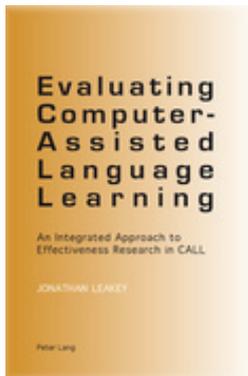


Book review

Evaluating Computer-Assisted Language Learning: An Integrated Approach to Effectiveness Research in CALL

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**Evaluating Computer-Assisted Language Learning:
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Ever since technology and computers were first introduced into language teaching and learning, there were doubts concerning whether multimedia resources had much to add to the language learning experience. This pointed out the need for a comprehensive evaluative model for CALL aimed at helping to determine the kind of multimedia tools which are more effective in language learning, based on the measurable impact these resources make on the learning of language students. This book rightly responds to this need by means of providing a very useful and comprehensive evaluative model for CALL aimed at helping schools, colleges and universities to determine the kind of multimedia resources worth investing in, based on the measurable impact these resources make on the learning of language students. This evaluative framework is also very helpful for CALL researchers looking at the effectiveness of the use of different kinds of e-tools and methodologies. In fact, one of the strongest points of this framework is the fact that it can not only be used for the evaluation of the language learning software, but also to evaluate teaching and learning in computer-based environments, as well as the digital platforms themselves.

Its author draws on current and past research on CALL and e-learning to inform his CALL evaluation framework while he explores the existing evidence for the impact of computers on language learning. He also applies this framework to the study of three kinds of media through which to examine the principal factors influencing both the language learner and language learning: the digital platform, the software program, and the pedagogy employed; concluding that "an evaluative model for CALL had to deploy the appropriate metric tools and research approach to assess empirically both the impact of each distinct element and any added synergies that may operate when all the elements are working together in a real-life setting" (p. 3). The author successfully connects theory and practice, and describes the process of creating the evaluative framework in such a clear and detailed way that it can be used by researchers interested in developing and putting into practice a similar framework relevant to their

research. The first five chapters are more theoretical, whereas the rest of the chapters present different case studies and a final evaluation framework.

Chapter 1, of the nine chapters the book is divided into, is an introduction which, as stated in the title itself, points out the need for "systematic quality control in CALL" (p. 1) and for empirical data capable of proving that CALL "makes an objective, measurable and significant difference to students' learning" (p. 1). This chapter also provides an overview of the different studies carried out in the field of CALL, examining Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Web-Enhanced Language Learning (WELL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL); together with the different tools used in educational institutions. At the same time, it is a thought-provoking reflection on the state of the art and on the need for an integrated approach to the evaluation of CALL. It broadly introduces the theoretical framework and the research questions, and includes a summary of the chapters that follow, which deal with different case studies.

In chapter 2, the theoretical framework is expanded; the main concepts regarding CALL pedagogy, SLA theory and the data collection techniques are defined; and the platforms and programs are introduced. The following chapter, Chapter 3, raises questions for debate concerning the impact of CALL on teaching. These questions are answered in Chapter 4 by means of a discussion on CALL enhancement criteria, drawing upon Chapelle's (1997; 2001) criteria, and mapping these criteria against those suggested by other authors while adding six new ones. As for chapter 5, it presents the qualitative and quantitative measures of the model for evaluating CALL while explaining and exploring concepts such as validity, objective measures, problems encountered when doing research in CALL, the different kinds of variables, the types of data and the way to report the findings. For the sake of clarity, these concepts and phenomena are organised into different tables.

Following this theoretical part, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 deal with the different case studies, the results of which inform Chapter 9. The 3 case studies presented look at the three 'P's and their sub-elements: programmes, digital platforms, and pedagogy. Following the case studies, Chapter 9 offers an evaluative framework made up of the combination of theory and practice. The case study presented in Chapter 6 (case study 1) makes a comparison between Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs) and Digital Labs. It also evaluates the following two digital platforms against the different criteria previously stated: Robotel at the University of Ulster, and Melissi at the University of Portsmouth. In chapter 7 (case study 2) two versions of the *TellMeMore* language learning software package are evaluated; i.e. version 7 of the *TellMeMore* 'Education' CD-ROM; and version 9 of the *TellMeMore* 'Campus' online version, providing a step-by-step and enlightening description of how the study was carried out. Case study 3 is dealt with in Chapter 8, which aims at evaluating pedagogy in two different projects, TOLD and BILINGUA, again providing a meticulous description of the way the Model of Evaluation can be applied to various pedagogical approaches, namely behaviourist, communicative, constructivist and blended.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, presents a new framework for evaluating CALL, which combines the theory dealt with in the initial five chapters with the findings of the case studies of Chapters 6 to 8. This new framework is presented by means of different tables and figures that help to organise the information in a clearer and concise manner so as to make the use of this information easier for other researchers involved with similar kinds of research. The first tables shown are an evaluation flowchart; and a list of synthesised criteria for evaluation of CALL programmes, platforms and pedagogy, with definitions (MFE2). These are followed by a set of 12 different tables concerning the different criteria, ranging from language learning potential to tuition delivery modes. The author wisely concludes that "what has been established is a systematic agenda and methodology for CALL evaluation, which may also serve as a more research methodology for CALL research" (p. 289) with the ultimate goal of generating "an ongoing, logically-sequenced, and ever enlarging meta-analysis that will, with every new study carried out using sound methodology in line with an agreed agenda for CALL

evaluation, add credibility to the body of evidence for CALL's effectiveness" (p. 289). It won't take long for the reader to realise that this goal has been only too well achieved.

The great amount of information displayed in such a numerous amount of tables makes it hard at times for the reader to fully process the interpretations of the results and the conclusions obtained. This in turn makes reading the book more complex, in spite of the articulate discourse and coherent structure of the book as a whole. However, this cannot be considered as a weakness, but rather a consequence of the great investment of time and effort that the author had to put in carrying out the studies and in presenting them in a clear and precise way; as well as in developing such a consistent and robust model for evaluating CALL. Overall, this book can be considered as a great achievement that shows the maturity of CALL as a scientific discipline, the effectiveness of which can be measured objectively thanks to the thorough, systematic, theoretically-based and logically-sequenced Evaluative Model provided and described throughout the book.

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