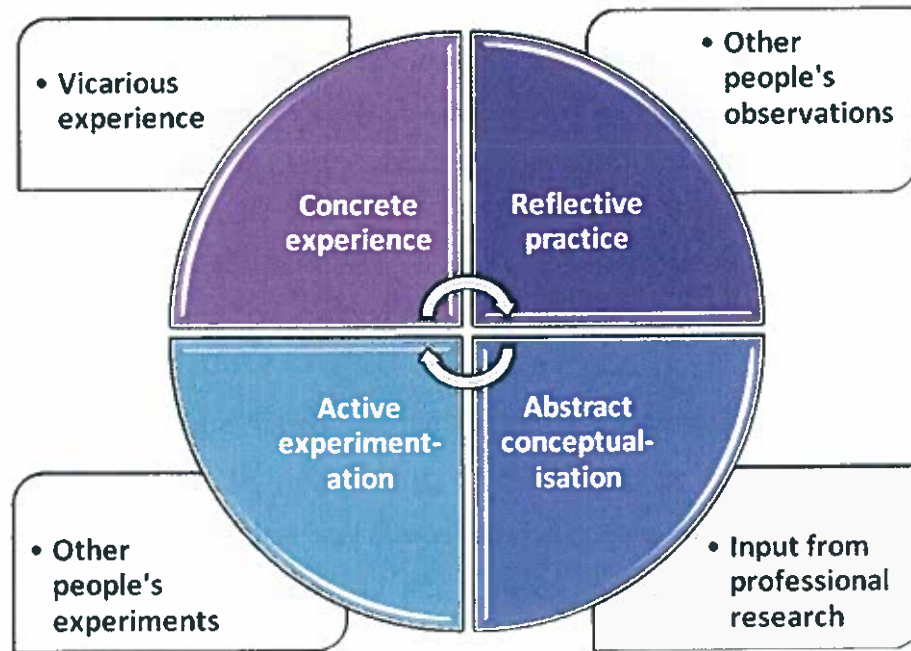
Of all the models, Ur's enriched reflection is the most appropriate for TEFL since it emphasises the value of appropriate external input in formulating one's own theory within the cycle of practice and reflection. In this way, trainee teachers are encouraged to foster action research abilities in receiving, evaluating and ultimately creating their own teaching conventions and values. The definitive goal of teacher training should be to foster autonomy in trainee teachers, that is, to direct trainees to rely on their own judgement as well as to receive and criticise other theories and research.

The reflective practice and the enriched reflection model of teacher training are based on constructivist principles since they advocate the 'active learner' who makes decisions based on 'received and experiential knowledge' in the practice and reflection cycle. For example, the successful teaching of English grammar lies in the teacher making choices about when to teach it, what to teach, how to teach it and how to demonstrate its pragmatic aspects. For language learners, effective communication involves these choices and not only knowing the language system. The complexity of decision-making in teaching is acknowledged by Mark A. Clarke in Wallace:

... when one is confronted by a group of intelligent, curious, motivated and totally naive individuals who want to know exactly how to conduct a particular technique, one learns very quickly that nothing can be taken for granted. Perfectly innocent questions suddenly expose the virtually limitless options that are available at each and every step in the execution of technique... it soon becomes obvious, in the course of such discussions, that to describe a technique is to trace a line through a complex, shifting series of decision points, and each decision is influenced by an awesome number of variables... (1983:109-110).

TEFL courses that are based on the reflective practice cycle allow for the development of essential decision-making skills in teaching. In the TP component, trainees observe experienced teachers at work in real lessons and are expected to adopt some of their microteaching skills. In this manner, the act of language teaching is treated as a craft. However, trainees are not expected merely to adopt microteaching skills but, more importantly, to make key decisions about which skills to use in respect of the learners' needs. Teacher training then is not a craft; rather it is a cycle of learning and decision-making.

The learning cycle should include all parties in the learning process. Language learners learn when taught by teacher trainees and teacher trainees learn from their trainers and by teaching language learners. Trainees experiment with lessons, interact with learners and adjust future lessons according to reflections and feedback[19]. Trainers, too, learn through interactions with trainees. They often adapt content and delivery methods according to the needs of trainees and situations. Flexible and adaptable TEFL courses allow for these necessary changes. In TEFL, teaching and learning are integrated and interwoven. Figure 2.5 illustrates the learning/teaching/training matrix.

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[19] Trainees complete self-evaluation forms after their TP lessons and it is used for discussion in feedback sessions with peers and trainers. Ur (2004) provides examples of self-evaluation tasks in her book: *A course in language teaching.*

Fig 2.5: The matrix of learning, teaching and training in TEFL.

Tomlinson (1995:9) describes the interwoven cycle of learning/teaching as an 'activity designed to promote learning'. Malderez and Bodóczky reiterate this in stating that:

> Learning is the goal of teaching, and learning, in terms of the development of constructs, is essentially a different process for every individual. In other words, each individual learner must be considered not simply under a label but as an individual with their own different experience-base, cultural background, style, feelings and so on. (2002:12)

Learner-centredness in the learning/reflection cycle is a focal point. This process has specific implications for ODL.

2.2.2 Parallels between TEFL and ODL

Best practice in TEFL correlates with best practice in ODL. Like TEFL, ODL principles focus on learner-centredness. In ODL, learner-centredness equates to the inclusion of flexibility, accessibility, appropriate learner support, and rigorous quality

assurance (Hodgson et al 1987; Evans, 1994; Department of Education – White Paper, 1995 and Trindade et al 2000).

According to Trindade et al (2000) and Hodgson et al (1987), flexibility in ODL means providing learners with options in curriculum, delivery methods, location, and time. Learners decide what they want to learn, how they want to learn, when and where they want to learn. As a result, they gain an independence of choice in learning. Even so, openness and independent learning are not unstructured and unrestricted. Evans (1994:67-68) states that independent learning has to work 'within the limits of the assessment schedules and prescriptions, within the timetabled activities or events and, perhaps most importantly, within the pedagogical and curricular parameters of the course materials, and the tutors or assessors who mediate them.'

The inclusion of appropriate support within ODL is an important initiative towards learner-centredness (Trindade et al 2000:2). ODL maintains various, effective support mechanisms that address learner problems and queries, and provides them with extra resources. Support should also originate from tutors and counsellors, especially since learners are geographically separated from the university and fellow learners. The use of technology offers creative opportunities for learner/learner, tutor/learner and learner/counsellor interactions through emails, chatrooms, discussion forums and synchronous meetings.

Support is also at the core of TEFL courses since the trainers become facilitators of learning rather than providers of knowledge (Wallace, 2001). Similarly, in ODL self-managed learning, learners take control of their learning and tutors are helpful guides. According to Cunningham (1994:40-57), ODL tutors should foster self-managed learning skills in learners through influential and helpful techniques. Independence rather than dependence is an imperative. It could be argued, then, that the aim of TEFL courses which is to encourage reflection that leads to autonomous learning, is commensurate with tutoring ideals in ODL.

According to Snell et al (1987:169-170) moving beyond distance teaching towards open learning means moving away from the hierarchical image of distance learning where the power resides in the hands of the experts with the knowledge. The ODL educational approach reflects a society of sharing and mentoring in which everyone has the 'right to create meaning and hold knowledge.... Such a vision is one of educational empowerment' (Snell et al., 1994:169). This image does not preclude the value of the tutor/trainer. Instead, the latter is seen as appropriately influential in the learning process. It is not that they cannot influence, it is how they influence learning that matters. In Ur's model, the trainer is influential in guiding the trainees through various types of input in TEFL such as research, discussion tasks, videos of lessons, and theoretical standpoints at different phases of the enriched reflection learning cycle. It follows that TEFL trainers, too, act as guides in self-managed learning.

Basic ODL principles align with TEFL core values. The cycle of learning and teaching informs both ODL and TEFL pedagogies. However, adopting a learner-centred philosophy for online teacher training raises design and pedagogical questions. How will TEFL principles be reconfigured in online learning? Which instructional design framework best suit TEFL courses that advocate the learning/teaching reflective cycle?

I attempt to answer these questions in the online TEFL pilot.

2.3 Approaches in Computer-Mediated Instruction

Sherry (1996:2) argues that 'the theoretical basis on which instructional models are based affects not only the way in which information is communicated to the student, but also the way in which the learner makes sense and constructs new knowledge from the information which is presented'. Research into instructional designs for CMI indicates that two pedagogical frameworks, which fall into the realm of cognitive psychology, influence the development and delivery of online courses. In brief, these are the objectivist and the constructivist traditions (Engvig, 2006; Sherry, 1996).

The relationship between objectivism and constructivism is summarised in Figure 2.6 (adapted from Engvig, 2006:14). Visually it is clear that while their goals are similar, the process through which those goals are obtained is different. The objectivist view is content driven. It introduces the field with specific examples and requires learners to put these examples into practice and reflect on them in the formative assessment stage. The constructivist view, typically, begins with a problem or project that learners have to solve by analysing concepts and providing suitable solutions.

Fig 2.6: The objectivist and constructivist paradigm (Engvig, 2006:14).

OBJECTIVIST PARADIGM

| Introduction | Concept | Example | Practice | Reflection |

| Define Objectives | Explore | Experiment | Stimulate | Test knowledge |

| Problem | Background | Concept | Analysis | Solution |

CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM
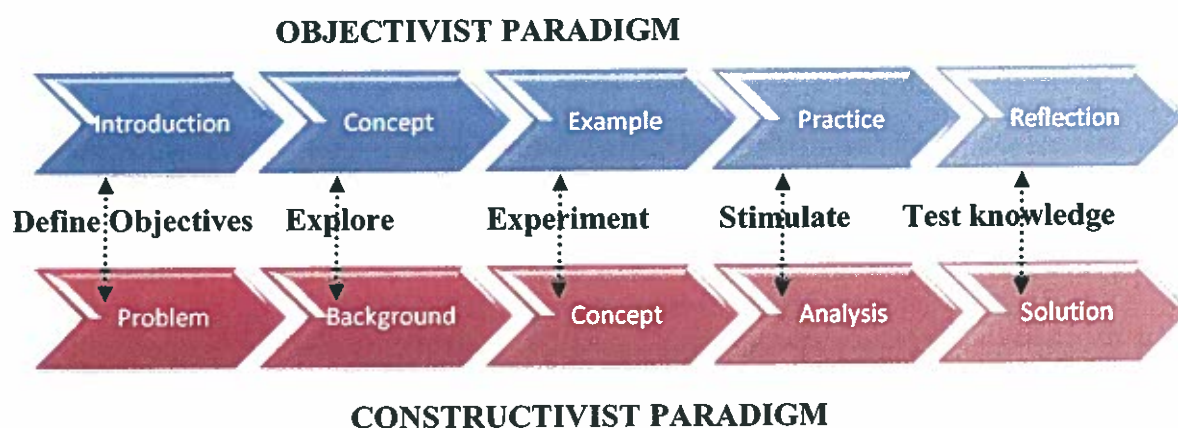
According to Perraton (1993) and Gulati (2004) traditional distance education relies heavily on the objectivist view of knowledge; by assuming that it can be imparted from teacher to learner via textbook and lectures. A major premise of the objectivist tradition claims is that final knowledge results from the accumulation of facts. This linear process of teaching and learning places great significance on the lecturer and the content. The learner is a passive receiver, only acting when he/she fulfils assessment tasks. Engvig (2006:13) describes the objectivist view of knowledge and education thus: 'the world is made up of entities, properties, and relations in which experience plays an insignificant role, the goal is to strive for the complete and correct understanding'. She claims that traditional textbook design, rooted in the objectivist paradigm, uses definite outcomes which define a clear pathway through the materials.

Rowntree (2006:2), a developer of distance courses at the OUUK, generally warns against these severe dangers for online learning inherent in the objectivist approach. He claims that the direct transference of lecture notes or textbooks to an electronic format for online use does not equate to learning. Materials prepared for contact teaching may be unsuitable in an online environment. The media are different and materials need to be designed accordingly. He also argues that course designers and subject experts may be lulled into a false sense of security if they presuppose that using the medium of a computer evokes interaction or learning: 'the learner may, in a sense, interact with the medium but the medium does not interact back' (2006:1). Online course designers may easily fall into the trap of using the traditional, information processing approach. This is evident in first and second-generation distance learning systems, where traditional texts prepared for distance courses are uploaded online for learners to download (Heydenrych, 2006:19). No major changes are made to the materials or approach. The emphasis is on delivering the materials electronically to save time, paper and costs.

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The objectivist approach of online learning and teaching is rooted in Skinner's behavioural psychology, where the major premise is that learning is a process of mechanical habit formation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It does not allow for the practice/reflective cycle of learning advocated in Ur's model.

Constructivism, by contrast, is an alternative epistemology of how people learn and absorb new information. It postulates that the learner, his/her experience and the learning context are significant factors in the learning process since various perspectives for any given concept or events are possible through the influence of an individual's experience and his/her context. Gold defends the constructivist view in stating that:

> Knowledge is not separate from but rather embedded within experiences and interpreted by the learner. Knowledge then is about interpretation, and making meaning of the environment. In other words, though we may more or less share one reality, each of us conceives of it in different ways based on our prior experiences, belief structures and perspective. To learn, therefore, is to communicate and demonstrate understanding of the world (2001:37-38).

Gold's view of learning is clearly applicable to best practice TEFL and ODL. Knowledge is not simply transmitted by the tutor to learner. Rather, knowledge construction depends on how learners and trainers, respectively, interpret and experience shared knowledge. Wallace's (2001) teaching model indicates that teacher trainees interpret and construct new concepts about language teaching in terms of their own assumptions and experimentation. This cycle of interpretation and construction is quite evident in the teaching practice and feedback cycle of TEFL courses.

In contrast to the objectivist tradition, constructivism is less content-oriented and more learner-centred because individuals are seen as actively involved in constructing personal meaning from the time they are born (Williams & Burden, 1997:21). In the learning process, for example, in constructivist problem-solving tasks, learners consider both social and physical interaction in defining the problem and constructing the solution. Simon, (in Sherry, 1996:339), supports constructivism when he states: 'Human beings are at their best when they interact with the real world and draw lessons from the bumps and bruises they get' (1994). This theory of problem-solving interactions aligns itself with experiential learning.

Gulati (2004) gathers arguments from several educators such as Knowles, Brookfield, Friere, Laurillard and Mason, and Vygotsky in defence of constructivism in online education. The key arguments are that constructivist discourse emphasises learner-control, learning in real-life contexts, flexibility in learning, choice in learning resources and ingenuousness in discussions. Furthermore, these aspects of the constructivist discourse are embedded in ODL ideals as discussed earlier. The constructivist approach addresses the needs of diverse learners and promotes democratic learning in collaborative online learning practices.

Based on the research and critical debate outlined above, it is reasonable to argue that the constructivist approach leads to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Enhanced retention and a greater ability to apply the subject matter are particularly appropriate in today's age of information overload. In reality, most online instructional design utilises elements of both theoretical approaches (Engvig, 2006). For example,

Breen (2007) asserts that people do not learn in any one style, rather they adopt an amalgamation of learning strategies which change from objectivist to constructivist. This implies that rather than choosing one single learning theory over the other, a blended approach is more suitable for online learning. Nevertheless, constructivist theory mostly informed the design guidelines of the pilot.

2.4   Implications for the Instructional Design of TEFL Online

As learner-centredness is critical to best practice TEFL and ODL, the theoretical approach for the online pilot was a deliberate decision. Attempts were made to employ a constructivist philosophy in its design. This implies that the online TEFL course promotes the 'construction of meaning' of EFL concepts through experimentation, discussion, reflection and understanding. It was taken for granted that participants would be led to question and think for themselves, rather than be presented with information to be ingested and reproduced.

The discussion so far has articulated a set of design principles for TEFL Online. As Figure 2.7 shows these principles constitute an interconnected, cycle of learning that should be grounded in best practice.

Fig: 2.7: TEFL Online design guidelines.
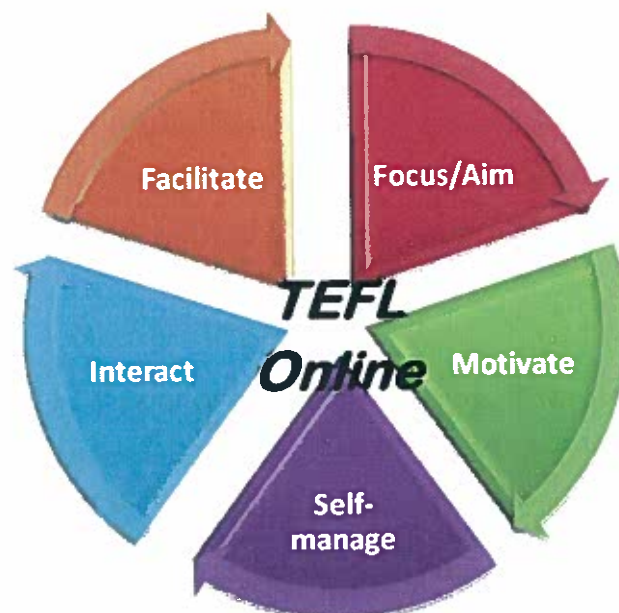
Following Gold (2001), Connolly and Stansfield (2007) and De Villiers (2007), any design for TEFL online should meet the following criteria:

1. The resulting course should promote learner-centredness in terms of support and constructivist learning. The latter should encourage participants to construct their own meaning of TEFL through interactions with the content, tasks, fellow learners and facilitations.

2. The design of the learning website should incorporate creative and affective elements that motivate and engage online participants. The inclusion of technical and tutor support will diminish the isolation experienced in traditional distance learning. In addition, real-life tasks that promote practical applications should engage participants (De Villiers, 2007:16)

3. Self-management is essential because it promotes true leaner-centredness. Participants should take responsibility for their own learning in an asynchronous online format since it allows them essential time to reflect, to make connections, and to construct coherent knowledge structures. In TEFL Online, participants should determine the direction of the course by virtue of their participation in tasks and discussions.

4. There should be opportunities for interaction and collaboration amongst participants and between participants and tutors through individual and group tasks. Jonassen et al (1999:3) support the view that learning is intrinsically a social-dialogical process. That is, meaning is created through our experiences of them and interactions with them. In TEFL Online, the inclusion of discussion platforms should reduce the 'distance' in ODL.

5. The learning should be facilitated by tutors/facilitators. The role of the e-facilitator is essential in guiding the participant's construction of meaning through individual and group feedback. In this way, facilitators guide and encourage self-managed

online learning (Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Cunningham, 2007) and, consequently, assist participants overcome the transactional distance in ODL.

This conceptual framework incorporates the main precepts of TEFL training and ODL, especially within an online learning environment. On the basis of these design guidelines, TEFL Online must promote learner-centredness and learning through interactions with content, fellow participants and facilitators. The overall aim is to engage participants in concepts of language teaching and learning, in addition to, fostering the beginnings of reflection within the field of TEFL. The next step is to ensure that technology serves as a platform that endorses these guidelines, not distracts from them.

Chapter 3: Developing and Implementing TEFL Online

3.1 The Development Phase of TEFL Online

This chapter illustrates the second phase in design-based research, namely, the development and implementation of the TEFL Online pilot. While the design guidelines proposed in Chapter 2 informed the development of the pilot, adaptations had to be made to suit the capabilities of the LMS that the pilot was launched on.

The implementation of the pilot is also discussed in this chapter. Figure 3.1 is a visual representation of the various steps involved in the development and implementation phases of TEFL Online.

Fig: 3.1: The development phase of TEFL Online pilot.
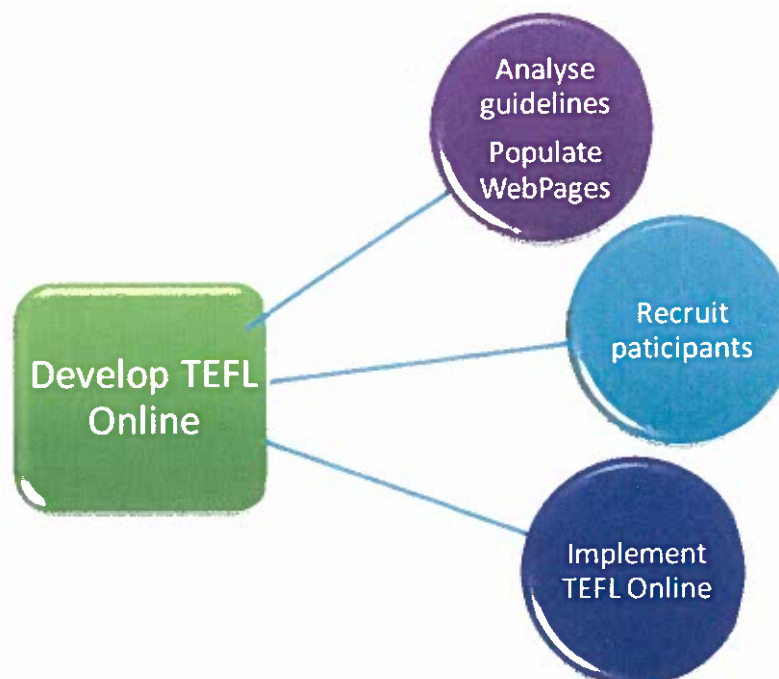
3.2 Launching the Pilot on myUnisa

With the assistance of myUnisa technical advisors, I created a project site for TEFL Online on the LMS. myUnisa is a web-based Learning Management System for academic collaboration and study-related interaction. It is intended to:

> ... supplement and enhance academic interaction and improve communication between Unisa and its learners as well as provide opportunity for engagement among learners. UNISA participates in an international initiative to develop open source collaboration and learning environment "Sakai". This technology was customized, enhanced and new functionality added to address Unisa's specific requirements. Taking care of tedious tasks such as handing in assignments at the post boxes or updating contact details is easily done using the online environment. At Unisa we believe that part of the learning process is to be part of the learning community where learners can test their thinking and growth with peers. In a distance learning institution such as Unisa this can become problematic. myUnisa helps to bridge some of these gaps. (myUnisa website, 2007)

The project site replicates the conventional myUnisa website with the same layout and most of the functions. Figure 3.2 presents a typical myUnisa Homepage. It contains the UNISA logo, a log in area, links for general learner matters, a general welcome message, UNISA news and resources, important announcements, and a help link. To enter the learner's personal courses, the learner has to log in with their learner number and the password that they have selected.

Once logged in, the learner has access to his/her individual myUnisa Homepage which has the following features (Figure 3.3):

- A logout link;
- A general welcome message;
- A My Workplace and My Admin link, which contains administrative matters;

- Links for the various courses for which the learner is registered;
- Links on the left, including Home, Announcements, Assignments, Class List; Discussion Forum, Materials, Schedule, Prescribed Books and Site Info.

Fig: 3.2: myUnisa Homepage.
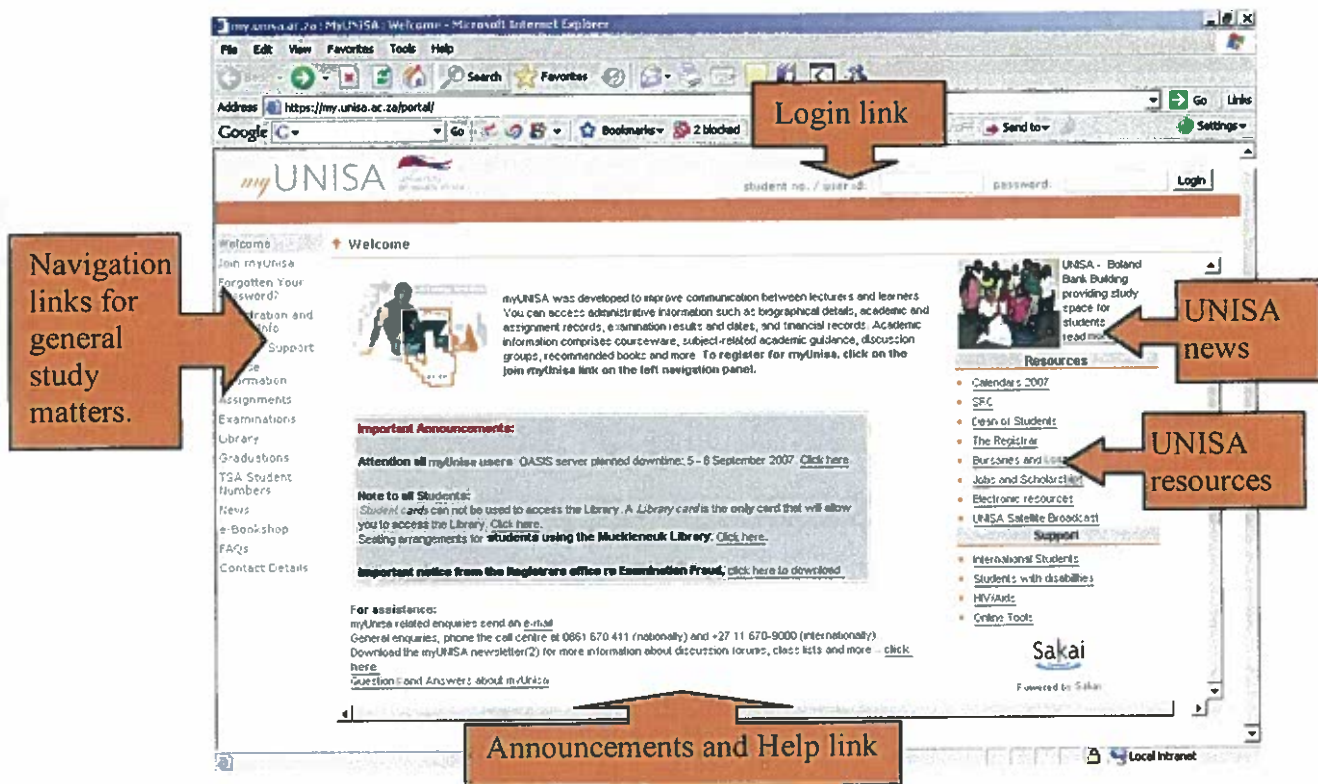
The navigation links, which allow a learner to move from screen to screen, accessing different parts of the course, are set against a different background colour from the rest of the screen (See Figures 3.2 & 3.3). For example, links to the learner's courses are listed in an orange tool bar at the top of the page and links into various sections of that learner's courses are listed sequentially on the left of the page on a grey background. When a cursor is placed on a link, it is highlighted in bold to make navigation easy.

Fig 3.3: A learner's individual myUnisa Homepage.
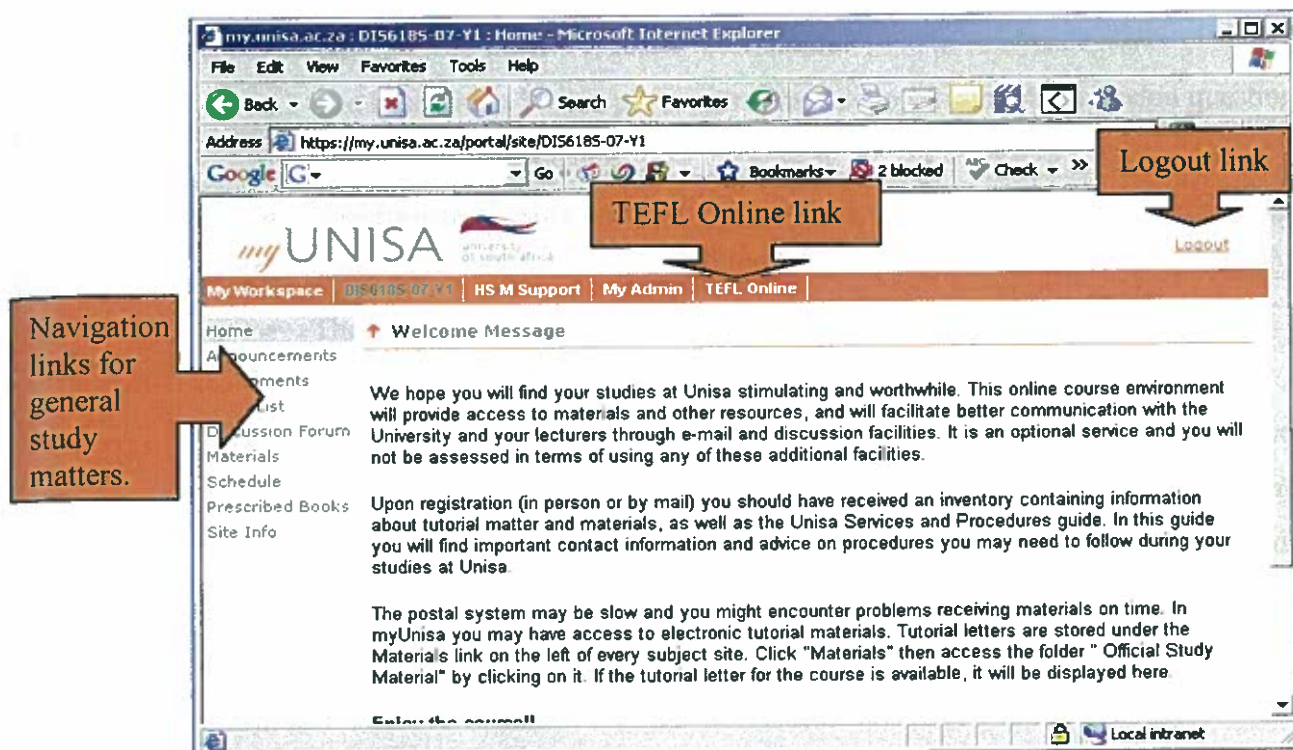
At the outset I created a storyboard for the TEFL Online project site. Cartwright & Cartwright claim that a storyboard is significant in planning as it is '…a sequence of simply drawn pictures that visually represent the program' (1999:93). The storyboard captures the architectural plan of the TEFL Online site and allows the academic and technical designers to visualize and plan the layout and content of each webpage. The original storyboard of TEFL Online comprised the following WebPages[20] and content:

- The Home page – Welcome message; photographs; contact details.
- The Schedule page – Calendar with tasks and discussion dates.
- The Announcements page – Notifications of tasks and deadlines.
- The Materials page – A tutorial letter, units 1-4 of study material, extra resources, a key of answers to tasks and activities to be posted at a later stage.

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[20] These WebPages are controlled by the design of myUnisa. Features and design elements cannot be changed. Most of the pages were available to the pilot.

- The Drop Box page – Folders for each learner.
- The Wiki page – Collaborative task, additional readings from study units.
- The Site info page – Website information.
- The Discussion Forum page – An Introduction forum, 4 discussion questions; feedback at a later stage.
- The Blogger[21] page – A case study discussion task and feedback at a later stage.
- The FAQs page – Frequently asked questions about the TEFL pilot.

During the development phase, a few revisions were made to the project site. Firstly, the Wiki page was removed from the pilot as it was still under construction. Instead I used the Blogger and Discussion Forum pages for TEFL tasks and activities. Secondly, a technical advisor navigated through the project site as a 'dummy' learner to test the site. Revisions were made accordingly.

3.3 Actualising the Design Guidelines in TEFL Online

This section discusses the actualisation of and adaptations to the design guidelines within the pilot. The design guidelines in this study act as a conceptual framework. However, conceptual frameworks ideally describe the philosophy of learning and teaching, and through integration in development, need to be adapted according to the online environment. The online environment should bend to the philosophy. But it is only in implementation and evaluation that it is possible to gauge the feasibility of the conceptual framework. It is, therefore, equally important to investigate the possibilities of the LMS to maintain the favoured conceptual framework.

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[21] Blogger derives from Blog, which in turn originates from the combination of web + log, used to describe personal web space for diaries or stories. myUnisa uses the Blogger page to post discussion activities, additional readings and information. In TEFL Online, it was used for a case study discussion task.

3.3.1 The Aims of TEFL Online

TEFL Online is an artefact in this design-based research that fulfils several interwoven intentions. In this way, the aims of TEFL Online are threefold. Firstly, from a research standpoint, it investigates the use of myUnisa in fulfilling ODL values at Unisa. Secondly, from a TEFL teacher-training pedagogical perspective, it investigates the possibilities and feasibility of launching a reflective learning/teaching model through online mechanisms. Thirdly, for the participants, TEFL Online is an asynchronous mode of learning about TEFL concepts. This section discusses how the last aim materialised in the pilot. The first two will be discussed in Chapter 4 — the evaluation phase.

An introductory course in TEFL should raise awareness of the fundamentals in language learning and teaching. However, the fundamentals are a disputed topic. Research reveals that while some TEFL course books begin with the psychology of learning (Lindsay & Knight, 2006), others begin with the theory of language learning (Harmer, 2002), while several courses begin with teaching techniques (Scrivenor, 2005) and others with the study of the English language (Wrangham, 1996). Given the experimental nature of the pilot and the fact that this is an introductory TEFL without any contact tuition, I decided to limit the focus to topics that raised awareness on aspects in first language and foreign language learning. I wanted participants to explore the characteristics of the foreign language learner and teacher in an attempt to encourage them to question their assumptions. As a result, the following outcome and assessment criteria for the TEFL Online pilot emerged:

- To familiarise participants with the basic principles of foreign language learning and teaching through investigation and discussion.

In achieving this participants are able to:

1. Deduce and describe the similarities and differences between first language and foreign language acquisition;

2. Discuss factors that affect language learning;

3. Compare and discuss effective language teaching techniques.

The aim and assessment criteria set out for the pilot are constructivist in nature. That is, they allow for the process of constructing meaning through consideration, discussion, comparison and investigation. Objectivist theory would have called for evidence of an accumulation of knowledge and facts in TEFL. Participants would be required to learn and to recall core elements of foreign language learning and teaching by citing content and examples. The outcomes of both approaches for an introductory TEFL course would arguably be the same but the learning process in achieving those aims would differ.

The pilot is designed with special attention to content, tasks, and discussions with the intention of participants fulfilling the proposed aims. The pilot commences with an investigation of how children learn their first language and moves to the differences between first language and foreign language learning. It then focuses on specific characteristics of foreign language learners and teachers of English culminating in effective foreign language teaching principles.

The materials for the syllabus were available in the Materials page (Figure 3.4). They were divided into small units of study and loaded into four separate folders no bigger than 2MB in size since the website could not host a larger file. The Materials page displays additional information such as the size of the file, the person responsible for posting it and the date of posting. The study materials in the Materials page consisted of four units of study and additional materials, namely:

- Unit 1: First Language Acquisition;
- Unit 2: Foreign Language Learning;
- Unit 3: The Foreign Language Learner;
- Unit 4: The Foreign Language Teacher;
- A tutorial letter with general guidelines for the pilot;
- A glossary of terms for the study units;

- A folder of useful websites, which directed participants to additional teaching material, discussion forums with teachers across the world and jobs in the field of ELT;

- A key to certain activities in the study units.

These materials were uploaded as a Microsoft Word document, not a web-based document as sometimes occurs in online courses, because myUnisa only hosts folders of Microsoft Word or PDF documents.

Fig 3.4: The Materials page of TEFL Online.
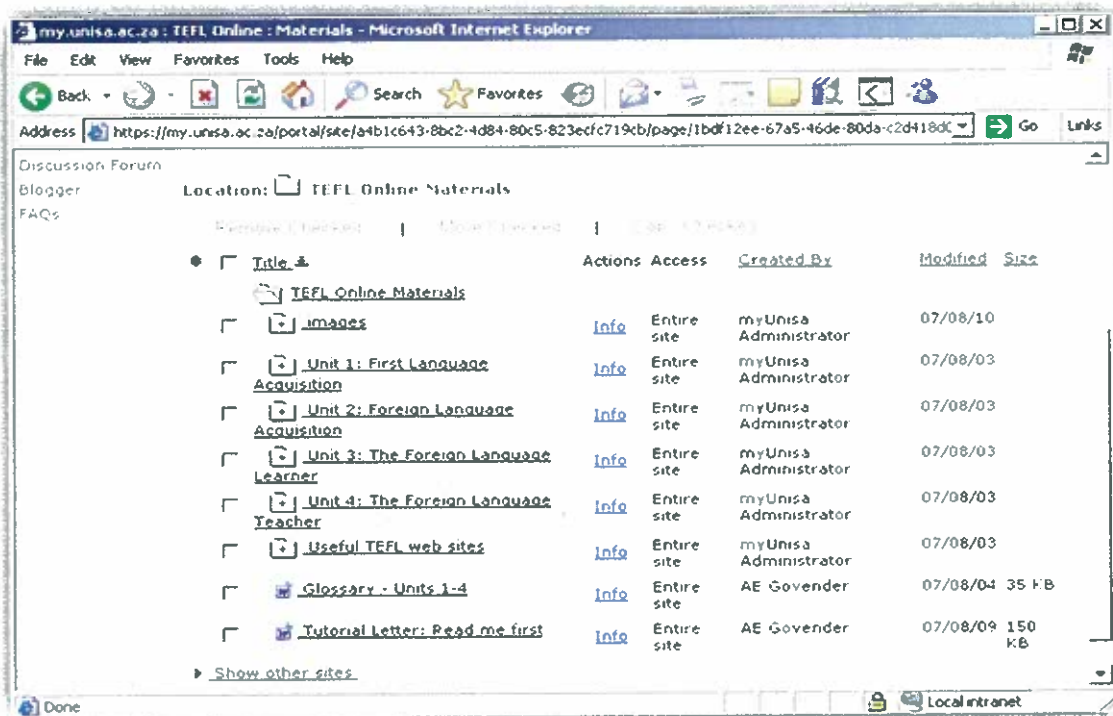
In the pilot, I adopted the use of tasks and activities that promote investigative and reflection skills. This teaching concept stems from task-based learning. It promotes the use of the target language in a problem-solving negotiation activity (Larsen-Freeman, 2003:144-146). Task-based learning is similar to Problem-based or Project-based learning (PBL) since it encourages the construction of new knowledge through application and experience.

Constructivist environments usually adopt PBL approaches as a means of encouraging meta-cognitive skills in participants. According to Ramsay and Sorrell (2007), these methods originated in the 1960s in medical education as a solution to an educational dilemma. It was evident that medical students could memorise medical literature extensively without ever having to diagnose successfully. To counteract this dilemma, students were presented with a problem, an ill patient. They had to offer a diagnosis of the patient's medical problem through research and analysis, with justification. PBL is said to develop communicative social skills and critical thinking through active adult learning.

People construct meaning and eventually knowledge through our experience of it, through application, and activity. It is possible to memorise facts that we have not experienced. For example, when applying for a learner's driver's licence, we are required to memorise the names and meanings of road signs, and driving regulations. But through memorisation, we gain only a superficial understanding of them unless we identify and use them to navigate our driving. Jonassen et al (1999:3) agree that 'knowledge construction results from activity, so knowledge is embedded in activity'. Active participants place the focus on the learner and learner-centredness which is characteristic of best practice ODL and TEFL.

It follows, that in order for participants to construct the meaning through a deeper understanding of TEFL concepts, they need to experience them and to apply them. The study units and the website of TEFL Online were populated with several tasks and activities. In total, participants were required to complete three tasks in TEFL Online:

- Task 1: Interviewing a foreign language speaker. Here participants have to interview an adult who has learned a foreign language. The aim is for them to discuss the complexities of language learning through their interactions with the learner. Thereafter they have to write a short report and submit it online as well as discuss their findings in the Discussion Forum.

- Task 2: Learning a few concepts in a foreign language themselves. In order to experience the complexities of learning a foreign language, participants have to learn a few 'everyday language concepts' such as language for giving introductions or ordering food in a language they do not know. Afterwards, they have to discuss their experiences in the Discussion Forum.

- Task 3: Identifying similarities and differences between first language and foreign language acquisition. Here participants submit an essay in which they demonstrate synthesis of pre-existing knowledge, personal experience, research and new ideas from discussions, content and feedback.

Participants were provided with guidelines in their study units and tutorial letter. There are no prescriptive answers for tasks one and two, while task three allows for field of proposed options.

3.2.1   *Motivating and Engaging Online Participants*

Learners appreciate online learning because it affords them the flexibility, convenience and autonomy of distance learning (Engvig, 2006:51). A further plus factor is that they are able to study at their own pace and in their own time. Even so, online learners often experience a sense of isolation, because they are physically removed from the institution, tutors and peers (Perraton, 1993). Successful ODL participants are self-directed and maintain their own motivation during their courses. Motivation is crucial to learning according to Knowles' adult learning theory, 'andragogy'[22]. Adults will learn if they are ready to learn and intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to do so (Saleh & Pretorius, 2006:114). Notwithstanding the tutor and the course itself, 'andragogy' suggests that adult participants are mostly responsible for their own motivation in learning.

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[22] Malcolm Knowles terms an alternative to pedagogy as andragogy — an adult learning theory which refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages.

Motivation is key to any learning experience, be it intrinsic or extrinsic. De Villiers (2007:15-16) claims that intrinsic motivation is influenced by aspects of the online learning experience that engage the participant such as adequate technical and tutor support, tasks in the course, online design and resources linked to the course. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand, is influenced by the recognition of the participant's performance. Psychological factors such as the participant's emotions, attitude, values and attention also contribute to the online learning experience. In the TEFL Online pilot, the content, activities and facilitation were specifically designed to motivate, engage and challenge the participants.

Design decisions that attempt to 'close the distance' in ODL were deliberate, however, they were constrained to a large extent by capabilities of the LMS. The initial TEFL Online Homepage included a welcome message (Figure 3.5) and the contact details of the e-facilitator and technical advisor so participants had resources for assistance. We also added a photograph and short biography of the e-facilitator to the website to personalise the pilot and to limit the isolation that participants feel with online and distance learning.[23] As a consequence of the e-facilitator's biography, participants introduced themselves and addressed each other by their first names in discussion. In contact TEFL courses, participants are able to contact trainers instantly for support and rapport is usually built between trainer and trainee and amongst trainees. Similar instant support is not available in online learning. However, attempts were made to create a 'community of sharing' with fellow participants and the e-facilitator through announcements, e-mails, the Blogger page and discussion forums. Case studies from Engvig's (2006) research in online learning report that participants feel safe and motivated to contribute if such a 'community of sharing' exists.

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[23] Engvig (2006) reports case studies that emphasise the isolation learners experience in online learning.

Fig 3.5: TEFL Online Welcome message on the Homepage.

Welcome to the TEFL Online Website!

We hope you will find this introductory TEFL project stimulating and worthwhile. This online course environment will provide access to materials and other resources, and will facilitate better communication with your facilitator through e-mail and discussion facilities.

The online TEFL course is an introductory project in teaching English as a Foreign Language. In this course, you will be alerted to new concepts in foreign or additional language learning and how those concepts impact on language teaching. You will be expected to gather information, solve problems, complete tasks and experiment with the concepts raised in this course; that is, you will be quite active in the learning process just as foreign language participants would be in learning a language.

In myUnisa you may have access to several useful links such as the electronic tutorial materials, discussion forums, announcements and an online connection to your classmates and e-facilitator.

- Start by going to **Materials** to read the 'Tutorial letter'. Your course materials are stored under the Materials link on the left of this web site. You will also access the folders for each Unit by clicking on them. You will also be able to find additional resources, links to web sites, etc. in other folders in Materials.
- Go to **Discussion Forum** to 'Introductions' and read the introductions from participants in this project. Then add your own introduction by replying.
- Then, familiarise yourself with the site and tools by clicking on the **Blogger**,and the **FAQs.**

Thank you for starting this journey with us and enjoy the course!
Angela Govender

Angela Govender is your
e-facilitator for this project

Contact details
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Additional support for participants was included in a 'frequently asked questions' link (the FAQ page as seen in Figure 3.6), which lists general questions and answers on TEFL Online. In distance education this information would normally be delivered personally through a tutorial letter. For the online pilot, I provided participants with

general information in an electronic tutorial letter and visible links. Electronic general information on the pilot in a sense replaces the tutor and is available at all times. Providing support is an initiative towards creating positive motivation in participants. If participants are informed, they will continue (Saleh & Pretorius, 2006:114).

Fig 3.6: The FAQs page of TEFL Online.
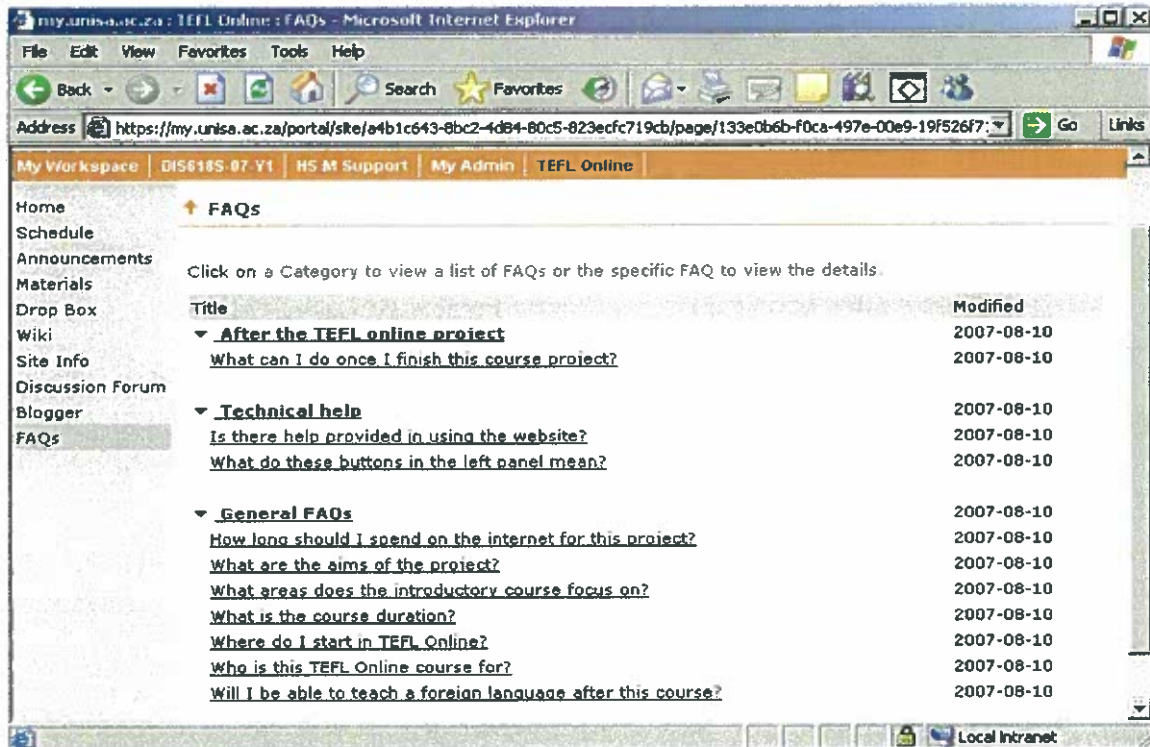
Other support mechanisms are the inclusion of the Schedule (Figure 3.7) and Announcements pages (Figure 3.8). The dates in the Schedule page and the frequent announcements in the Announcements page allow participants to plan their learning around a time-frame. With the aid of an online calendar, participants are able to plan and self-direct their workload. The participants involved found the announcements particularly supportive since they were available online as well as posted automatically to their e-mail inboxes.

Fig 3.7: The Schedule page of TEFL Online.

Fig 3.8: The Announcements page of TEFL Online.

Figure 3.9 displays two examples of Announcements. They include alerting participants to the starting date, discussion dates, new discussions, task deadlines and online feedback for activities and tasks. I used emoticons and an informal, friendly tone in all Announcements, which were kept brief. I also always added a greeting at the top and instructions for the activity at the bottom. The use of a friendly tone and emoticons is supported by Meyer[24] (2003:10). She suggests that facilitators use language and emoticons to express their thoughts and to encourage participants to do so as well. Her suggestion encourages a community of sharing through validating the participants' feelings and, as a result, develops learner-centredness.

Fig 3.9: Examples of Announcements from TEFL Online.

Example 1: TEFL Online Begins!

Hello all

The *TEFL online* project website will be open for registered learners on Friday the 10th of August 2007. It will run from the 10th (10am) to the 31st of August 2007. Congratulations if you have received this e-mail. You have been accepted into *TEFL Online*. So log on, we await your participation.

Log on with your user name and password. UNISA staff members can login with their Novell codes and passwords. UNISA learners can login with their learner numbers and the password they created when they joined myUNISA .

(If you haven't joined myUnisa, go to http://myUnisa.ac.za and click on '**Join myUnisa**' in the left panel to join. Note: you must have an email address to join myUnisa)

Example 2: Discussing your foreign language lesson

Have you all learned a few phrases of a foreign language yet?

Don't forget to share your experience of learning a foreign language in the discussion forum. Remember to click on the topic 'Unit 2, Task 1' formed by Angela

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[24] Meyer researches theories and case studies on the *Implications of Brain Research for Distance Education.* She discovered several valuable insights on brain processes that influence learning. She discusses best methods to enhance online learning using the findings.

Another motivation for online participants was the inclusion of tasks as a form of assessment in lieu of an examination. I decided to follow the usual assessment trend in TEFL courses, which is the inclusion of a learner portfolio of tasks. A portfolio of evidence that comprises small, authentic tasks encourages reflection time and experiential learning. This assessment method is supported by constructivist learning theory that advocates PBL (Jonassen et al 1999; Ramsay & Sorrell, 2007). Bostock (in Bach et al 2007:140), too, claims that success lies in creating an assessment that promotes the learning philosophy of the course.

Once completed, learners can upload their tasks in the digital Drop Box page (Figure 3.10) which contains a folder of documents. It is also possible for participants to download various other documents in the folder such as photographs, power point presentations, reports, research articles, websites and completed essays. The facilitator, then, views, marks and submits the tasks online via the Drop Box page. The advantages of the Drop Box facility are that it reduces the delivery time of posted assignments and caters for immediate feedback in distance learning.

Fig 3.10a: The Drop Box page of TEFL Online. [25]

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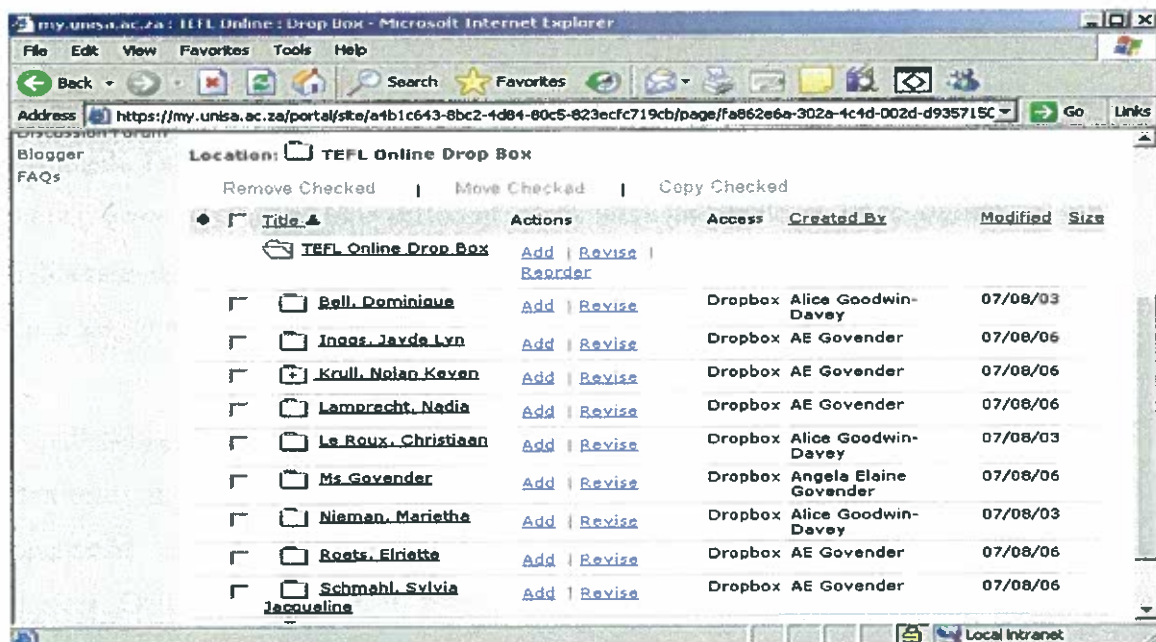
[25] All participants were made aware of the use of their real names in all of the WebPages.

3.3.3 Self-managed Learning

The norm in distance and online learning is that participants are expected to be accountable and to take ownership for their own learning. Along with the freedom to choose when to learn and how to learn, participants have to be self-directed, motivated and disciplined since online learning comes with certain responsibilities. Constructivist theory supports a learner-centred or learner self-directed form of andragogy.

Online courses are often less structured than traditional classes (Kearsley, 2000). They are unbound by time and space. While the design team plays a part in selecting the WebPages and content for TEFL Online, participants are able to determine the direction of the pilot by virtue of their participation in tasks and discussions. Knowles advocates this aspect when he states that participants with some initial assistance should direct themselves when ready (Saleh & Pretorius, 2006:113-114).

The asynchronous environment in TEFL Online allows participants essential time to reflect, to make connections and to construct coherent knowledge structures. Participants could log into the online pilot when they were ready even though there was a work schedule available on the Schedule page (Figure 3.7). With regard to discussion tasks, participants could post their comments when ready even though deadlines were assigned. They could even add to the discussions at later stages. Even the materials which were posted in four different units were available at once online. It was a deliberate design decision to allow for participants who wish to download all the materials at once or in stages and work through the materials as they see fit.

Allowing participants the freedom of asynchronous learning is characteristic of flexibility in ODL practices. However, the notion of flexibility is not one of complete openness; that is, allowing the learner to start and complete courses when he/she desires. ODL learners need to work within scheduled assessments and structures that allow for suitable flexibility (Evans, 1994:67-68).

3.3.4 Interaction and Collaboration

One of the strengths of traditional face-to-face classes is the presence of a strong social context in which participants can connect with peers and tutors. Research confirms that participants value human contact in peer discussions and tutor guidance (Bach et al., 2007:132-133). Social context in online learning differs from that of traditional contact classes. In asynchronous modes participants are not connected physically at the same time and in the same place. Nonetheless, it is still possible to create beneficial connections using technology. Synchronous communications such as Inter-relay chat, audio conferencing, video conferencing, web conferencing and instant messaging connects participants and tutors in real-time but there are disadvantages such as bandwidth[25], specialised technical facilities and skills that participants and myUnisa would need to have. In any event, these synchronous facilities are unavailable on myUnisa.

In TEFL Online, I used the asynchronous mode of learning to create a collaborative environment where participants interact with the content, fellow participants and the facilitator (Saleh & Pretorius, 2006:117). Although it is important to create a 'community of sharing' which is an integral part of a teacher's professional development, connections amongst participants and between learner and tutor are generally neglected or absent. TEFL Online differs from traditional distance learning because it attempts to connect participants and tutors.

Semi-collaborative activities and tools were built into the TEFL Online pilot. Examples include a Discussion Forum page and a Blogger page. Both are threaded discussion systems, and are also called asynchronous conferencing. They function in a similar way. Topics and sub-topics are created by the e-facilitator, (or participant if they wish to create a topic), and participants post messages under any topics. A Discussion Forum page (Figure 3.11) allows participants to discuss their views on the

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[25] The greater the bandwidth (the speed at which information is transferred via modem to Internet user); the faster the data such as videos and audio text reaches the user.

activities in the study units. On the front page it is possible to view the forums, how many times each one was viewed, and the date, time and person responsible for the last posting. Messages include the sender's name, the time and date of posting.

Fig 3.11: The Discussion Forum page of TEFL Online.
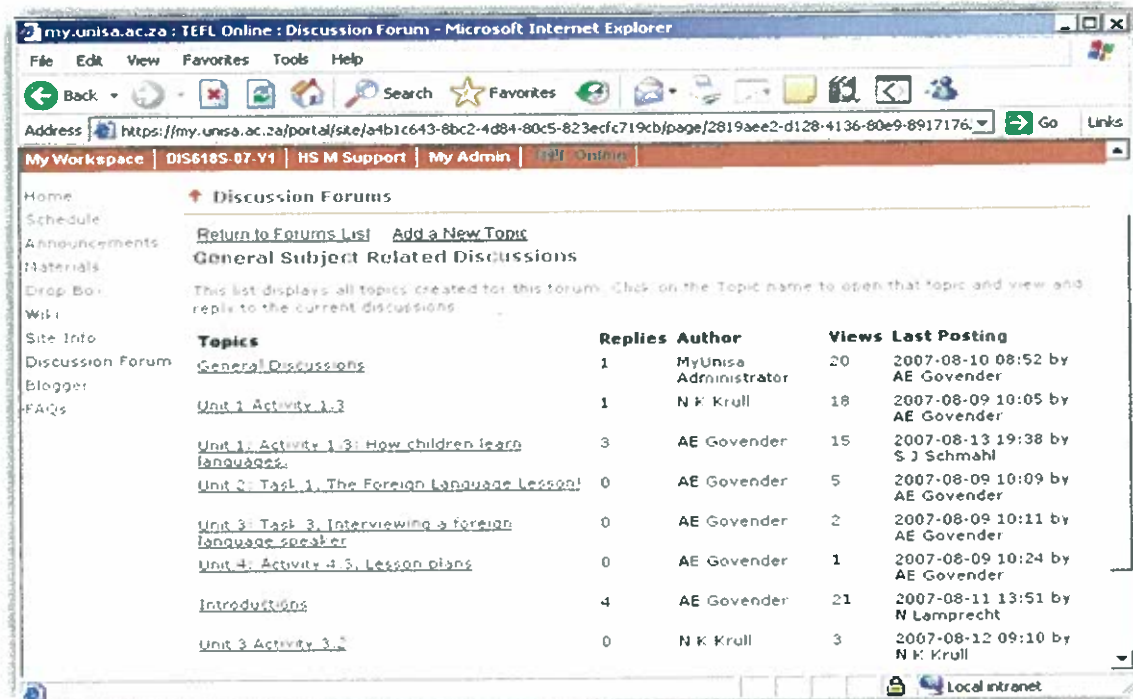
The Blogger page (Figure 3.12) included one discussion task, a case study of two EFL lessons. Participants had to discuss the teaching techniques employed by two EFL teachers in two separate lessons. The Blogger page worked successfully as a discussion tool for several reasons. It was posted later in the pilot. This gave participants an opportunity to gain confidence in using discussion tools and participating in discussions. Secondly, after completing some of earlier discussions in language learning, participants were able to apply their findings to the case study. Navigation is easier in the Blogger page; participants click on the topic only once and the case study accompanied by all the responses are shown on one page, whereas the participants had to navigate through different topics in the Discussion Forum. All participants contributed to the discussion task (Figure 3.13).

Fig 3.12: The Blogger page of TEFL Online.
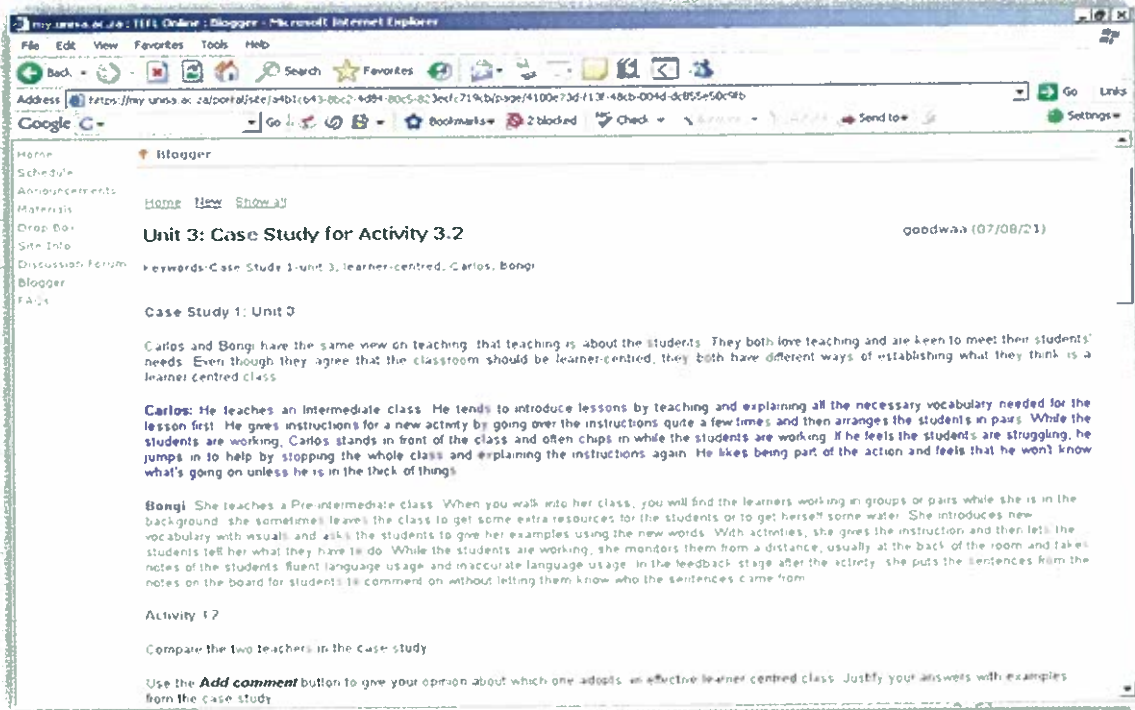
Fig 3.13: The learner's responses to the case study in the Blogger page.
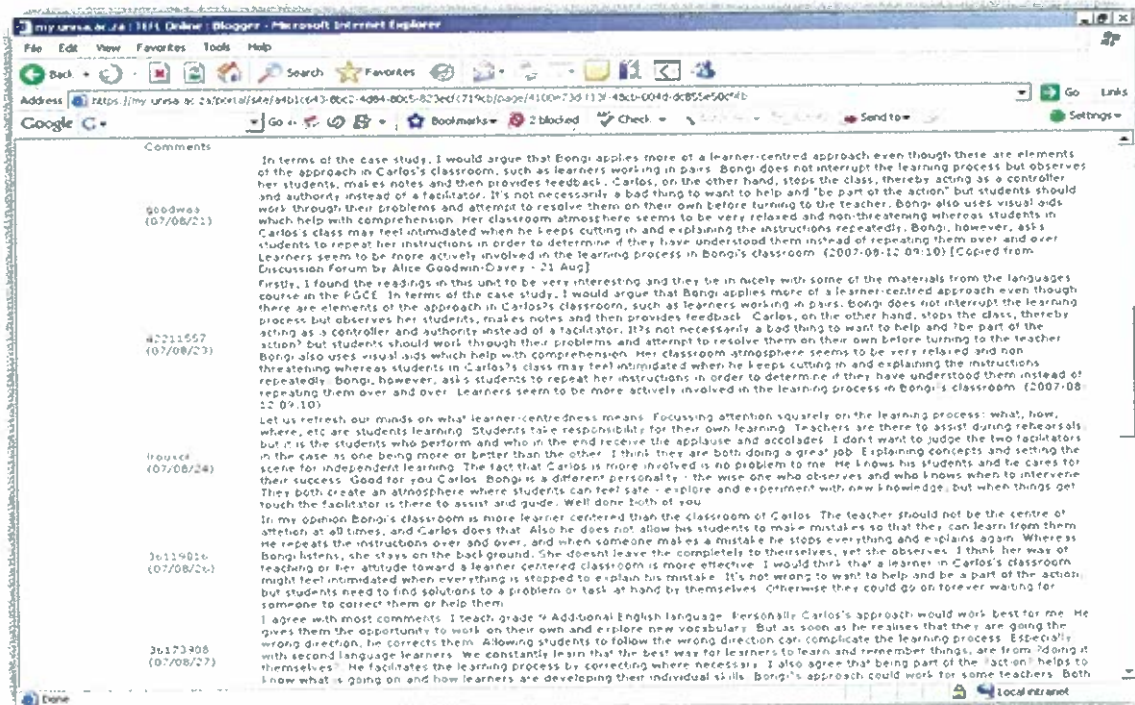
The Blogger and Discussion Forum pages do not have the instant interaction patterns and responses of traditional face-to-face classes. Instead, they employ a delayed interaction which allows participants more reflection time for a considered response. The facilitator also has time to consider his/her response to the benefit of everyone. As is the case in contact classes, some participants may need more time and to develop confidence to be able to give a considered written response (Gold, 2001). Therefore, providing more than one platform for connection and interaction in online learning is significant since participants learn from reading other contributions. All of them will find their voice at some point. This is supported by Beisenbach-Lucas (2003:36-37) who shows that online discussions such as the discussion forum and web-blogs appealed to 'slow' learners or learners who wished to take time to reflect on the task at hand.

Kamhi-Stein (2000), in her case study on Web-based bulletin board discussions, claims that anonymity and the lack of cultural and linguistic barriers in online discussion reduces anxiety. Face-to-face discussions are often led or dominated by vocal participants and reticent learners are often overlooked or unheard. Alternatively, online discussions and collaborations are driven by the needs and interest of the learners (Kamhi-Stein, 2000). In TEFL Online, the discussion tasks were led by the questions posted by the e-facilitator, but learners had opportunities to post their responses at their pace and introduce new related questions if needed. The discussion platforms in TEFL online are an attempt to foster interaction in online learning. However, more collaborative platforms promote true and varied interaction. A discussion platform is spatially and physically limited. It is difficult to evaluate nuance, non-verbal cues, or to provide the quick to-and-fro spontaneous interchanges that so often bring life and humour to the classroom.

3.3.5 Facilitated Online Learning

According to Williams and Burden (1997:40) the role of the mediator is central to constructivist psychology of learning. Social constructivists use the term mediator for

the teacher or guide who shapes or enhances the learner's learning experience. They claim that effective learning lies in the social interaction between the learner and the mediator, the one with the expertise or higher knowledge. It follows from this that the mediator plays a pivotal role in the learning process.

In online learning, the mediator is known as the e-tutor, e-facilitator or simply facilitator. The significance of the role played by the online e-facilitator is supported by Connolly and Stansfield's suggestion that the facilitator should be available for consultation, coaching and scaffolding by offering hints, reminders and feedback (2007:24-26). They claim that the roles of online facilitators should be defined by four steps, namely: *modelling* tasks for participants' observation in order for them to build conceptual models; *encouraging* participants to communicate their thinking; *pushing* participants to explore on their own and lastly, *fostering* reflection skills in participants.

Connolly and Stansfield's suggestions are evident in the TEFL Online pilot. At the very beginning I modelled online participation with my own contribution in the introduction link. Thereafter, participants introduced themselves. During the pilot I was accessible for the participants via e-mail, telephone and the online discussions. I also assisted participants with keeping abreast of their studies by posting frequent online announcements (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9).

I posted various discussion topics with questions and scenarios that related to the different tasks and activities in the study units. Figure 3.14 is an example of a discussion task where participants were required to learn a minimum of eight words and phrases in a language they do not know. The intention was for participants to examine the various difficulties in learning a foreign language as an adult through sharing their experiences with fellow participants. Assuming that this experience might have been overwhelming, I listed a few leading questions to guide them in the discussion. The questions ranged from simple at first: *What language did you learn?* to more open-ended ones: *What insight have you gained from this experience?* In this way, I encouraged participants to share their experience, to communicate their thinking, and to reflect on their findings.

Fig 3.14: The foreign language lesson discussion question.

Author	Message
e-facilitator	Share your experience of learning a foreign language with the class by responding briefly to the following questions: 1. What language did you learn? 2. What new words/phrases did you learn? 3. How did you feel during the lesson? 4. What insight have you gained from this experience?

The first participant (Figure 3.15) described the linguistic aspects of the language and phrases he had been taught. He stated that he *'felt very relaxed during the lesson...'* (and) not *'intimidated'*. He mentioned aspects of phonology and phonetics — *'The biggest challenge for me was adjusting my tongue and vocal chords to pronounce new sounds, particularly the clicking sounds of the language'*. He also noted the difference between his first language and the foreign language —

A further aspect that is different from English is the use of prepositions and verbs, which are not always spoken separately.... some words in Xhosa are derived from English or Afrikaans ... or in some cases, there are no Xhosa words to describe something.

The participant offered his thoughts on foreign language learning —

The process of learning a few words or phrases in another language is a formal process that requires the assistance of a teacher or someone who can speak the language fluently. Learning a first language is more of a natural process and once you've picked up a basic vocabulary and language forms it seems to develop quicker. A new language, on the other hand, seems to take much longer to master and requires a lot of concentration. What I learned about foreign language learning is that it's natural to make mistakes, it's important to use the words or sentences that you have picked up in conversation with others and it's

not a process you can rush. The process takes time, commitment and patience.

From his contribution, it is possible to isolate some factors that affect language learning, i.e. the teacher, time, commitment and patience.

The second participant mainly commented on the socio-cultural issues of the new language —

Greeting a male in NSotho is not the same as greeting a woman. Respect for the male figure lies at the base of this difference....The bottom line: be respectful at all times, and let it show in the way you use the foreign language and the traditions of that culture.

Little was mentioned of language learning techniques and factors that affect learning. When referring to his attitude during the lesson, the second participant made vague and superficial comments stating — *I had a great experience learning some greeting and respect phrases in NSotho.*

Both participants' contributions respond to questions 1, 2 and, to some extent, 4. Nevertheless, more depth regarding language learning techniques and the emotions they experienced during the lesson, both of which play a crucial role, is needed. They only offered superficial comments on these aspects. This may be understandable at this early point in the pilot as participants are only beginning to consider aspects in language learning.

Fig. 3.15: Responses from the first two participants.

Participant 1	I asked one of my colleagues to teach me a few basic words and phrases in Xhosa. I felt very relaxed during the lesson because I have worked with her for years so I was not intimidated. The biggest challenge was adjusting my tongue and vocal chords to pronounce new sounds, particularly the clicking sounds of the language. A further aspect that is different from English is the use of prepositions and verbs, which are not always spoken

separately. For example, the phrase 'I am going to Cape Town is Ndiya eKapa'. So the 'am going to' part is attached to the 'I' part. Similarly, 'I am fine, thank you' is 'Ndiphilile, enkosi so 'am fine' becomes part of 'I'. It was also interesting to note that some words in Xhosa are derived from English or Afrikaans (such as 'eBhayi' for Port Elizabeth from PE's reputation as 'Die Baai') or in some cases, there are no Xhosa words to describe something. She told me how to pronounce the words and then I repeated their pronunciation. I also tried to say the words to myself and to use some of them with my Xhosa-speaking participants. The process of learning a few words or phrases in another language is a formal process that requires the assistance of a teacher or someone who can speak the language fluently. Learning a first language is more of a natural process and once you've picked up a basic vocabulary and language forms it seems to develop quicker. A new language, on the other hand, seems to take much longer to master and requires a lot of concentration. What I learned about foreign language learning is that it's natural to make mistakes, it's important to use the words or sentences that you have picked up in conversation with others and it's not a process you can rush. The process takes time, commitment and patience.

Participant 2   I had a great experience learning some greeting and respect phrases in NSotho. Let me start with what I've learnt: language cannot be understood apart from its cultural context. Let me explain: Greeting a male in NSotho is not the same as greeting a greeting a woman. 'Tobela Tate' and 'Dumela Mma', respectively. Respect for the male figure lies at the base of this difference. Staying with the respect issue, one inquires to the male's wellbeing in the plural – 'lekai tate' - and respond in the plural. Respect also comes in when you greet an unfamiliar person – 'dumelang'. Respect is further attached to age. If someone is older than you you greet with 'Tate' and 'Mma'. When someone is as old as your parents they are addressed as 'Rakgolo' and 'Gugu'. It has been mentioned that when inquiring about how someone is doing, respect is also fundamentally important. This manifests itself in asking in the plural how you are: 'lekai' - indicating respect for the other person and his/her family. Beautiful, isn't it? And lastly, saying good bye. It would be disrespectful to end a conversation if you are not the one leaving. That could be interpreted by the other as "go now, I am through talking to you". The bottom line: be respectful at all times, and let it show in the way you use the foreign language and the traditions of that culture. I am convinced that this is the way to learn language - not all rules and paradigms, but the way the language "works" in real life.

I used specific feedback techniques to enlist more focused responses (Figure 3.16). To highlight the affective factors[26] in language learning, I requested that participants describe their emotional state during the lesson and the learning techniques they used to cope with the new language. To clarify my request, I referred to a similar foreign language lesson that is used in contact TEFL courses. I hoped that this type of feedback would lead to more in-depth reflection with regard to Questions 3 and 4 in the task.

Fig. 3.16: E-facilitator's feedback.

e-facilitator	Thank you for sharing your language learning experience, P1 and P2. Sounds like it was fun. In our contact TEFLA course, when we teach trainees a foreign language, they usually go through quite a few emotional states. They also use many different techniques to cope with the new vocabulary such as associating a word with an English equivalent, drawing a picture, writing them down, repeating them several times, asking questions about the meaning etc. I would like to know more about the various emotions you experienced during the lesson and what techniques you used to help you understand and remember the new vocabulary.

This prompting elicited the following responses. Over and above describing linguistic details, participant 3 (Figure 3.17), provided more information on how she felt during the lesson.

Fig.3.17: Further responses.

Participant 3	A friend taught me a short dialogue for making a reservation at a restaurant. What I had the most difficulty with is the way in which they greet each other. For example, the first exchange in the conversation he taught me was: 'Dumela, ke thusa eng? Ê ma, o tsogile? Ê, ke tsogile bjang'. Roughly translated, the second line is 'yes ma'am, I see you have awoken'. Followed by 'yes, I have risen from the floor'. I found this strange because there is no direct equivalent in English. I can see how knowing this

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[26] Krashen and Terrell (1983) describe the affective filter as a combination of factors that contribute to the emotional well-being of the language learner during learning. Factors such as anxiety, excitement, stress and enthusiasm all contribute to the language learning experience and should be considered when teaching.

conversation could be useful in a specific context, provided the person I were speaking to, knows the routine. If I were suddenly faced with an unfamiliar question the whole dialogue would collapse. Also, I do not know which word translates to which English equivalent, and if I were to see a word in a different tense or with a different subject I probably wouldn't recognise it because these details are attached to the word itself. However, a first twenty-minute lesson can obviously not accommodate much more than this. I did notice, to my dismay, that I had forgotten more than half the dialogue by the next morning, which implies, I think, that without repetition, practice and revision, one cannot learn a language. Also, even though my teacher was someone I am familiar and comfortable with, I definitely felt a degree of anxiety. I felt anxious and self-conscious and did not want to sound foolish by making a mistake or mispronouncing a word. I think the atmosphere in a classroom is essential to putting participants at their ease so they are willing to try out new sounds and are not afraid to make mistakes.

It is noticeable that she focused on the '*strangeness*' of the new language and being '*dismayed*' at not remembering all that was learnt by the next morning. She also mentioned that she felt a degree of '*anxiety*' and '*self-consciousness*' the fear of making errors. Not all participants will experience the same emotions during their foreign language lesson. So it was not an expectation that all the participants would mimic each other. Variables such as the 'teacher' they enlisted, their own level of confidence, and motivation during the lesson will tailor their response. The aim is not to mimic each other in their discussions, rather to share their experiences of various possible factors that affect foreign language learning. The considerations should eventually culminate in effective classroom praxis as they plan, select and adapt effective teaching techniques to counter-balance affective factors

Facilitation plays a vital role in discussions. Even social constructivist discussions need to be monitored and guided by the facilitator. Guided facilitation endorses discovery learning approach. That is, if the idea is to promote an enriched reflection cycle the facilitator needs to lead the participants to discover the meaning through interaction and discussion. Facilitation, rather than telling, is closer to the true principles of ODL. However, successful facilitation can only occur once participants are present and willing to be lead.

3.3 The Implementation Phase

The design and development phases (including a few revisions) of the TEFL Online pilot were completed by the first week in August 2007. Participants were able to log into the project site by 10 August 2007.

The course lasted four weeks and allowed participants to participate asynchronously. During the pilot, participants could contact the e-facilitator for any TEFL enquiries and the technical coordinator for any technical or website enquiries. I initiated the e-learning with e-mail announcements to participants to inform them of their acceptance, and the official opening of the TEFL Online site. Participants were provided with a folder in the Drop Box page which enabled them to submit electronic tasks. Over four weeks participants logged onto the site, downloaded the study units and participated in the Discussion Forum and Blogger pages asynchronously. Participation varied from participant to participant.

The WebPages were revised during the implementation phase. The first active participant to participate in the discussion forum created his own discussion forum that was separate from the ones listed on the page yet related to the same activities. Therefore, I sent reminders of how to access and answer the activities in the discussion forum with an example of my own. I added my own contributions to the first few discussion activities prompted by the first participant's eagerness. After this example, I soon realised that ongoing revisions were part and parcel of online learning and teaching courses.

Facilitating the e-learning process is not my area of expertise. Therefore I employed a trial and error approach while keeping an e-facilitator's journal of my online duties. For example, I would log onto the site twice daily, in the morning and in the late afternoon and note the duties I performed. These may be sending out announcements, responding to participants' enquiries or monitoring and offering comments in the Discussion Forum.

I experienced a sense of anxiety[27] at the onset and wrapping up of the online pilot. Initially, participants were reluctant to contribute to the Discussion Forum. This prompted me to contact the participants via e-mail. I also added an 'introduction' forum to the Discussion Forum page which was a short biography of myself and asked the participants to do the same. The personal e-mails and introduction successfully prompted most of the participants into action. They participated in the 'introduction' forum and the other discussion topics. I also discovered through initial facilitation that two of the participants were unable to continue with the pilot beyond logging on only twice because they experienced difficulties with Internet connections. Towards the end, even though participation in the discussions was rife, the summative tasks proved to be less popular. Not all the participants submitted their tasks. Again I sent out e-mails via the online announcement system to little avail. Only four participants in submitted their tasks, one of whom submitted only one task. Factors that may have contributed to the uneven participation are discussed in Chapter 4.

On conclusion of the pilot the participants completed an evaluation questionnaire in which they described their experience of the TEFL Online pilot. The information collected from the questionnaires is discussed in Chapter 4.

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[27] This reaction is similar to the participants' reaction during the pilot.

Chapter 4: Evaluating TEFL Online

4.1 The Evaluation Phase of TEFL Online

The fourth phase in design-based research is the evaluation phase. Findings are drawn from a variety of evaluation methods including surveys, case studies, interviews, comparative analysis, expert reviews, and reflections from the designers and researchers (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). In most cases, where a new design artefact is involved, retrospective analysis and formative evaluation are employed. In this study the TEFL Online pilot was evaluated and analysed at the formative and summative stages.

Data in the evaluation phase was collected from a triangulation of research instruments, namely an investigation of approaches for TEFL Online, questionnaires[28] and interviews[29] with participants, responses from external observers and reflections from the researcher and designer of the pilot. The data collected was examined for qualitative purposes to highlight the participants' perspectives, the external observers' views, and to examine the researcher's reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of TEFL Online. The findings emerging from the data focus on answering the main research questions concerning the development of self-reflective language practitioners in an online environment and the constraints arising when implementing an online TEFL through an LMS.

Two external observers reviewed the TEFL Online pilot, one prior to the implementation and one on completion of the pilot. The first, an experienced TEFL

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[28] See example of the questionnaire in Appendix 2.

[29] Interviews followed the questions in the questionnaires and participants were asked to expand if the answers were vague.

teacher trainer, reviewed the content of the pilot, and then navigated through the project site as a 'trial student'. The second external observer, with experience in online learning and learning development, reviewed the website at a summative stage. Their comments are similar with only marginal differences.

These reviews were added to my reflections as designer, researcher and online facilitator of the pilot. In most design-based research, researchers assume the dual function of being both designers and researchers in order to reflect on and implement interventions that advance the pragmatic and theoretical aims of the artefact. In this way, design, research and practice are intrinsically linked (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). Consequently, my reflections constitute a critical meta-discourse, which mirror the processes of self-reflexivity desired from TEFL trainees, and which are arguably intrinsic to the nature and function of best-practice, online course-design.

4.2   Evaluating the Design Guidelines

I used the constructivist design guidelines proposed in Chapter 2 as evaluative criteria for TEFL Online. Overall, these guidelines were not fully realised in the pilot even though attempts were made to emulate them in design and implementation. The following section critically discusses the successes and failings of the design of TEFL Online.

4.2.1   Outcomes

The responses from the external observers and participants indicated that the desired outcomes of the TEFL pilot were realistic and achievable for a short introductory course. The outcome of the pilot was to familiarise participants with concepts in TEFL by encouraging them to consider and to reflect on foreign language learning and teaching.

As the statements below show, participants agreed that the pilot had alerted them to ideas and viewpoints in the field of learning and teaching language:

Participant 1: *It was an interesting way to introduce participants to the basic principles or concepts in English language teaching.*[30]

Participant 2: *I found the alignment of outcomes, activities and assessment effective – that is all one needs for successful learning.*

Participant 3: *Due to the nature and the length of the course it was not possible to go into great depth. However, I felt what was covered was excellent for an introductory course such as this one.*

Participant 4: *Even though I didn't have the time to finish all the tasks, from the materials, the tasks and the discussions I discovered more about language teaching and learning. I had little idea of this field before TEFL Online.*

Participant 5: *The materials and tasks were very effective in introducing basic concepts in language learning and teaching.*

Participant 6: *As I worked through the materials, the activities and discussions, I began to think about the various aspects of language learning. It's not as straightforward as I thought it would be.*

Participant 7: *TEFL Online provides students with knowledge and skills that can serve as a foundation for further studies in language teaching.*

It appears that all participants were alerted to ideas in language learning and teaching. For most, the pilot was an introduction to basic concepts, rather than a complete programme. Nevertheless, the pilot provoked thought — *I began to think*

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[30] The names of the participants are omitted and their comments are in italics throughout Chapter 3 and 4.

about the various aspects of language learning — and discovery — *I had little idea of this field before TEFL Online.* Crucially, several other factors are mentioned such as time, activities and discussions. Moreover, the comment — *It's not as straightforward as I thought it would be* — indicates the extent to which the participants were challenged.

However, without specific and reliable assessment criteria, it is impossible to determine to which extent the pilot's outcomes were achieved. If the outcome is familiarisation with language learning and teaching through reflection, then we cannot rely solely on the submission of written or oral tasks as an end product as this would be tantamount to endorsing objectivist or behaviouristic means of assessment. Summative tasks do not test the development of critical reflection skills as the finished product is not always a means to an end. Rather, assessment that is informed by the constructivist principles needs to focus on the processes through which the outcomes were met (Gold, 2001; Hamilton et al 2004). While this may be easier within a contact situation where all participants' contributions can be assessed continuously, in the online pilot I had to rely on evidence which emerged from the discussion forums. This evidence is inherently limited because it is primarily written and does not arise from face-to-face discursive, dialogic interactions in real time.

Notwithstanding this constraint, evidence of reflection is apparent in the participants' contributions in online discussions. For example, in the discussion task from unit 1, participants began to examine their existing knowledge and assumptions on language learning. Figure 4.1 illustrates the discussion question I posted relating to the study unit on first language acquisition. While reviewing the participants' contributions to the discussions, I had to reflect on my own motivations and intentions in framing the learning experience. The idea was to encourage participants to discuss their thoughts about, and experiences of, children learning their first language. I deliberately posted a personalised situation of a baby learning language from her parents. My reasons were twofold: to ease participants into a contextualised online discussion (I knew that they had never tried discussion forums before), and to engage participants. The latter is a conventional technique in EFL learning and TEFL. Trainers

set up real-life situations to encourage trainee interaction[31]. In the situation, I included aspects of language learning such as the role of mother:

> *At the first sign of Hannah's baby talk, her mum repeatedly said the word 'Mum' to Hannah while pointing to herself, Whenever Hannah reached out for the book, her mum would utter, 'You want your book? This is your book. Hannah say book', with emphasis on the word book.*

I mentioned the role of repetition and reinforcement:

> *Her mum repeatedly said the word 'Mum' to Hannah while pointing to herself, her mum would utter, 'You want your book? This is your book. Hannah say book', with emphasis on the word book.*

I also included the father's ignorance of language learning through his absence or rather his inactive role:

> *Hannah's dad is quite dismayed that Hannah hasn't yet uttered the word 'Daddy'. Every time, Hannah says 'Mama', he moans; 'Hannah Daddy is here too?'*

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[31] This technique of using real-life situations in learning and teaching falls under the Communicative approach where language learning is always contextualised. Richards and Rodgers (1992) provides a detailed explanation of this approach.

Fig. 4.1: Discussion task from Unit 1: Activity 1.3

E-facilitator	My 10 month-old niece, Hannah's first words were 'Mama' and 'book'. At the first sign of Hannah's baby talk, her mum repeatedly said the word 'Mum' to Hannah while pointing to herself. After a few weeks Hannah said her second word – 'book'. When Hannah received her first baby book, she bit straight into it like all babies do when faced with something new and colourful. Whenever Hannah reached out for the book, her mum would utter, 'You want your book? This is your book. Hannah say book', with emphasis on the word book. Hannah's dad is quite dismayed that Hannah hasn't yet uttered the word 'Daddy'. Every time, Hannah says 'Mama', he moans; 'Hannah Daddy is here too?'
	1. Why do you think Hannah's first words were 'Mama' and 'book' and not 'Daddy'?
	2. How do children learn the meanings of new words?

Participants responded to the discussion question with important factors in language learning (Figure 4.2) derived from their knowledge and experience. The first participant mentioned the role of repetition, reinforcement and association in language learning:

I think the key word is repetition.... Hannah heard the word repeatedly and then made an association between that word and her mother. Perhaps the more Hannah used the words, the more she understood their meaning because she was receiving reinforcement from her mother.

The second participant reiterated the initial responses and expanded with the role of the mother and the child's ability to imitate language utterances:

I agree with P1! It is definitely because of repetition and reinforcement. P1 mentioned the mother's 'conscious effort' to teach her baby.... .They are good at imitating.

In addition, she discussed the influential role of exposure in language acquisition: *but I think children will 'acquire' their first language if they are exposed to it - even if no conscious effort to teach it to them is involved.*

While both participants agreed that children learn words through associating them with concrete objects, participant two questioned the learning of abstract terms such as conjunctions and adverbs which cannot be associated with something concrete;

I also agree with P1's suggestion of association between a word and an object. But what about words such as 'and', 'now', 'or' etc. There surely are more questions than answers!"

Fig. 4.2: Responses from participants to discussion task from Unit 1.

Participant 1	I think the key word is repetition. Hannah's mother made a conscious effort to teach her the word 'mum'. So Hannah heard the word repeatedly and then made an association between that word and her mother. Perhaps the more Hannah used the words, the more she understood their meaning because she was receiving reinforcement from her mother.
Participant 2	I agree with P1! It is definitely because of repetition and reinforcement. P1 mentioned the mother's "conscious effort" to teach her baby, but I think children will "acquire" their first language if they are exposed to it - even if no conscious effort to teach it to them is involved. Am I right? I think the meaning of new words are learnt in a very concrete way - by letting children do certain things (e.g. 'give the toy to me') or by giving instructions (e.g. 'smile!', 'eat your porridge!', 'drink your milk!'). They are good at imitating. I also agree with P1's suggestion of association between a word and an object. But what about words such as 'and', 'now', 'or' etc. There surely are more questions than answers!

In the ensuing responses, participants continued a similar thread of discussion. Participant three mentioned the notion of an innate language ability which assists children in learning abstract concepts — ... *perhaps they have an innate language ability as well which could explain children's ability to use conjunctions, pronouns and prepositions correctly.* Participant four expanded on the innate language ability with supporting evidence and an example:

According to psychiatrists, children up to the age of thirteen have an excellent ability to learn a language, be it first, second or later language. Thus, I say, an English child brought up by a Chinese family would have

*no difficulty in learning Chinese, provided that he/she is still young
enough.*

She also added other interesting contributions to language learning:

> *... stimulation is needed to make it exciting for the child to learn how to
> communicate.... Environment plays a great part as well. All one's senses
> (perhaps excluding the 6th) play a valuable part in language learning.*

Similarly, other responses expanded on previous participants' contributions, and
added further questions. I, as the e-facilitator, contributed to their responses by
affirming appropriate responses and then providing leading questions to direct their
discussion towards more factors in language learning. At this stage, it was not
necessary to direct participants to various theories of language learning because their
own observations concurred with contemporary research.[32]

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[32] Chomsky claims that children are born with an innate language ability. Children are able to produce
grammatically accurate structures without being taught the complexities of syntax, word order,
prepositions, conjunctions etc. In Applied Linguistics, Skinner claims that children learn languages when
exposed to it. The combination of these two views has led to the 'Critical Hypothesis Period' theory. It
proposes that children can easily learn any language with all its complexities between the age of 0-13
years through stimuli and their innate ability. If language input occurs only after that period, the child
will never achieve a full command of the language. See Chomsky's views on language learning in
*Language and Responsibility, (*1979), and *Language and learning: The Debate between Jean Piaget and
Noam Chomsky,* (Piattelli-Palmarini, Massimo, ed.1980), and Skinner's views in *Verbal Behavior,* 1957.

Fig. 4.3: Further responses from participants to discussion task from Unit 1.

Participant 3   I agree that children will acquire their first language if they are exposed to it. But perhaps they have an innate language ability as well which could explain children's ability to use conjunctions, pronouns and prepositions correctly.

Participant 4   Sorry for logging now, our server was down yesterday. In any event, while I agree with my fellow learners that learning a language is mostly about repetition, association and reinforcement through conscious effort, one perhaps needs to consider that other factors also play a role in language learning. Firstly, stimulation is needed to make it exciting for the child to learn how to communicate (that is what language is about – to successfully communicate and interact) and through communication to discover new things. Examples, persons, pictures, objects etc. Environment plays a great part as well. All one's senses (perhaps excluding the 6th) play a valuable part in language learning. (Even though hearing-restricted children can still learn a language, they are at a clear disadvantage against the ability to hearing-children) Children do not need to be taught language, provided they are surrounded by it and talked (communicated) to. Age and experience also play a great role. According to psychiatrists, children up to the age of thirteen have an excellent ability to learn a language, be it first, second or later language. Thus, I say, an English child brought up by a Chinese family would have no difficulty in learning Chinese, provided that he/she is still young enough. It is with us adults where the problem lies.

It is quite clear that participants contributed opinions, drawn from personal experience, on how infants learn their first language. The responses show an attempt to reflect on children learning languages. Interestingly, although the 'real-life' situation was carefully designed, there was, no explanation of significant factors that contribute to language learning in the study unit. In the discussion, participants deduced influential language learning factors by elaborating on each other's responses. Arguably, these discussions display the beginnings of reflection through interaction with content, fellow participants and the tutor.

However, reflection needs to be situated in practical outcomes. True and successful reflection materialises into appropriately altered action. This means using the knowledge gained in discussions about language learning to plan and later effect

language teaching practice. According to Ur's model, active experimentation evolves out of reflection. In this pilot, participants have only begun stage 1 of Ur's enriched reflection model. In an extended pilot or a full TEFL Online other stages would be included.

Certain study units and tasks explore aspects of language teaching. Participants were encouraged to consider the effect of language learning on teaching. They did this by comparing, examining and later discussing three EFL lesson plans in the Discussion Forum and by discussing a case study involving the teaching techniques of two EFL teachers in the Blogger page[33]. Since discussions were not founded or informed by actual EFL teaching practice, they tend to be superficial. To grapple with the teaching of a foreign language, the trainees not only need to consider the language learning process, but they also need to experiment with teaching environments that will foster language learning. An introductory pilot such as TEFL Online scratches the surface of ELT pedagogy in theory and practice. In Chapter 5, I consider ways in which an online TEFL course could offer opportunities for TEFL teacher trainees to put their ideas and reflections into practice.

4.2.2 *Participation in TEFL Online*

Learner motivation was considered in the design of TEFL Online. But, based on the completion rate it seems that participants were not fully involved. Although participants appreciated the asynchronous learning aspect of online learning which granted them the ability to learn — *in their (your) own time and at their (your) own pace* — they displayed varying degrees of commitment. Only four participants submitted the required tasks. In retrospect, higher levels of completion might be achieved in a course for which participants register and pay, rather than volunteer.

Moreover, time management was clearly a problem. Participants suggested that:

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[33] See EFL lessons in Blogger page in Figure 3.12 and on CD.

Online learning has unique demands on the student – time-management ... and the ability to explore independently, and: *A course like this requires discipline on the side of the student because there is no one else to urge them on. However, visiting the website does increase the feeling of being supported.*

Another who did not complete the tasks said:

I only managed to complete some of the tasks because I did not realise beforehand how demanding an online course would be. There is no time for procrastination. If a group discussion is going on, you will have to participate immediately – you can't leave it for later – when you have more time. I haven't studied for a long time and found it very hard to get into the 'study mode' again. The fact that there is no examination at the end of the course made me a bit relaxed. If there were an exam, I wouldn't have taken it so casually.

While yet another confessed that:

Being a part-time student and having a full-time job made it difficult when I had to work late. I didn't always have time for everything as I had to work on Saturdays as well. Time was the only true predicament.

Clearly, self-management was a problem. The low level of completion also suggests that the design may need attention. More personalisation and creativity may improve participation especially since participants responded well to the personalised features of the pilot. In future manifestations the possibilities for personalisation of trainers and trainees could be expanded. In addition, the course designers will have to consider how, appropriate (proactive) facilitation could maintain motivation.

The problem of varied learner commitment is not exclusive to TEFL Online. Inordinately high drop-out rates are a universal concern in online learning. Research, by Engvig (2006), Duncan (2005), and Heydenrych and Louw[35] (2006), indicates that lack of continued participant commitment afflicts most innovative online courses. Since continued involvement of e-participants and e-facilitators is necessary for the success of any online course, more needs to done to find design and pedagogical elements that improve and maintain commitment.

Engvig (2006:51) suggests that constant evaluation and revision is crucial to improving on learner participation. Additionally, an online pre-screening test[36] at the outset may assist in sifting committed online participants from browsers. An example of this would be a simple questionnaire that potential participants complete online to determine whether the course is suitable for them. However, these interventions may not be adequate. The general perception of online learning should be investigated. Responses from participants show that they approached the course *casually* and did not expect the *demanding* workload. If this is the general perception, then online learning will be plagued with participation and commitment problems until attitudes to it are changed by design or experience.

Online courses are often seen as a 'fast track' method to delivery, whereas more correctly may last longer than traditional contact courses and involve greater input. Cavanaugh (2005) reports that online courses involve more planning time than contact taught courses since they require time for research, design, development, and facilitation time for individual attention to each participant[37] during the course. Online courses also need to factor in extra time for first-time online learners, who may have to

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[35] Macleod, in Heydenrych and Louw, notes that e-learning ventures at Oxford University, (New York Online, Virtual Temple and the University of Maryland University College Online), failed to attract sufficient learners and as a consequence, bowed out of the online delivery of courses.

[36] See an example of a placement test for online courses at Hudson Valley Community College at https://www.hvcc.edu/dl/dlquiz.htm

[37] In Cavanaugh's case study on time comparisons in teaching online, he discovered that teaching online involved as much as three times more time than contact courses due to much needed individual attention for online participants.

learning before they can proceed. Participants who experience technical problems will also need time to catch up.

4.2.3 *Interaction and Collaboration*

The external observers rated the tasks in TEFL Online as authentic and true to the experiential learning nature of language teacher training. Attempts were made to interweave real-life, authentic tasks which require participants to investigate language learning and discuss their findings afterwards. For example, Tasks 1 and 2 involved practical research (interviewing a foreign language speaker and learning a foreign language respectively), both of which promote social constructivist, problem-solving thinking.

Similar tasks are provided in contact TEFL courses, but because of the contact nature, they are easier to administer. Trainees are exposed to foreign language learners in their TP component and so can investigate characteristics of foreign language learning through interaction with learners. This aspect is not as convenient for online trainees since they have to depend on their own resources. In TEFL Online I asked participants to locate foreign language speakers and interview them. Online course design has to re-configure effective methods of involving trainees in tasks that promote similar outcomes to those obtained through contact tuition.

Participants, too, appreciated the practical nature of the tasks. They claimed that the:

> *... pilot addressed both the theoretical needs as well as the practical needs of students. We now not only understand e.g. the problem of learning a new language, we can do something useful with that knowledge in a real-world context.... The developers of the course ensured thus that learning was not narrow, behaviouristic and devoid of critical thought.*

Participants agreed with the practical, non-behaviouristic approach of the materials and tasks in the pilot:

What I liked about the materials is that they really made me think about things. The task in which I had to ask someone to teach me a few words in a foreign language made me realise how difficult it is to learn a language.... (the materials) forced us to use application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills as well.

Even though the tasks were true to constructivist learning, I must concede that more could have been done in terms of collaborative learning. The Wiki page[37], which had the potential of involving participants in collaborative essays and research, was under construction and therefore unavailable. The inclusion of this form of collaboration may have augmented the 'community of learning' necessary in social constructivist online learning and could have sustained the participant's commitment. New online tools that promote collaboration and interaction over and above a surface engagement are needed in the online design of courses if true engagement is an essential step in the learning process.

The tasks employed in TEFL Online fostered the beginnings of experiential learning in participants. For a true enriched reflection cycle of learning in TEFL, trainees need to apply findings from their investigations to real-life EFL classes and to learn through watching a critiquing each other in training situations. In Chapter 5, I will suggest ways in which authentic class-based tasks can be included in a comprehensive TEFL course.

4.2.4 Facilitated Learning

Facilitation and feedback from the e-facilitator is essential in online learning. Participants and observers remarked positively about the support and comments from the e-facilitator:

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[37] A wiki is software that allows users to easily create, edit, and link pages together. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. These wiki websites are often also referred to as *wikis*; for example, Wikipedia is one of the best-known wikis.

I really appreciated the feedback I received throughout and ... received
great support from the instructor, (who was) always available to answer
questions even on the phone and send updates.

The external observers agreed that the feedback provided to participants was fitting for online learning. They thought that the tone and the use of a different colour was an appropriate design feature since it distinguished the e-facilitator's input from that of the participants'.

I utilised deliberate feedback techniques in facilitation. In the discussions, I commented generally after a few participants' responses and used leading questions to encourage further investigation. When I reviewed the submitted tasks, I commented on specific points and then generally[38] (Figure 4.3). The technique of 'not telling the participants what to do or say' but instead, leading them to the answers is termed scaffolding. This type of teacher supervision is supported by Randall and Thornton[39]. They claim that the role of the advisor is to assist trainees in 'seeing the pattern and then to interpret the pattern in a principled way' (2001:51). According to this, my typical response to Task 2 (Figure 4.4) may not be sufficient.

Fig: 4.4: Feedback to Task 2.

e-Facilitator: Feedback to Task 2:

Well done. Your essay displayed valuable research into the field of language acquisition and learning. You highlighted some principal differences and similarities between the two aspects. Read the comments in the margin and the feedback below for more ideas.

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[38] One of the submitted tasks is included as Appendix 4.
[39] Mick Randall and Barbara Thornton's view of supervision in teacher training is informed by Wallace's reflective practice cycle of learning and teaching.

Young (2006), for instance, indicates that the role of the e-facilitator is vitally important in the success of online learning. She stresses that this is not just a simple practice of monitoring and providing feedback. Instead, Young claims that:

> An e-facilitator must be effectively and actively involved in every activity, communicate well, offer flexibility, provide meaningful and practical connections between theory and practice, and is committed to doing what is necessary to make an online course effective. This includes communicating with the students in a consistent, thoughtful and personal way (2006:74-75).

Duncan (2005) concurs with Young's view that the e-facilitator needs to be constant and vigilant in managing online courses. She maintains that the main drawback of asynchronous learning is the assumption that it may be easier to overlook some participant's questions and comments or not provide immediate feedback because the class is not in real-time. This assumption leads to a build-up of frustration on the participant's part and may even provoke de-motivation. She claims that 'although an issue may be buried, if it is unresolved it remains an issue' in asynchronous learning (2005:890).

Personal feedback to every participant for every discussion and task requires specialised skills in addition to being time-consuming. Moreover, online feedback may have to be structured more innovatively than the generic-type comment in Figure 4.4. Indeed, online facilitation may require us to rethink the ways in which we respond to and evaluate student work. Within an online environment, the value of unspecific comments is questionable. Further, electronic text communication (which emulates the marking of a printed answer or essay) does not allow the facilitator to convey subtleties and nuances through shifts in intonation and expression or to encourage deeper examination by the trainee. By contrast, responses that are captured by audio and video may, literally and figuratively, talk directly to the issue. Thus while it may seem that the facilitation of the pilot was relatively easy for one person to undertake as there were only ten participants, bigger groups and more apposite commentary will require additional time and effort. This needs to be catered for in the design of the course. E-facilitators must understand constructivist theory and online learning strategies to

formulate suitable feedback, that is, to know how and when to facilitate successful constructivist online learning.

4.2.5   Technical Issues

Several technical issues became apparent during the design, development and implementation of TEFL Online. Primarily, there were limitations to TEFL Online as a result of the fundamental design features of the LMS. These constraints include limited access, difficult tools, the lack of collaborative activities and multi-media, where the latter is due to limitations on the bandwidth.

A high proportion of the criticisms of TEFL Online centre on the LMS. These include unattractive layout, difficult tools, poor navigation, poorly threaded discussions, lack of collaborative tasks, and an inability to host web-based materials. Unfortunately, little can be done to an existing LMS, unless the entire design is reconsidered. Alternative Learning Management Systems such as Moodle and ACollab[40] could be investigated. I would argue, though, that the solution does not lie in replacing one LMS with another. Instead, universities intending to embark on online learning may have to interrogate the suitability of all their systems in terms of pedagogy, feasibility, accessibility and cost. From this perspective, the software and design capabilities of learning websites — to cater for multiple sophisticated functions that engage participants and host a constructivist mode of learning and teaching — merely poses technological and economic challenges. Reconfiguring institutional attitudes and behaviours is far more daunting.

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[40] Moodle is a popular LMS for online courses for teachers and ACollab is a LMS that hosts various collaborative tasks. See www.e-learningcentre.co.uk for more information on both LMS's.

4.3 Key findings

The following section examines the responses to the research questions of this study.

4.3.1 *How can we effectively train reflective language practitioners through online learning and teaching?*

The TEFL Online pilot was designed and implemented as an attempt to respond to the need to increase access to language teacher training by using online methodologies. Learning and teacher-training pedagogy indicates that TEFL courses should aim to produce reflective teacher trainees (Wallace, 2001; Ur, 2004). While attempts towards designing a pilot that would foster self-reflective trainees were made, on the whole, reflection amongst participants was difficult to measure given the scope of the pilot.

A major limitation of this study was the sample population and size. Including and observing a wider demographic of participants in an online TEFL course is essential to determine the efficacy of this method as a delivery and learning mechanism. At the same time, there are limitations to the number of participants a facilitator can effectively support in a constructivist framework (Gold, 2001:54; Duncan, 2005; Engvig, 2006 and Little et al 2005:360).

The results of this research study are inconclusive since only a segment of a TEFL course was designed for online learning and teaching. An introductory pilot that does not include teaching practice cannot effectively bring about behavioural changes to the long-term practices of trainee teachers. Teachers need to put into practise what they have explored in theory. This translates to experimenting with theoretical concepts in teaching practice and developing concrete evidence out of retrospective reflection. In this way, language teacher trainees are able to apply Ur's (2004) enriched reflection cycle of learning.

4.3.2 What constraints emerge when implementing an online TEFL course through a Learning Management System?

Utilising a LMS for the delivery of online courses has advantages and disadvantages. Issues such as difficult navigation, poor format in discussion forums, difficult website tools, lack of online interactive, collaborative activities and web-based materials are technical and pedagogical consequences of a limited LMS. While the former three constraints can be improved upon through technical adaptations, the last two affect the foundational design of the LMS and this may be beyond the control of a single course, far less a pilot. The design features are decided on and controlled by an ICT team influenced by the needs of the university. Ultimately, updating and adapting the LMS is only part of the solution. Failing that, hosting TEFL Online through a separate, suitable website may prove to be the answer. While the latter may seem a likely solution, a new website will have cost and design implications.

At the same time it is important to stress that a comprehensive unified LMS may not be a panacea for all online learning and teaching, especially ODL courses. In UNISA's case, myUnisa is an intervention that connects courses and learners, not learners and learners or learners and tutors, effectively. Its main strength lies in the delivery of UNISA's electronic distance courses. In this way, it does not uphold ODL ideals which focus on the learner and as a result, is unsuitable for TEFL in general. Successfully delivering an interrogative, exploratory TEFL at UNISA is not simply a matter of tinkering with the LMS. Rather, an institutional shift to best practice ODL is crucial.

To take this argument one step further, we need to realise that a 'one size fits all' LMS is not a suitable solution to the requirements of TEFL simply because education moulded to technology is intrinsically weaker than technology that is designed for specific educative purposes. Research from Samarawickrema and Stacey (2007) in using an LMS at Monash University in Australia, by way of illustration, suggests that an adoption of a single, unified LMS is strongly motivated by top-down, authority directives, economic and political imperatives. It is not always motivated by using technology to enhance learning and teaching. Therefore, changing the LMS will only

solve superficial problems, when the real challenge is to align university practices with contemporary ODL principles.

If we are to create and administer an online TEFL course informed by constructivist principles, then we need to create an online platform that not only supports this kind of thinking, but is supported by the institute administering it. The solution does not lie in creating a course that bends to a pre-dominantly behaviouristic style of thinking and working. There needs to be a fundamental shift in the learning and teaching model. This necessitates a new vision of the relationship between the tutor and the learner with change in focus from bureaucratic and academic convenience to serving learners in a flexible, individualised, contextualised, proactive and supportive way.

Chapter 5: Blue-sky Thinking for TEFL Online

"Clone sheep not Internet courses."[41]

5.1. Conclusions from TEFL Online

The design-based research for this pilot has several theoretical and practical applications. The challenges which mark the design, development and evaluation phases are thought-provoking and provide insights into both TEFL and ODL. In the specific instance of UNISA, the misalignment or gap between the LMS and best practice ODL is apparent. Not only is myUnisa an inadequate medium for ODL, but it could be argued that the tuition and administrative systems of the University as a whole fail to meet the requirements of a meaningful, relevant, interactive, scaffolded, efficient learning environment.

Reconceptualising UNISA is not the task of the dissertation. Similarly, a more-detailed longitudinal study of TEFL Online in order to accumulate valid, reliable and in-depth quantitative and qualitative results would have to precede further implementation. This would entail developing an online course that includes the theoretical and practical components of TEFL, implementing it several times over a longer period, and testing it on measurable focus groups of participants.

This study claims that constructivist theory is an appropriate point of departure for online teacher training courses (and for best practice ODL). Many researchers (Gold,

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[41] This slogan is taken from a picket line where the faculty of York University in Toronto carried signs that read: "Televisions don't teach, people do" and "Clone sheep, not Internet courses". The strike which lasted 55 days was reported in Jeffrey R. Young, "Canadian University Promises IT Won't Require Professors to Use Technology," *CHE*, 3 October, 1997:A3. Fuchs (1998:191) introduces his article on *The Promise and Challenge of New Technologies in Higher Education* with this story.

2001; Gulati, 2004; De Villiers, 2007; Jonassen et al 1999; Hamilton et al 2004; Windschitl, 2002; Bailey, 2006; Brookfield, 1995; Williams & Burden, 1997, and Ur, 2004) assert, and the TEFL Online pilot shows, that a successful constructivist online course promotes the construction of knowledge and skills through interactions with peers, tutors and content. Participants integrate 'received knowledge' with 'existing knowledge' through discussions with peers and tutors, experimentation, investigation, and reflection. In this respect, the foundation on which the design is based is crucial to successful online learning.

Everything in the online TEFL course must serve the educational approach including the online platform. From this study it is obvious that myUnisa is based on second generation distance learning and is not designed according to constructivist principles. Learning Management Systems such as myUnisa augment traditional approaches of distance courses without fundamentally changing the way distance education is delivered to their learners (Heydenrych & Louw, 2006:19; Peters, 1998). The platform immediately limits and compromises any implementation of constructivist instructional design. The fact that other LMSs have far more advanced capabilities suggests that they may be a route towards better praxis[42]. The common denominator amongst these LMSs is that they host a greater bandwidth than myUnisa and offer more potential for collaborative learning by hosting videos, chats and synchronous classes; all of which are appealing and necessary for TEFL Online.

Nevertheless, I have claimed that the solution does not lie in simply replacing myUnisa with another LMS. Instead, it lies in adopting educational and administrative practices that promote the core values of both ODL and TEFL. In the context of UNISA, these would entail a fundamental re-visioning and restructuring of the

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[42] See several examples of Learning Management Systems on the e-learning Centre Homepage: http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/vendors/campusportals.htm. AlefMentor offers a flexible platform for instructors, administrators, learners and consumers who wish to create, update, and select courses. Similarly, more than 3,300 leading colleges, universities and K-12 schools around the world use Blackboard's software for online teaching and learning (see http://www.blackboard.com). Other examples are ClassCampus, CyberExtension and iTunes.

organisation's business and tuition models. More crucially, a major shift would have to occur in the mindsets of learners and faculty as new roles and responsibilities would necessarily accompany institutional, educational and technological realignment. A blue-sky scenario for TEFL online is, then, not merely a research exercise, but also an important indicator of the steps which will have to be taken if UNISA is to remain globally competitive as a credible and effective ODL university.

5.1.1   A Paradigm Shift towards ODL

ODL involves a paradigm shift from the traditional mode of learning and teaching by emphasising the role of the learner in effective learning (Trindade et al 2000; Snell et al 1987; Evans & Nations, 1989 and Evans, 1994). Traditional pedagogy positions the educator at the helm of learning, steering the ship of knowledge to the learner. The learner is seen as an empty 'reservoir' to be filled by the educator's knowledge and experience. Educators and course developers, to some extent, work in the dark, developing products for learners they do not know and with whom they will probably never interact. As a consequence, one-dimensional courses are developed to suit *all* contexts and *all* learners. These culminate in a printed teaching package, that is delivered by mail or, in some cases, over the Internet. In this way, distance universities are no different to rigid industrialised organisations where the mass production of structured, traditional courses, according to the economies of the assembly line, is paramount. As a result, learners are objectified (Annand, 2007). Quality is sacrificed for quantity.

Within the university-as-industry model, educators are at the top of the hierarchy, creating content that filters down to learners at the bottom (Figure 5.1). The power imbalance is apparent and the distance created is a necessary divide to maintain academic and disciplinary authority. This power dynamic is ironic given that learners outnumber educators and courses. It is learners who necessitate existence of education. Rather that being treated as 'the other' their presence needs to be fully integrated into all aspects of educational processes and institutions.

Fig: 5.1: The hierarchy of tutors and learners in traditional distance education.
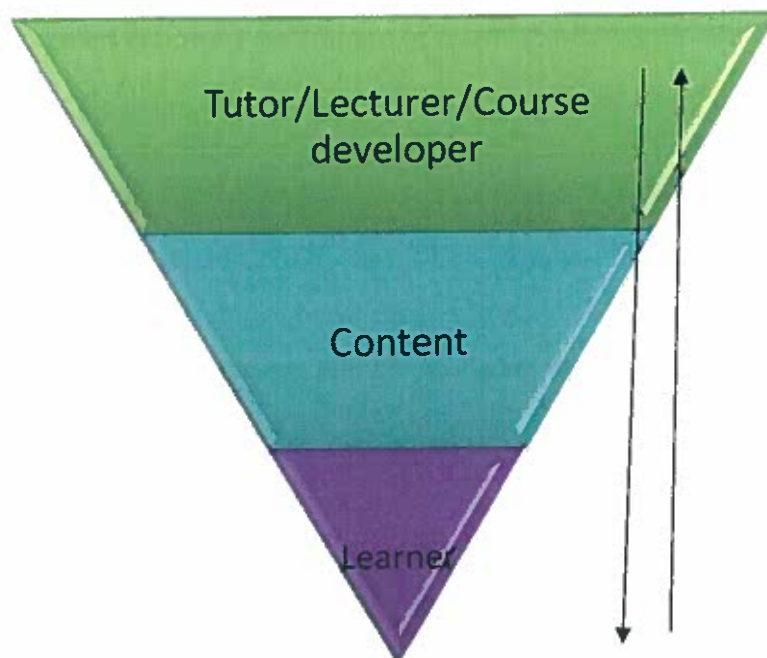
Empowerment, not disempowerment, is a central tenet in education. In any given ODL course, learners should feel that they are able to participate in the creation of knowledge and new skills in order to benefit themselves and society. In true ODL, the relationship between educator, learner and course is interdependent and not mutually exclusive (Trindade et al 2000, Snell et al 1987). Learners, their preferences, and their contexts influence and educate course developers and, as a consequence, the course. This paradigm shift from traditional distance education bears implications. The focus should not be on the 'printed teaching package' at the cost of the learner's needs. That is, learners should be able to make decisions about course content and scope, schedules, resources and delivery (Evans & Nation, 1989, Hodgson et al 1987). Appropriate and continuous learner support is of paramount importance in administrative and tutorial matters such as a proactive intelligent learner management system, 24/7 tutor and peer support, and a resource-rich interactive media. Ongoing research into the learner market segues to up-dated, contextualised course material, and a more accessible learning structure. If these essential practices determine ODL, then the distance between learner and tutor is not merely geographically diminished, but it is in fact overcome.

Best practice ODL has the same characteristics as constructivist TEFL teacher training. TEFL courses endorse a continuum of learning where trainees and trainers are equally important. In ODL, too, tutors, course and learners are part of a cycle of learning and teaching. As Figure 5.2 shows, in 21st century ODL the notion of a pedagogy where tutors are the only ones capable and able to complete learners or to fill the 'empty vessels' is subverted. ODL and TEFL course that continuously adapt to cater for the needs of individual trainees/learners from different cultural backgrounds cannot be achieved through top-down, knowledge-laden instruction.

Fig: 5.2: The relationship between tutors and learners in ODL.
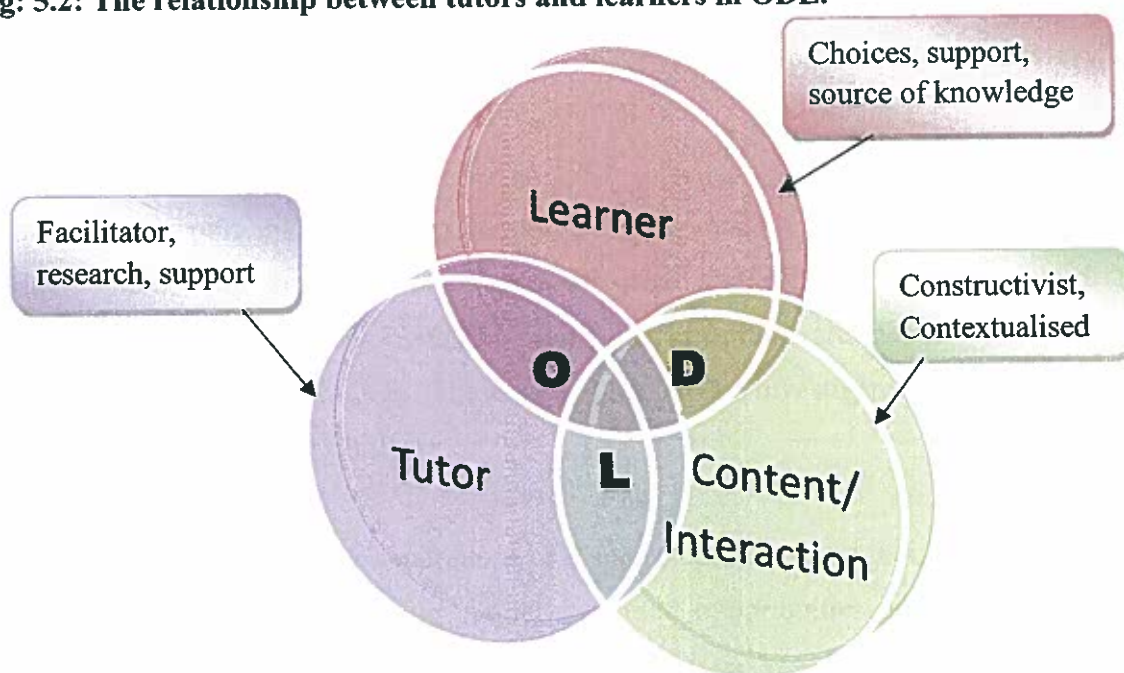
Whereas, in the past, interaction implied physical presence within the same spatial location, today dynamic, interactive processes in ODL and TEFL are supported by the capabilities of the World Wide Web with its speedy information and connection highway and other communicative advances. Digital communication offers creative and attractive options for education that outstrips other technological advances. Nevertheless, the digital highways of cyberspace are not a quick-fix to problems driven by human nature.

5.1.2 Evolving from 2nd to 3rd Generation Distance Learning Systems and Beyond

Further research in education and technology is needed to do justice to the design of a new and evolved TEFL Online course for ODL. To realise and appreciate fully the ideals of an effective ODL TEFL, it is necessary for those involved to adapt technology to suit a new paradigm of teaching and learning. The learner lies at the heart of ODL and TEFL. Successful language learning and teaching involves adapting to accommodate the learner and their learning styles. ODL, too, focuses on the needs of the learner. The learner should be an active participant in the learning process. Every effort needs to be made to accommodate and to integrate technology for pedagogical sense and not to adopt it to satisfy authorial directives or to pursue a quick delivery system.

In ODL this principle equates to adopting creative and flexible technologies that produce interactivity and allow for more effective and efficient learner support. Ultimately, the various synchronous and asynchronous options are means of bridging the transactional distance in ODL. These modes need to be investigated for feasibility, cost implications and accessibility.

Table 5.1 illustrates further generations of distance education and their benefits. The third generation distance learning model provides opportunities for synchronous learning and learner support through video conferencing, audio-telephone conferencing and autographic communcation. The flexible learning model supports an interactive, collaborative and laterial learning process. In this model, electronic references are linked to specific URL addresses (Taylor, 2001:7). Interaction with peers, tutors and mentors is accomplished through computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as discussion groups. Fifth generation distance education expands on CMC interactions by exploiting it for tuition purposes. That is, interactions are tagged and stored in a database through automated response systems (Taylor, 2001:7). The integration of the capabilities of third and further generations of distance learning systems is imperative for best practice in TEFL Online.

Table 5.1: Third to fifth generation of distance education.

Models of Distance Education	Associated Delivery Technologies	Benefits - for ODL and TEFL
Third Generation The Telelearning Model	• Audio-teleconferencing • Video conferencing • Audiographic Communication • Broadcast TV/Radio and Audio-teleconferencing	• Synchronous learning & learner support
Fourth Generation The Flexible Learning Model	• Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer-mediated communication	• Interactivity • Additional external resources • Interactivity and learner support
Fifth Generation The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model	• Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer-mediated communication, using automated response systems • Campus portal access to institutional processes and resources	• Interactivity • Additional external resources • Interactivity and learner support • Additional resources and learner support

5.2 Blue-sky thinking for TEFL Online

One of the main impediments in distance education is the lack of support for learners due to the over-emphasis on self-guidance. Traditionally, distance education learners have limited or no contact with their tutors and peers. As a result they usually experience a sense of isolation and, in turn, a lack of motivation. Teacher trainees working in isolation when investigating new teaching concepts is not conducive to the reflective/practice interactive approach of best practice TEFL. Interpersonal reflection and discussion play a vital role in exploring various concepts and strategies that suit the complex diversity of experiences that constitute a language classroom. To counter isolation and de-motivation, sufficient and effective online tutor, peer, technical, and administrative support is fundamental, as is the case in successful ODL systems (Snell et al 1987:169-170). Learners should feel that they are valued members of online learning.

A speedy and effective LMS should include intelligent and automated management technologies that allow for instant and directed assistance. An in-built online intelligent management system is also helpful in technical, administrative and research areas. Technology has the capacity to allow online learners to access assistance immediately and asynchronously, without the mediation of a 'real' person. This assistance can take several forms. For example, online learning units and activities are easily connected to electronic dictionaries, grammar sources and checks, style and layout lists, and associated, self-correcting practice exercises ranging from the basics of vocabulary and spelling to the complexities of advanced language usage. Further, a designed web of interconnected sites can lead the learner or trainee to establishing new links to information and resources.

At the most obvious level, no learning programme should be without a resource-basket or data-bank of books, articles and readings that are available online. Online resources expand the boundaries of the classroom into virtual worlds of endless information options. E-libraries permit learners to view and download various types of information such as pamphlets, books, articles and reviews with or without sound and visuals. Trainees and trainers are exposed to a world of relevant information. It is

necessary to establish primary links between the learning material and a ladder of other resources through campus portal access to institutional processes and resources, similar to fifth generation learning systems. Such links should not constitute a closed loop, but need to allow for personal investigation and exploration, according to the needs of individual learners. Therefore, an online basket of resources that can be personalised and contextualised is essential. These resources are carefully planned and anticipated in the design phase. They are consciously placed and integrated to guide trainees appropriately. At a later stage in the online course, when trainees have developed autonomy, random diverse and additional learning can take place.[43]

Self-navigation and innumerable routes for discovery, which are inextricable from the online experience, force a rupture in the authoritarian tutor-trainee relationship. The tutor (or more correctly the e-facilitator) has to relinquish control over the sources available to and accessed by the learner. At the same time, the learner is enabled to explore a plethora of primary and secondary material no matter where it is and irrespective of his or her own location.

Bearing this in mind and considering the importance of designing-in motivation, it is necessary for formative and summative assessments to tap into learners' use and exploration of multi-dimensional matrices of assistance and support. In other words, accessing support should not be an add-on to learning, but a core component of the learning itself. Knowing how to use and using a wide variety of programmed and free-standing support resources is inescapable in the constructivist paradigm and integral to developing language teachers (and language acquisition).

Intelligent student management systems add another dimension in that they are able to track learner activity and preferences. Such tracking enables e-facilitators to keep abreast of the online learning in order to provide timely and appropriate support. It also allows the facilitator to adopt an informed, proactive role. Continual feedback, which

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[43] Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace indicate the extent to which planned content can be personalised and individualised. Similarly, the success of these sites shows how mutually supportive, interactive groups can be formed and sustained in cyberspace.

allows for adjustments of the learning programme and its components, is a precondition for ODL delivery that is not comprised of defined, pre-packaged units of knowledge that are transmitted one-dimensionally from the subject authority to the needy trainee. Through adequate learner monitoring and management, online courses can be imbued with dynamic interactivity that matches or surpasses the flexibility of the contact environment. Constant revision and adaptation is at the very core of good learning processes. Significantly, these elements are inseparable from the design, content, teaching and assessment in a constructivist online course.

A holistic TEFL Online should seamlessly connect trainees and trainers. Each party feeds into the experience of the other. In correspondence distance learning bringing them together is a logistical feat. Even contact instruction requires planning to effectively group participants in a common location at a suitable time. The information age, more than any other age, connects people at various locations, over space and time at the click of a mouse. If the learner or trainee is 'incentivised' to share his or her exploration of ideas and resources with networks of other learners, and to be the recipient of the same, constructive and self-regulatory communication flows can mediate and perpetuate the learning cycle without being constrained in time or space. Not surprisingly, an online TEFL that exploits these connective and interactive opportunities has the potential to create a rich community of learners and learning in a designed, self-reinforcing continuum of knowledge and practice.

Language learning and teaching are ongoing processes. Trainees and trainers continually seek answers about language acquisition and raise further questions in doing so. Sharing experiences and views is thus vital in ELT. Electronic media such as chat networks, bulletin boards, RSS feeds, text messaging networks, and podcasts that directly link and interlink the parties to the latest news and resources in ELT are a significant advance on linear exchanges which typify one-on-one contact.

Indeed, the creation of communities of learning is so important that I would argue that TEFL Online has to allow learners, trainers and practitioners to tap into and form part of a tutor help system. Personal development and transformative empowerment imply mutual support in the attainment of common goals. An efficient and cost-

effective method of providing support is to install a 24/7 automation tools that direct enquiries to participants who are working on similar tasks and/or employing dedicated tutors, preferably language practitioners, in various locations worldwide (Taylor, 2001:9). In TEFL this equates to experienced trainers guiding novice trainers, trainers assisting teacher trainees and practising teachers, and teacher trainees assisting language learners, through scaffolded assistance, mentorship programmes, discussion forums, communal resource banks, and counselling chat sessions. In this way, the empowerment of trainers, trainees, teachers and learners continues and is carried on, with the benefits spread across all participants in the TEFL and EFL community.

If TEFL Online is to be 'open' then it should provide trainees and trainers with opportunities to create and share learning experiences. In TEFL courses, the participants often journal their TEFL experience. Journaling is an extension of their ongoing reflection during the course, and eventually, their teaching career. Online platforms allow for the customisation of personal journals in the form of Blogs[44] for trainees and trainers. Blogs permit an inner dialogue of views and experiences. Ultimately, participants should feel at liberty to share these Blogs with their peers. TEFL Online must practice what it preaches. That is, if trainees are expected to grow from sharing experiences, then trainers, too, ought to take advantage of this opportunity.

Geographical and spatial diversity in distance education becomes a strength, by accommodating different viewpoints and experiences, by offering a wealth of delivery alternatives and information sources, and by establishing extended communities of learning. For TEFL Online, carefully and appropriately designed constructivist technological tools enable the development of a community of trainees, teachers and trainers.

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[44] Blog derives the terms web + logs. It may be used for personal web diaries and/or stories.

5.2.1 Options for Teaching Practice in TEFL Online

To enter the field of ELT as entrance level teachers, trainees need to have already considered, investigated and practised methods in language teaching. An introductory course or course-fragment, as in this study's pilot, is suitable only as a taster but does not qualify one to teach English as a foreign language. Theory on its own is of limited value without practise. Therefore, pre-service teacher trainees need to have practised teaching real (authentic) EFL learners before embarking on a language teaching career. Generally, teaching practice has implied that trainees have to attend contact-sessions offered at selected locations. Now, new technologies mean that online learning mechanisms can emulate, replace and even enhance teaching practice as an individual and group activity.

Firstly, if it is decided in the instructional design phase that the course is going to incorporate some contact tuition, then blended learning is appropriate (Hoffman, 2004:10-11)[45]. This mode combines online learning with contact sessions where TP is conducted. Mixing modes is humanly appealing, but the need for contact sessions implies geographical, logistical and financial considerations, including infrastructure, spatial and temporal proximity, venues for teaching, availability of EFL learners, accommodation, and catering, amongst others. While these factors are not necessarily inhibiting in developed contexts or where small numbers of trainees are concerned, they are highly problematic at institution like UNISA which caters for a diverse student body that is dispersed across many countries and socio-cultural and economic contexts. Indeed, while contact tuition is an important component of best practice ODL and TEFL it may not be efficient, effective or accessible given the current market and the prevailing conditions.

Secondly, synchronous online instruction is another valid mode of learning and teaching that conquers temporal and spatial distances between trainees and facilitators.

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[45] Blended learning involves a mixed-mode tuition mode of part online blended learning and part contact tuition.

In this mode, trainees and facilitator connect in real time[46] via the Internet or other communication media to conduct lessons. Examples of synchronous instruction include conference calls, instant messaging, video conferences, web conferences, and Whiteboard sessions[47]. For example, in a typical web conference, trainers and trainees connect in real-time using webcams and speakers that allow them to see and talk to each other. It is possible to conduct EFL lessons while fellow trainees observe and while they are in turn observed. Trainees can also watch a selection of recorded lessons with various levels of EFL learners that display an array of teaching techniques. Afterwards, trainer and trainees are able to discuss and to reflect on the lessons through live chats. While pre-prepared lesson examples can be distributed by DVD, trainees would have to obtain the necessary bandwidth to follow live web-casts or to participate in Internet conferencing.

Synchronous communication expands reach of TEFL provision. Moreover, webcam and High-Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) technology is becoming so common that portability is no longer an issue. Indeed, as bandwidth increases in Africa as it has elsewhere, teaching practices conducted through synchronous online communication may provide for classroom observations that are inherently richer, more authentic and diverse than their contact counterparts. Further, synchronous links benefit language learners as much as they benefit trainee teachers. The community of learning now can include classes from different locations, time zones, cultures, and language spheres: interactivity, exchange and empowerment are unquestionably enhanced.

Thirdly, another option for TP is asynchronous field teaching. Here the onus is on the trainee to organise opportunities for teaching EFL at suitable EFL schools in his/her area. Recorded lessons are then uploaded onto the TEFL Online website for observation and discussion. The latter two may be synchronous, asynchronous or a combination. As is the case with synchronous electronic communication, spatial

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[46] Real time relates to when people connect over the Internet irrespective of time and geographical differences.
[47] See www.virtual-whiteboard.co.uk/home.asp for information regarding using Whiteboards for online learning and teaching.

distances do not matter since trainees do not have to attend contact sessions in a central area. Asynchronicity introduces greater flexibility in dealing with time differentials. This option also eliminates administrative burdens of authenticating TP environments and arranging mutually agreeable times for trainees. There are, however, logistical and quality assurance considerations. For example, quality assurance mechanisms would have to be in place to ensure the authenticity and validity of the schools that trainees locate and the work submitted for assessment. While this may increase the administrative burden that the trainer or institution has to bear, community and school involvement can play an important role in in-service or continuous practitioner development. Thus a positive spin-off is that tertiary institutions' interactions with school and language communities are ongoing, sustainable and multi-directional, rather than initial and top-down.

5.3 Conclusion

The lure of learning on an 'anywhere and anytime' basis is irresistible to learners, and the business community alike. The World Wide Web offers endless possibilities of reaching out to more people than ever. Distance education institutions will have to embrace the new wave of open and flexible learning if they are to cater effectively for the mass market.

Significantly, Stammen and Schmidt propose that we need a better understanding of how the 'wisdom of education ought to influence electronic media...not how education will be changed by electronic media' (2001:48-49). The success of merging the Internet and ODL for TEFL Online is dependent on a learner-centredness that informs the design and selection of appropriate technology in online learning. Academic and intellectual achievement must have priority over technical innovation. It would be unacceptable to reduce standards to meet popular, technological trends.

The complexity of best practice ODL and TEFL should not be underestimated. As several commentators have stressed, ODL is not a simple and economical substitute for contact tuition (Evans & Nations, 1989; Evans, 1994; Trindade et al 2000; Annand,

2007). Resources, infrastructure, development and implementation are all costly as soon we move from second to third and further generation distance learning systems. There is hope however. The wise use of online automated learner response systems has the potential to improve the cost-effectiveness of ODL (Taylor, 2001:7[48]). The financial commitments are not only technological but also human. An interdisciplinary team of expertise is required for a comprehensive and effective online TEFL course. Educators who wish to use technology for educational purposes need to acquire the necessary technical knowledge and skills. Also, updating those skills is part and parcel of a continuum since 'promising' new tools emerge daily. The design of TEFL Online is not aligned to producing a final product; instead, it is receptive to adaptations and changes in technology, trainees' needs and learning contexts. .

The digital age has revolutionised the way we communicate and connect. It has probably had an even greater impact on world society than the industrial revolution. The extent to which the Internet has shaped economic and social changes over the last decade will pale in comparison to the changes that will occur in the next decade. Currently, we face a renaissance in learning possibilities – a foundational split between old and new ways of thinking and being. E-learning has changed the constructs of the classroom and the notion of distance learning as interactive multimedia extends and redefines learning and teaching praxis. In the present context, change is the only constant. The digital possibilities cannot be ignored. We need to embrace technological advances with a creative, innovative and proactive spirit. Application, research and engagement according to best practice should drive our academic endeavours in the digital age. As technology allows for flexible, fluid and efficient learning, academics and universities will have to rethink their nature and function, or confront extinction.

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[48] Taylor discusses the potentials and implications of a fourth and fifth generation distance learning case study at the University of Southern Queensland. See URL http://www.usq.edu.au/Vistors/vc/vcGUG.htm He asserts that overall, once carefully planned and implemented, further generations of distance learning improves costs and the quality of ODL tuition.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

The contact TEFLA syllabus

The TEFLA course syllabus includes the following topics in foreign language teaching and learning:

1. Introduction to English grammar
2. Language analysis
3. Grammar in teaching
4. Phonology and pronunciation
5. Introduction to foreign language learning and teaching
6. The role of the teacher and learner in EFL
7. Classroom management
8. Skills work in EFL
9. Professional development

Appendix 2

TEFL Online student evaluation questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help us gain an understanding of the participant's experience with the *TEFL Online* pilot. The information you provide us will assist us in making improvements to *TEFL Online.* We value and appreciate your contribution. The questionnaire consists of three sections: A) Evaluation of the e-learning website B) Evaluation of the *TEFL Online* course and C) Testimonial of your experience of the pilot.

A) Evaluation of the e-learning website

1. Comment briefly on each tool of the website by saying what you liked and/or disliked about it.

A. Home page	
B. Schedule page	
C. Announcements page	
D. FAQs page	
E. Discussion forum	
F. Blogger page	
G. Drop Box	
H. Materials page	
I. Navigating from one page to the next.	
J. Technical and instructor's support	

2. Can you suggest any improvements to the *TEFL Online* website? Please comment.

B) Your experience of the TEFL Online pilot

1. How effective was the pilot in introducing basic concepts in language learning and teaching? Please give reasons for your response.

	The materials and the tasks were very effective.
	The materials and the tasks were somewhat effective.
	The materials and the tasks were ineffective.
	I would have liked more on…

Comment:

2. How did you experience this online mode of learning? Choose an option.

	I had no problems with the online learning pilot.
	I found it challenging initially but eased into it afterwards.
	I found it challenging and only managed to complete some of the tasks.
	I found online learning extremely challenging and struggled through most of it.
	I never managed to go beyond the first few steps.

3. Is online learning sufficient in training language teachers? Choose an option.

	Yes, online learning is sufficient in training language teachers.
	A combination of online learning and face-to-face tuition should be sufficient.
	A complete face-to-face course is sufficient in training language teachers.
	I am not sure.
	*Other...

*Add another option.

4. What problems (if any) affected your learning experience during the *TEFL Online* pilot?

C) Testimonial

Please write a short account of your experience of the *TEFL Online* pilot. It is an invaluable source of information for the course developers and the university. Refer to the following aspects (and additional aspects you wish to comment on):

- Overall online learning experience
- Learning success comparison: Web vs. traditional face-to-face courses
- Recommendation to other students who want to take an online course

Appendix 3

An example of an assessed task

> "In his whole life man achieves nothing so great and so wonderful as what he achieved when he learned to talk" – Otto Jespersen, 1904

Language is a complex phenomenon that underlies most human interaction and communication. Humans use language daily to express their thoughts and emotions, convey messages, find information, construct explanations and issue commands. Central to the phenomenon of human language is the manner in which a language is acquired. The differences between language acquisition and language learning will be examined in more detail, followed by a brief discussion of the similarities that exist between learning and acquiring a language.

Nieman and Monyai (2006:27) define language acquisition as the way children unconsciously "acquire their mother tongue...through informal learning". It is a cognitive process that takes place within an environment in which children interact with others who speak the mother tongue. There is no formal teaching of the language and children who are acquiring a language are not aware of grammatical rules or the application thereof.

Language learning, on the other hand, takes place within a formal learning and teaching environment. Nieman and Monyai (2006:27) define this process as the conscious "learning of a language by learning new words, learning the grammar rules of a language and how to apply them". This means that a person learning a new or foreign language will have explicit knowledge of the rules and structures that underlie the language. This is a contrast to language acquisition which is informal and does not rely on formal linguistic knowledge.

Furthermore, Falk (1973:259) points out that it could be easier for adults "living in foreign countries" to become "fluent speakers [of a foreign language] in a year or two" while no child "attains equivalent linguistic control of [their] native language in such a short period of time". Falk's argument highlights the primary similarity between language acquisition and language learning, namely the environment.

Both the acquisition of a mother tongue and the learning of a foreign language are strongly influence by the environment in which the speaker lives and interacts with other speakers of the same language. A child's mother tongue will be strongly influenced by the level and dialect of language to which he or she is exposed. Indeed Pinker (1996) emphasises the interaction between heredity and the environment when examining the acquisition of a mother tongue. Similarly, Falk (1973:250) advises an adult who wants to learn a foreign language to "go to an area where that language is spoken" and submerge themselves in that environment in order to secure "maximum exposure to, and practice in, the language".

In conclusion, the primary differences between language acquisition and language learning are based on the conscious efforts to learn the language.

Comment [u1]: Good point

Comment [u2]: Good point 2

Comment [u3]: Good point 3

Comment [u4]: Good point 4

Comment [u5]: spelling

Comment [u6]: Good point. Yes, it is an influential factor

Comment [u7]: This is also an influential language learning factor... but... a. What will happen to absolute beginner speakers? Do you think they will sink or swim? b. And will the exposure guarantee that foreign speakers become excellent language speakers? Think about immigrants who had traveled to S.A with their families and used only their mother tongue whilst they communicated to English speakers through their children. They didn't have to learn English to survive.

Language acquisition is an informal and subconscious process of learning a language and takes place predominantly in childhood while a learning a new language requires a conscious endeavour, usually in a formal learning environment that focuses on language rules and forms.

Feedback to Task 2:

Well done. Your essay displayed valuable research into the field of language acquisition and learning. You highlighted some principle differences and similarities between the two aspects. Read the comments in the margin and the feedback below for more ideas.

These were some of the issues you could have discussed:

With L1 acquisition, the child is immersed in a situation where he/she hears the language all the time. Different people in the child's immediate family or environment act as models for the child to imitate as well as providing the child with new input: vocabulary, concepts/ideas, explanations, examples, stories and so on. These role models will also correct the child and answer the child's many spontaneous questions as he/she explores the world. The child models its language usage based on what it hears and how it makes sense of the language and what it can deduce about the "rules". The child learns naturally and without rules; imitates what it hears; takes risks; asks questions endlessly. The learning is implicit and not rule-bound while the child's desire to understand and communicate is its motivation and the driving force to its learning. Also, very importantly, children have an innate ability to learn any language fluently during the 'critical hypothesis period' (Chomsky) while adult learners have passed this stage when they learn their foreign language.

Foreign language learning (acquisition), on the other hand, involves the learner making a conscious decision to learn a new language, motivated by personal needs (such as career prospects, studies, love of a foreign culture, self-actualization...). However, the learning process in adults may be hampered by a number of issues such as age, personality, learning style, degree to which the learner is prepared to take risks and make mistakes, not being totally immersed in the language; L1 interference, being less spontaneous and more inhibited than young learners. For the adult learner, personal motivation may not be enough to overcome some of these obstacles.