The Evaluation of Three English Learning Websites

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Article Info	Abstract:
	With the growing use of internet, a large number of English learning websites have been developed to assist English learners to improve their English. However, the websites do not always match the learners' need, learners' interests, and learners' characteristic. Hence, it is essential for English teachers to evaluate the English learning websites before they recommend them to their students. The present study evaluated three language learning websites focusing on listening. Three major criteria including design, content, and learner fit were used as the parameters in the present evaluation. It is expected that, upon the evaluation, English language learners can be assisted to choose the best website for their English learning. In addition, this evaluation can contribute to the development of the language learning websites in which the feedback from the evaluation can be incorporated to the better development of the websites. **Keywords**: English learning websites, technology, website evaluation, English learners

INTRODUCTION

The extensive use of internet has led to the emergence of language learning websites that aim to assist language learners, especially English. It is expected that the language learning websites can help the learners achieve their mastery of the language they learn. In Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language, meaning that English is not an everyday language. As a result, English is rarely heard by Indonesian English learners outside of their school. In order to gain enough exposure of English, the learners might utilize the abundance of English websites. These English websites, however, do not always fit the learners' characteristics. As a result, learners might find them ineffective and may feel discouraged in using the website. An evaluation of the available English websites is then necessary to ensure that the learners are

learning English on the appropriate websites. This study aimed to evaluate three English websites focusing on improving learners' listening skills.

The use of technology including language websites in language learning has attracted many scholars to investigate whether the technology is effective for language learning. In fact, a number of scholars view that technology can be a significant part in language learning. Bull and Ma (2001), for example, view that technology provides limitless resources to the learners of language. Genclter (2015) states, that in order to be successful in language learning, learners should be encouraged by teachers to discover language learning activities by utilizing technology. Similarly, Clements and Sarama (2003) argues that language learners can gain advantages from appropriate technological materials. Likewise, Harmer (2007) suggests that the use of computer-based language activities contributes to the level of learners' engagement in group learning.

Other scholars also support the use of technology in language learning. Tomlinson (2009), for example, state that technology-based activities offer language learners fast information and suitable materials. He adds that technology encourage learners to study more. Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) agree with the idea that technology offer learning resources to the learners and provide them with great learning experience. By utilizing technology, learners can have authentic materials so that they can get more excited in learning the language.

Apart from the views agreeing the use of technology in language learning, a few studies have shown the merits of using technology in language learning. A study by Lee (2001) showed that changes in leaners' language attitudes occur after the utilization of Computer Assisted Language Learning in which leaners' self confidence in learning the language improved. Similar findings also come from Baytak, Tarman, and Ayas' study (2011), indicating that learners found it fascinating and motivating when learning through technology. Another study by Gillespie (2006) indicated that, in doing tasks, learners tended to be more collaborative. Parvin and Salam (2015) in their study found that language learning technology facilitated learners in gaining more exposure to the language being learned in a meaningful context and learning independently. Furthermore, Gorjian (2011) found that the use of web-based language learning in teaching English vocabulary had significant effect on students' mastery of English vocabulary.

While studies and views above indicate that the use of technology in language learning facilitate learners in learning the language, the characteristics of technology and learners' context have not been extensively touched. One technology might be efficient and appropriate for a certain group of language learners. Other group learners, however, might find it inappropriate as it might not suit their language learning need. It is, therefore, necessary to evaluate a technology before offering or recommending it to language learners. A language website, for example, might provide learners with useful input for the learners. How effective and appropriate this website for a certain group of language learner needs evaluating. Indeed, Dragulanescu (2002) suggest that it is essential to conduct assessment on webpages and to assess if those websites meet learners' needs and characteristics. In addition, Premaratne (2012) maintains that a website does not always meet learners' interest, leaners' need, and learners' characteristics. Furthermore, Gotwald (2002) in his study found that the content of websites designed for second language research required improvements.

According to scholars interested in the use of language learning websites in language learning, a language website should be well developed in order to meet learners' needs (Hubbard, 2006; Rost, 2007; Son, 2005). According to these scholars, there are a number of aspects of a language website that need to be evaluated including the design, the content, and the learners' fit.

In terms of the design, it is said that a language technology will be extensively adopted if the technology is both meaningful and emotionally appealing (Norman, as cited in Rost, 2007). Similarly, Rost (2007) suggests that if leaners do not find it fascinating when using the language technology, leaners will tend to avoid using it no matter how logically useful the technology is. According to Son (2005), a website design can be evaluated in three aspects including the organization, navigation, and multimedia. He adds that a language website has to be well organized, be appealing to see and explore, and own effective screen displays. Regarding navigation, he mentions that a website needs to be easily navigated, meaning that there should not be complex instructions on the website. In terms of multimedia, he mentions that the sounds, graphics, and colors of the website should have good quality.

In relation to the content of the website, there are a number of aspects that need to be incorporated. They are the authenticity of the materials, interactivity, feedback, reliability, and accuracy. What is meant by authenticity here is that the website should provide the learners with natural-everyday language so that real-life use of the language can be experienced by them. Interactivity and feedback deal with the pedagogical aspects and the process of second language acquisition. When the website is interactive, learners have the chance to practice their English as they will have input from the website (Ellis and Sintani, 2004). The availability of the feedback in the website is also crucial since feedback is found to be effective in acquiring the language being learned (Ellis and Sintani, 2004). In terms of reliability, Son (2005) mentions that the website needs to be free of dead links, breaks, and bugs. This is essential because there should not be any distractions for the learners during the learning. With regards to accuracy, the spellings and grammars in the website need to be accurate to prevent students from obtaining incorrect input for their learning.

The last aspect that should get attention is the learner's fit. Learners' fit deals with the how well the website fit in the characteristics and needs of the learners (Hubbard, 2006). In other words, a language website should consider learners' interests, learners' cultures, age, sex, and leaners' proficiency level.

RESEARCH METHOD

The procedure of evaluation

The followings were the stages of evaluating the language website:

1. Designing the instrument.

   In this stage, the instruments used to evaluate the websites were developed based on the existing literatures

2. Choosing the websites to evaluate.

In this stage, three websites were chosen based on three criteria. First, the website was specifically designed for teachers and learners. Second, it was specifically designed for English learning, not other languages. Third, the website should focus on listening skills.

3. Evaluating the websites using the instruments

4. Analyzing the results obtained from the instrument.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a checklist consisting of 24 statements regarding the apects of the websites being evaluated ((10 statement for design; 10 statements for content/teacher fit; and 5 statements for learners' fit) in the form of Likert-sclae (1 =strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). These 24 statements were developed based on the existing literature (Hubbard, 2006; Son, 2005; Rost, 2007). The instrument also included an open-comment section where the evaluator could give more perspectives on the website.

The materials (the websites)

The websites evaluated in this study were:

1. http://www.elllo.org/
2. http://whttp://www.eslradioandtv.com
3. ww.real-english.com/new-lessons.htm

The raters/evaluators

Two teachers with master's degree in TESOL were the raters in this study. These teachers have had over five years teaching experience.

Data analysis

The data obtaining from the checklist were manually analyzed in which the average scores for each aspect of the evaluation and overall evaluation (the combination of all aspects) were counted. The average scores were then interpreted using a set of criteria. The average score of 1.1 – 2.0 was interpreted as poor (not appropriate). The average scores of 2.1-3.0 were interpreted adequate (acceptable with reservation). The average scores with 3.1-4.0 were good (appropriate for use). The average scores with 4.1-5.0 were interpreted as excellent (highly recommended).

The data obtained from the open-comment section were analyzed through qualitative content analysis including highlighting segments related to teachers' evaluation of the website, giving initial code to the segments, examining the codes, and grouping them into themes.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The raters's reponses to the checklist

1. http://www.elllo.org/

Categories	Average scores
Design	4
Content/Teacher fit	3.6
Learner Fit	4
Overall	3.9

Fig. 1. The average scores of www.ello.org

Figure 1 shows the average scores of the aspects evaluated on *www.ello.org.* In terms of design, the average score was 4, indicating that the design was considered good or appropriate to use. In term of content/teacher fit, the average score was 3.6, indicating that that the content of the website was appropriate to use. Regarding leaner fit, the average score was 4, also indicating that the website fitted the learners' characteristics. The overall average score was 3.9, indicating that the website was considered good for English listening learning.

2. http://whttp://www.eslradioandtv.com

Categories	Average scores
Design	3.5
Content/Teacher fit	3.5
Learner Fit	2.6
Overall	3.2

Fig. 2. The average scores of http://whttp://www.eslradioandtv.com

Figure 2 shows the average scores of www.eslradioandtv.com. In terms of design, the average score was 3.5, indicating that the design of the website was considered good. This score, however, was lower than that of www.ello.org. In terms of content, the average score was 3.5, indicating that the content was appropriate to use. Regarding, learner fit, the average score was 2.6, indicating that the website was not really appropriate for the learners. The overall average score was 3.2, indicating that the website was still appropriate to use. However, this score was lower than that of www.ello.org.

3. ww.real-english.com/new-lessons.htm

Categories	Average scores
Design	4.2
Content/Teacher fit	4.0
Learner Fit	4.2
Overall	4.1

Fig. 3. The average scores of www.real-english.com

Figure 3. shows the average scores of www.real-english.com. In terms of design, the average score was 4.2, indicating that the website design was excellent or highly recommended for student. Concerning content, the average score was 4.0, indicating the content of the website is good or appropriate to use. With regards to learner fit, the average score was 4.2, indicating that the website has excellently considered learners' characteristics and needs. The overall average score was 4.1, indicating that the website was highly recommended for English learners to improve their listening.

The raters' responses to the open-comment section.

Based on the analysis of the open-comment section, the two raters stated the strengths and the weaknesses of each websites.

According to the raters, www.ello.org included various English accents in the websites which was considered essential for English learning these days. This website, however, did not provide feedback for the learners as rater 1 stated:

 "This website contains different English accents. However, no there was no feedback for the learners".

In relation to www.eslradioandtv.com, the raters mentioned that the availability of different types of listening tasks was the main strength of the website. The website, however, only suit intermediate and advanced learners as rater 2 stated:

"Many different listening tasks are available but not appropriate for beginner level"

Concerning www.real-English.com, the two raters stated that this website was highly recommended, confirming the result of the analysis of the checklist. The mentioned that various listening activities were provided on the website according to the leaners' English proficiency levels, even though monologue listening were absent from the website, as rater B mentioned: "The listening exercises can be adjusted according to the English proficiency level of the learners. However, monologue or speech need to be included in the website".

DISCUSSION

The study found that all the three websites had their own strengths and weakness. Overall, the three websites were still recommended for students to learn listening skills. The design of the three websites partly met the criteria specified by Son (2005) in which a website should be

well organized, be appealing to see and explore, and own effective screen displays. The availability of feedback and interactivity in www.real-English.com was in accordance with the English learning concept proposed by Ellis and Sintani (2004), stating that interactivity and feedback is essential in English learning. The absence of different kinds of listening exercises for all level of English learners on www.eslradioandtv.com may be disadvantageous for learners (Clements and Sarama, 2003). This means that the website needs to consider learners' appropriateness before building a language website in order to accommodate all levels of learners.

CONCLUSION

The current study evaluated three English learning websites. The three websites owned their strengths and weaknesses. However, based on the result of the analysis of the data, www.real-english.com was the first top website to be recommended for learners to learn listening skills. The design, content, and learner fit of this website mostly fitted the criteria existing in literature. However, it is recommended that this website include monologue to improve the quality of the website. www.ello.org also met some of the requirements of good language website specified by the scholars. The main weakness of this website that need to be fixed was the absence of feedback for the learners. www.eslradioandtv also needed to improve a number of aspects of its websites, especially in relation to learner's fit.

A number of insights regarding language learning websites can be obtained in this study. However, there are some weakness in this study. First, there were only three websites evaluated. In the future study more websites have to be evaluated. Second, this study has only sought perspectives from teachers regarding the websites. In the next study, leaners need to be included to evaluate the websites.

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