The Motivational Aspect: The Low and High Proficiency Undergraduates of Islamic University College Of Malaysia (IUCM) in Using Tell Me More (TMM) Language Learning Software

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ABSTRACT

Many learners are excited to use language learning software when the software is introduced. However, it is believed that, the low proficiency users are less motivated compared to high proficiency users. This study compares the motivational level of low and high proficiency undergraduates of IUCM in using TMM language learning software. The data was collected by administering the modified Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS) questionnaire (Keller, 1987) to the respondents and analyzed using SPSS software to arrive at the statistical figures. The analysis shows that there are not many discrepancies in terms of the motivational level between the two groups in using the software, thus indicating the strengths of the software in catering for both groups. However, there are also some weaknesses in the software that will be addressed in this paper. Finally, possible modifications to TMM software pertaining to the features related to the ARCS model (Keller, 1987) will also be put forth.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are plenty of software which provides parents, teachers and students with a better chance to have more effective language learning and teaching. However, the ever increasing numbers of soft wares increase the burden upon teachers and parents in making decision. This is when software evaluation becomes an important instrument to evaluate the effectiveness of the software. There are many aspects to be considered in evaluating software, but for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the motivational aspect of the software. Software evaluators should look into whether or not the software is capable of motivating learners. According to Keller and Suzuki in Lee and Boling, 1999, learners' involvement does not persist long if motivational components of the design do not extend beyond the novelty of the learner. Therefore, the four factor macro level of Keller called the **ARCS model** (**A-Attention, R- Relevance, C- Confidence and S-Satisfaction**) will have to be considered for evaluation on motivational aspect (Keller, 1987).

According to an article in internet http://www.ugr.es/`icem2002/Ponencias/ Lasagabaster - Sierra.PDF, as for as ***attention*** component is concerned; the evaluator will have to check whether the software arouses and sustains curiosity and attention of the learner. In respect of the second component, the evaluator must establish whether the lesson is ***relevant*** to the needs of the learner. The evaluator must also assess whether the lesson instills ***confidence*** in the learner and whether the software activities bring about ***satisfaction*** on the learner. In other words, it is very important to get feedback from students in order to gauge their motivation level in using language learning software. Kessler and Plakans (2001: 15) believe that, in the process of evaluating materials “learners must be included as they are also experts of their learning as well as the benefactors of well-developed materials”.

In addition, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) in *Students' Evaluation of CALL Software Programmes* undertook a study in which students were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the software they use in multimedia laboratory. In this study, the students expressed their opinions about issues ranging from their satisfaction with the programmes to the type of activities they enjoy most. The study indicates that students see software programmes as a complementary tool in a language classroom.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Many learners are excited to use language learning software at the beginning stage, when the software is introduced. However, eventually, some learners become demotivated to continuously engage in the activities in the software. Conducting a software evaluation can assist in collecting feedbacks from students, in order to gauge their motivational problems. However, there are many software evaluations done by teachers or evaluators of software which are focused on other aspects of the software. Hence, there is still very less attention given in evaluating the motivational aspect in using software because many believe that learners will be motivated to engage in software activities since the materials/ instructions are on the computer, which is not true. So, it is important to check whether the tasks are capable of motivating the learners although the materials/instructions are on computer (http://www.ugr.es/`icem2002/Ponencias/Lasagabaster-Sierra.PDF). In addition, it is also generally perceived that high proficiency learners' are said to be more motivated towards using software for language learning compared to low proficiency learners. However, there is also a tendency for low proficiency learners to feel highly motivated to use software in language learning. As a result, there are gaps in this area, which prompts the researcher to undertake the study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research is done to compare the motivational aspect towards Tell Me More (TMM) software of the low and high proficiency undergraduates by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of this software in motivating the two groups. This will enable the researcher to find out whether or not the TMM is motivating language learning software.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To compare the motivational aspect towards TMM from the low and high proficiency undergraduates of Islamic Sciences University of Malaysia (USIM) by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the TMM language learning software using the modified IMMS questionnaire and ARCS model (Keller, 1987).

2. To determine whether or not TMM is motivating software for low and high proficiency undergraduates of USIM

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

1. The results of the research will assist the language practitioners to get an insight on the motivational aspect or problems from low and high proficiency undergraduates in using the TMM language learning software.

2. The research will be a stepping stone to further explore the use of TMM in language teaching and learning in USIM.

LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

This study is based on 100 respondents. 50 respondents (50%) are of the low proficiency, first year undergraduates from the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies (FQSS) and 50 respondents (50%) are of high proficiency undergraduates from Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) in USIM. Thus, these two groups may not represent the opinions from all the low and high proficiency undergraduates of other faculties in USIM.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TELL ME MORE (TMM) SOFTWARE

Tell Me More (TMM) Language Learning Software is produced by Aurolog Innovation for Language Learning. According to its publisher, the most prominent feature in TMM is its remarkable use of speech recognition technology which allows learners converse freely and interactively with the computer. There are three kinds of exercises in this software:

1. Assimilating what has been learnt
2. Putting the rules into practice
3. Mastering the language.

There are three types of path available:

1. Functional language patterns- the learners assimilate grammatical points and put the rules into practice
2. Theme based path – learners practice pronunciation and assimilate vocabulary and
3. Cultural path – learners get to see illustrated texts and associated activities.

It has a dynamic mode that adapts according to students progress. TMM allows students to personalize an objective according to ability or knowledge area. In other words, students select one or several areas of knowledge and levels they wish to work at. There are five difficulty levels available: complete beginner, beginner, intermediate, advanced and business. The publisher also claims that the variety of activities in each section keeps the learners motivated. Hence, this research seeks to compare and find out whether or not TMM is capable of motivating its users, the low and high proficiency undergraduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning, CALL and Motivation

A more practiced eye more receptive ears,
A more fluent tongue,
A more involved heart,
A more responsive mind.

These characteristics, according to Oxford (1990), these are the qualities that we teachers want our students to have, in order to be effective language learners. Oxford's language learning strategies stresses on the importance of learner's autonomy and communicative learning. She laid out an eight-step model:

1. Identify the learner's needs and available time
2. select related strategies
3. consider integration of strategy training
4. motivational issues
5. prepare materials and activities
6. conduct 'completely informed training'
7. evaluate the strategy training
8. revise the strategy training.

To achieve the qualities mentioned above, we need to ensure that motivation is actively nurtured and maintained. Dornyei (2002) points out motivation as being a very convenient way to refer to 'a rather complex issue'. Dornyei's motivational strategies are entirely devoted to second/foreign language learning and focuses on 'motivation-sensitive teaching practice'. He laid out 35 strategies but advised that a selective and stepwise approach is taken, choosing a few strategies that would suit one's teaching style and learner group well.

Towndrow and Vallance (2003) explored the theoretical and practical issues relating to the use of Information Technology (IT) in language teaching and learning. They believed that the effectiveness of the computer and its associated role in language learning depends on 'how it is employed to meet a particular need, for a particular student, in a particular environment, at a particular time'. They also highlighted that with the development of instructional tools such as language learning CD-ROMs, digital video lectures on-line added with features like hyperlinks to further resources, the role of the teacher changes from the 'traditional teacher dependent' to the development of learners that can 'filter, organize, and present information, be self-learners, self-motivators, self-assessors, and develop goal setting, time management and teamwork skills'.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been available to language teachers and learners worldwide for a number of years. Despite of the many problems it presents, such as expense, technical support and maintenance, necessity of new skills in manipulation of the new technology, or lack of worthwhile language learning materials available (Powell, 1998 in Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2002), CALL has taken the centre stage with the development of information technology and multimedia programmes with a wide range of technology-based pedagogical materials.

Software Evaluation and Motivation

With the development of CALL and its sophisticated software, software evaluation has become necessary. Software, according to Buckleiner (1999), refers to 'the programming code stored on CD-ROMs that transforms a computer into a set of games, a word processor, or perhaps an Internet browser'. Software evaluation is a challenging task. Buckleitner (1999), added that because the software experience is an interactive and multi-dimensional one, the evaluation 'must look at the pedagogy used in its development as well as design features'. This research however, is not going to look into software evaluation pedagogically. The focus as mentioned much earlier is software evaluation in the aspects of motivation.

According to Alessi and Trollip (1991), software evaluators should not assume that learners will be motivated to learn or engage in the tasks just because the instruction is on the computer. Pertaining to that, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) in *Students' Evaluation of CALL Software Programmes* undertook a study in which students were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the software they use in multimedia laboratory. In this study, the students expressed their opinions about issues ranging from their satisfaction with the programmes to the type of activities they enjoy most. The study indicated that students saw software programmes as a complementary tool in a language classroom.

Various strategies for designing interaction in multimedia products have been proposed using Keller's ARCS model of motivation (Keller and Suzuki, 1996). This framework would enable the designer to identify motivational strategies that are necessary for the instructional design. Keller outlined four major factors that influence motivation to learn:

1. Attention- to gain and keeping the learner's attention
2. Relevance- to meet the personal needs and goals of the learner
3. Confidence- to develop positive expectancies for success
4. Satisfaction- to reinforce accomplishment.

These factors need to be sustained to keep the learner interested in the topic because once it is lost, motivation is lost, and learning does not take place. Keller's ARCS is a very useful model to refer to for the creation of instructional units utilizing computers as learning tools. Rooted from a number of motivational theories and concepts, it is a systematic model for designing motivating instruction (Small, 1997).

There is a number of software evaluation instruments used to evaluate the motivational aspects. Similarly, Small (1993) in Small (1997) developed an instrument to assess the motivational quality based on ARCS, but of World Wide Web (www) called The Website Motivational Analysis Checklist (WebMAC). WebMAC identifies 60 items categorized according to four characteristics: Engaging, Meaningful, Organized, and Enjoyable.

In addition, Keller (1987), in Small (1997) developed The Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS) based on ARCS to assess the motivational quality of instructional situations. The survey required students to rate 36 ARCS related

statements based on the instructional materials they have just used. Some examples as in Small (1997) are:

- These materials are eye-catching. (Attention)
- It is clear to me how the content of this material is related to things I already know. (Relevance)
- As I worked on this lesson, I was confident that I could learn the content. (Confident)
- Completing the exercises in this lesson gave me satisfying feeling of accomplishment. (Satisfaction)

Thus, for the purpose of the present research, Keller's IMMS instrument and ARCS model will be employed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Motivation is the key to the success of any instructional strategy. Therefore, any instructional strategy, including the instructional materials in language learning software, needs to be evaluated in terms of the learners' motivational aspects. In educational area, there are many models of learner motivation. For the purpose of this research, Keller's ARCS model (1983) is used as the conceptual framework, as it is one of the comprehensive motivational models (Hodges, 2004; Song & Keller, 2001).

Sample

The sample will be 100 respondents from USIM. 50 respondents are of the low proficiency, first year undergraduates from the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies (FQSS) and 50 respondents are of high proficiency undergraduates from Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) in USIM. The undergraduates from these two faculties are chosen because majority of the low proficiency undergraduates (Band 1 and 2 in Malaysian University English Test [MUET]) are from FQSS and the high proficiency (Band 4 and above) are from FST. The purposive sampling method is used to select the first year undergraduates of FQSS and FST. According to Ary et.al.,(1996), purposive sampling is judged to be typical or representative from the population. Therefore, this sampling method is suitable for the purpose of this research.

Research Design

This is a survey research. The low and high proficiency undergraduates who have used the Tell Me More software are chosen to provide their feedback/opinions through questionnaires.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The research instrument used in this research will be a questionnaire – Instructional Material Motivation Survey (IMMS), which will be administered after the learners are familiar with TMM language learning software. The IMMS contains 36 statements

regarding learners' perceived interests, usefulness, ease of use and preference. Originally, the IMMS (Keller, 1983) was developed to measure learners' motivation towards instructional materials provided to them. However, since the origin is in the ARCS motivational design model that is based on human motivation literature, it can be used to measure attitude towards a treatment (Seung, 2006). In this research the modified IMMS statements refer to the specific situation- TMM language learning software (APPENDIX 2). The modified IMMS reflects some changes in vocabularies for instance; instead of 'instruction' and 'learning', 'task' and 'activities' were used. The reliability of modified IMMS (Cronbach's *a*) was 0.91 for the 36 items (Seung, 2006).

Procedures

STEP 1: The respondents will familiarize with the TMM language learning software.

STEP 2: The respondents will respond to the modified IMMS questionnaire based on their experiences using the TMM software.

STEP 3: The researcher will collect the questionnaires and analyze the data.

STEP 4: Based on the results, the researcher will compare the differences in the two groups of respondents and propose possible modifications to the TMM software.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

In the discussion of findings, there will be three major discussions based on the analyzed data: a) overall comparison between the low and high proficiency learners in using TMM, b) individual questions in IMMS to show the strengths and weaknesses of the software in motivating both levels of learners and c) whether or not TMM is motivating language learning software for both low and high proficiency learners.

The overall comparison between the low and high proficiency students on their motivation in using TMM shows very small discrepancies. There are about 52% of the low proficiency students and 54% of high proficiency learners indicate their high motivation towards using the software. In addition, 46% of low proficiency and 42% of high proficiency learners explain that they are moderately motivated in TMM usage. And, there are only 2% of the low proficiency learners and 4% of the high proficiency learners, who are low motivated to use the software.

The percentage from the overall comparison further delineates that low proficiency learners are still highly motivated to use the software. In contrast, although the minority who are low motivated from the low and high proficiency levels, the percentage for high proficiency learners are slightly higher compared to low proficiency learners about 2% disparities. These percentages (2% and 4%) provide some insights that there are weaknesses in the software that have lessened the students' interest in using the software.

In the analysis of individual statements in IMMS questionnaire, there will be four aspects that will be linked namely; *Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction*

(ARCS, Keller 1987) in order to arrive at the strengths and weaknesses of TMM to the users. In reference to Statement 2 which is on *Attention*: '***There was something interesting at the beginning of this session that got my attention'***, there are about 70% of the low proficiency students and 64% of high proficiency students who strongly agree with this statement. The percentages show that majority of the low and high proficiency software users believe that the software have caught their *Attention*, which indicates the strength of the software in creating high motivation among users.

As for *Confidence* aspect, statement 4 on: ***'The goal of the task was challenging but achievable for me'***, gives an overview of the learners' confidence level as a key to motivate them in using the software. There are 34% of low proficiency and 42% of high proficiency learners who strongly agree with this statement. Another 56% and 42% from low and high proficiency respectively, moderately agree with this statement. The remaining 10% and 16% strongly disagree with this statement. Hence, the percentages show some disparities among the low and high proficiency learners whereby, there are about 12% and 14% differences between the two proficiency levels. It can be concluded that the confidence level of the high proficiency learners are slightly higher compared to low proficiency learners and therefore, the motivation level in using TMM is also higher. However, there is also a similarity in majority of the respondents' motivational level. It is found that the highest percentages fall in moderately motivated levels with 56% and 42% from the low and high proficiency learners. Generally, it can be deduced that both groups do not have very high confidence level in using TMM.

Pertaining to Statement 5: ***'Completing the task in this session gave me a satisfying feeling of accomplishment'***, gives information on *Satisfaction* level of the software users. Based on the analysis, 62% of the low proficiency and 56% of the high proficiency learners strongly agree with this statement. About 30% and 32% of the high and low proficiency learners moderately agree on this statement. It can be said that low proficiency learners have more satisfaction in completing tasks in the software in comparison to high proficiency learners, which means their motivation level towards the use of TMM is higher.

'***It is clear to me how the task material is related to things I already know'*** is Statement 6 in IMMS questionnaire that provides insights on *Relevance* of the materials in the software to the users. The distribution of percentage for this statement is almost equal in terms of strongly agree, moderately agree and strongly disagree for low proficiency learners: 34%, 32% and 34%. However, the high proficiency users signify slightly higher percentage on strongly agree (48%), 40% moderately disagree and 12% on strongly disagree. Hence, high proficiency users find the materials in the software more relevant to them compared to low proficiency users. This situation shows the limitation of the software in catering for specific needs of users.

Moreover, in the IMMS questionnaire there are about 7 negative statements to gauge users' consistency in their responses. This assists the researcher to see whether the respondents' views are contradictory with the positive and negative statements which have similar meaning but worded differently. There are also some negative statements included to get an idea whether the respondents read the statements carefully or merely tick their answers for the purpose of answering a questionnaire. For instance,

Statement 3 and 4 is to gauge their consistency in responses (refer to the tables below).

Statement 3*: The task was more difficult to perform than I would like for it to be.*

		%	
Motivation / confidence level		Low prof	High prof
AA3	High confidence	34	36
	Moderate confidence	50	46
	Low confidence	16	18
Total		100	100

		%	
Motivational / confidence level		Low prof	High prof
AA4	High confidence	34	41
	Moderate confidence	56	42
	Low confidence	10	17
Total		100	100

Statement 4: ***The goal of the task was challenging but achievable for me.***

The statements above have similar meaning and the only difference they make is statement 3 is negative and statement 4 is positive. Although, the percentages differ from table for statement 3 and 4, there is a significant pattern worth addressed. The highest percentages for both statements are in moderately motivated level and the lowest percentages are of the low motivated level. Therefore, the respondents' answers are consistent and can be concluded that the confidence level in using TMM is moderate regardless of their proficiency levels.

Statement 20: '***The task was complicated and caused excessive stress***', gives an overview on the difficulty level of the tasks to the students and its effects to their motivation level. There are about 62% of the low proficiency learners and 58% of the high proficiency learners who are highly motivated to use TMM as they strongly disagree with this statement. The low motivated users amounts to 20% and 16% for low proficiency and high proficiency users respectively. Hence, the percentage portrays the strength of the software in motivating the users.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is not much disparity between the low and high proficiency TMM users in their motivation level in using the software. The analysis delineates that learners' proficiency levels are not determinants in measuring their motivational levels in using software, in this context TMM language learning software. This is because generally, both high and low proficiency learners strongly agree with most of the statements. However, there are some statements which signal some disparity in the percentages between the two proficiency levels but the differences are not very

significant to prove that major disparity exists in the two groups in terms of motivation in using TMM language learning software.

In addition, the analysis portrays that there are strengths in this software that are worth addressed as majority of the software users are highly motivated. Thus, signaling that TMM language learning software is capable of motivating both the low and high proficiency learners. Some of the strengths that could be highlighted are in terms of the *Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction* (ARCS, Keller 1987) aspects. Firstly, the software captures the users' attention with interesting layout, design, font size and the arrangement of the information. Secondly, the tasks and materials in the software are generally relevant to the needs of the learners. Thirdly, the tasks and the materials which come in different levels of difficulty, ranging from beginners until advanced levels, could assist them in building their confidence to certain extent. The learners' satisfaction is met when the tasks/activities could be accomplished successfully when learners put in their efforts to understand and attempt the tasks willingly.

However, there are also some weaknesses in this software that worth discussed. Although the software meets most of the requirements in the ARCS model (motivational model), there are limitations in terms of catering specific students needs. As we know, it is difficult for a tool to meet specific students' requirements although the software has many activities of different levels. Besides that, in terms of confidence level, both the low and high proficiency learners fall in moderately confident category, signaling some limitations in the software. This is probably because; the students are not given guidelines in the software as to which levels to choose to start of their tasks. Although, there are different levels of difficulties available, there is a possibility that the users choose a level which is not suitable for them. Hence, they may feel it is too difficult for them which eventually lead to lack of confidence in using the software.

Based on the analysis, it is evident that TMM Language Learning Software is motivating software for both low and high proficiency learners of USIM. Although there are variations in percentages for most of the statements from both levels of proficiency, the overall comparison indicates that the highest percentage fall in highly motivated level in software usage.

Since the purpose of the study is look at the motivational aspect towards the software, there are not many suggestions for the software modification. With reference to the findings, there is one modification on the software that I wish to suggest; a placement test. The software should include a placement test which should be taken by users during the first hour of the lab session. After which, they should be notified by the software on the levels that they should start. This would guide learners to choose a suitable level based on their ability. Thus, working on the appropriate level of difficulty, would increase the learners' confidence level and so do their motivation to further engage in the activities in the software.

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