

COMPOSING AN EVALUATION FORM FOR SELECTING A CALL SOFTWARE PACKAGE

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ABSTRACT

The use of computer in educational institutions and the growth of computer users each year led to the development of computer assisted language learning (CALL) software package. CALL had been used extensively for teaching and learning, which assisted teachers to provide various learning materials. However, the questions of which software package was suitable and appropriate for learners or whether learners and teachers were able to use the software package often raised ever since. It was widely known that a checklist, questionnaires and interviews were common ways to conduct an evaluation of a CALL software package. From those three ways, questionnaires and a checklist were the most common evaluation form established to analyse a software package. Therefore, this article aimed at how a teacher was able to select appropriate criteria and to compose an evaluation form in order to analyse a CALL software package. This paper was a non-research paper, which focused on reading past and current literatures of analysing a software package for learning a language. This paper discussed that *behaviourist* and *acquisition approaches* (Hubbard, 1982) were the appropriate criteria to assess usefulness of a software package from teacher and learners' perspectives related to their experience of teaching and learning a language. Meanwhile, Bradin (1999) introduced two steps; *feasibility* and *quality*, in which feasibility focused on understanding the basic requirement of a software package and quality were ensuring users to know the content, operation, and format qualities of a software package. The content quality should highlight the curriculum, learners' needs, and the appropriateness of learning materials. On the other hand, the format quality was chosen for making sure that the design of a software package was interesting for the users and each tool was able to be used effectively. Additionally, the operation quality was selected as a software package should provide a demo or preview instruction in order to minimise troubles when it was being operated by users in the classroom.

Keywords: *teacher, learners, software package, criteria selection, feedback.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Computer Assisted Language Learning, known as CALL was the modification from earlier stage of computer, which was the combination of video, audio, graphics, pictures, and written text (Schiniciariello, 1997 as cited in Ayres, 2002). This multimedia was mainly used for entertainment industries, such as film and recording industries. They were, then, used by educational institutions and had become good facilitator for language learning, which embarked to the establishment of computer assisted language learning (CALL). Furthermore, the number of users has increased which also had given an impact to the development of computer applications (Healey, 1999 as cited in Ayres, 2002). The development of CALL was definitely a good step in language teaching and learning. The production of software packages was demanded since many educational institutions had used them as part of teaching learning process. This fact led to the awareness of a software package's quality control, which was created for e-learning. Therefore, an evaluation of software package required as this was a key part of CALL development (Dunkel, 1991 as cited in Ayres, 2002).

In other words, the quality control over a learning software package required feedback. There were two ways of conducting feedback,

formally and informally (Egbert, 2005). A teacher could get an informal feedback from his peers and school authority. A developer of a software package could also get feedback informally from his peers and quality control staff of his company. On the other hand, formal feedback was also required as it was a very essential key point of controlling the software package quality. Peers, teacher, the developer as the individual, administrators, and external constituents were people who played important roles to give information of a learning software package standard and how learners were progressing in specific areas (Egbert, 2005).

According to Hubbard (1987), there were four main individual roles, which played important part for an evaluation process. Those were the learners, the teachers, the creator or developer, and the evaluator (Hubbard, 1987). These individual roles absolutely assisted a production of evaluation criteria, which would be used to assess a learning software package. In addition, an evaluator could also be a third party who did not have any direct involvement in the object of evaluation (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Meanwhile, there were two main roles for selecting criteria of the evaluation form; teachers and learners as they were the most essential users of a software package. In other words, a teacher gave learning materials through

e-learning and learners would get benefit from them. Therefore, the application of a software package in the classroom was expected to help learners to improve their language proficiency level.

II. COMPOSING EVALUATION FORMS

After deciding which individual roles were going to evaluate a software package and which frameworks would be applied, the criteria would be selected carefully. However, before creating a list of criteria, types of evaluation forms to be composed should be decided. Based on Levy and Stockwell (2006), an evaluation form could be created into surveys and checklist. Checklist was a simple form to make an evaluation form from past until present use of a software. Checklist was divided into several categories with a set of questions for every category. However, the most common one was survey, in which questionnaires or interviews conducted to obtain feedback (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). To compose a questionnaire, ideas from various language experts on CALL could be integrated. For instance, the criteria selection set by Hubbard, Levy and Stockwell could be used to create a questionnaire which contained a set of questions in different categories. The combination between a checklist and a questionnaire was highly recommended because some questions were not only closed questions (yes and no answers) but also required further explanation.

It was believed that Hubbard's framework and the players of doing an

evaluation were very important because of several reasons. Having certain individuals to assess a learning software package was absolutely essential for quality control over language teaching and learning. Furthermore, formal feedback was required for different points of views, for example learners and teachers' perspective. Those comments and feedback were needed to develop, improve and enhance the quality of a software package production. Hubbard's seven categories of framework were; certainly, assisted any individual who wanted to evaluate a software package to limit the scope of composing the criteria list. By selecting *behaviourist* and *acquisition approaches*, teacher and learner would be able to evaluate a software program from two learning approaches of learning a language. These approaches underlined how learners perceived when they used a software package for language learning. The reason for using learners as the evaluator was they were the end users of a software package and their opinions were highly considered and appreciated. Additionally, a language software package was designed to help learners to reach better understanding of language learning and better achievement of language proficiency level. Nevertheless, teachers' roles were also important as they integrated a software package into classroom situations. Moreover, a teacher was also a key person who had flexibility to choose appropriate software packages that was adjusted into curriculum and learners' age and needs.

Meanwhile, *feasibility* and *quality* were also important steps to evaluate a software package (Bradin, 1999). Feasibility was essential as it aimed at knowing basic understanding of software requirements, such as types of computer, internet or stand alone software package. On the other hand, quality related to *content*, *format* and *operation* qualities of a software package. It was also very important to underline and understand the *content* of software, which represented curriculum and learners' needs as well as the appropriateness of learning materials' topics. Furthermore, *format quality* was also necessary to ensure that the design was interesting and every tool ran effectively. Additionally, the *operation quality* was important to give preview instruction or even a demo and training which were required to reduce difficulties of using a software package. However, the most important thing of all criteria was the availability of feedback to learners, which helped them to improve and to develop their English language proficiency.

After selecting five criteria mentioned previously, an evaluation form could be composed. It would be in the form of a checklist and a questionnaire and required respondents to give comments at the end of the survey (see Appendix). This sample of evaluation form would be based on teachers and learners' perspective after using a certain language software package.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it was believed that selecting a list of criteria to

evaluate a language software package required depth understanding of aspects such as curriculum, learners' age and needs, learners' learning style and what kinds of language learning materials as well as appropriateness of learning materials that a teacher would be delivered through an application of a language software package. Selecting *behaviourist* and *acquisition approaches* were highly important to evaluate how learners would achieve better understanding of a language as well as better language level of proficiency. Hence, *feasibility*, *format quality*, *content quality*, and *operation quality* were also very important to understand the basic requirement of a software package; whether or not it was a nice looking design; how a software was fitted into the curriculum and learners' age and interest; and whether or not it provided useful help options such as a training or a demo.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This was a paper which was written based on library study by reading related literatures on CALL. In other words, it was a non-research paper. Therefore, a research on the usefulness of a well-designed evaluation form should be conducted. The research should use the evaluation form created to analyse a software package, in which learners and teachers would be the respondents.

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APPENDIX

A sample of CALL software Evaluation Form:

EVALUATION FORM

SOFTWARE PACKAGE/WEBSITE ADDRESS:

DATE OF EVALUATION :

SOFTWARE PACKAGES EVALUATED :

SUITABLE FOR AGES : _____ years old

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS :

COMPUTING SKILL LEVEL : ____ Beginner ____ Intermediate

____ Advance (Please tick **ONE**)

TEACHER AND LEARNER SURVEY				
How long have you been teaching/learning English? _____ years				
Please tick as appropriate				
FEASIBILITY		Yes	No	Neutral/Unsure
1.	Does the software run in your computer			
2.	Does the software require internet access?			
3.	Is the software available for every user, particularly learners?			
4.	Is the software affordable?			
5.	Do you get computer training before using computer to assist your teaching program?			
CONTENT QUALITY				
6.	Does the software package fit into and be relevant to curriculum?			
7.	Is the software relevant to learners' learning styles and preferences?			
8.	Does the content consider learners' language and cultural background?			
9.	Does the content focus on certain language skills and aspects, such as grammar and listening?			
10.	Is the software interesting?			
FORMAT QUALITY				
11.	Does the screen display effectively?			
12.	Is the software's interface consistent?			
13.	Do the devices in drills and exercises run effectively?			
14.	Does it provide support/help option?			
OPERATION QUALITY				
15.	Is the software easy to use?			
16.	Are the instructions of getting started clear?			
17.	Is the software giving sufficient feedback?			
BEHAVIOURIST APPROACH				

18.	Does the software present vocabulary and grammar appropriate for learners?			
19.	Does the software accept errors correction?			
20.	Does the software focus on grammar patterns and vocabulary presented each lesson?			
ACQUISITION APPROACH				
21.	Are the learners motivated to use the software to improve their English proficiency level?			
22.	Does the software motivate learners to practise their English?			
23.	Does the software motivate learners to learn English?			

COMMENTS:
