

Lesson: Evaluation in CALL

Introduction

Evaluation in CALL is essential for determining the **effectiveness, appropriateness, and value** of technological tools and activities used in language education. While CALL researchers have proposed evaluation frameworks over the years, there has historically been a lack of integration between CALL evaluation practices and the broader, more formal field of educational evaluation. Applying systematic evaluation principles from formal evaluation can greatly enhance the quality, reliability, and usefulness of evaluations conducted in CALL contexts.

1. Defining Evaluation in CALL

Evaluation is a **systematic process** designed to determine the **value** of an object, activity, program, or process. **In CALL, evaluation examines materials such as software, websites, online courses, and technology-based activities to assess their impact on language learning.** Evaluation is distinct from research in that while research seeks generalizable knowledge, evaluation focuses on helping stakeholders make specific decisions regarding the use, improvement, or replacement of CALL resources.

2. Traditional Frameworks for CALL Evaluation

Two influential figures in CALL evaluation are **Hubbard** and **Chapelle**, each offering frameworks:

- **Hubbard's Framework** focuses on **practical evaluation** for classroom use, emphasizing courseware and websites. It suggests using checklists, methodological frameworks, and SLA principles. However, it has been criticized for conflating evaluation methods with criteria and for not fully considering a broad range of stakeholders.
- **Chapelle's Framework** offers a broader perspective, evaluating CALL activities, software, and learner performance. She emphasizes the use of SLA theory to define evaluation criteria such as language learning potential, learner fit, authenticity, and practicality. However, her framework may overlook non-linguistic factors like administrative needs or technological constraints.

While these frameworks provide useful starting points, they often lack the systematic rigor seen in formal evaluation disciplines.

3. Towards a Systematic Framework for CALL Evaluation

Building on the practices of formal evaluators, an improved framework for CALL evaluation should include:

1. Identifying the Evaluand

The evaluand is what is being evaluated: a software program, a CALL activity, a platform, or even a broader technological ecosystem.

2. Identifying Stakeholders

Stakeholders include all parties affected by the evaluation, such as students, teachers, administrators, developers, and funders. Their values and concerns must be incorporated.

3. Determining the Purpose of Evaluation

Evaluations can serve different purposes: selecting materials, providing feedback for improvement, assessing learner outcomes, or informing purchasing decisions.

4. Selecting the Type of Evaluation

Evaluations can be **formative** (for improvement) or **summative** (for decision-making). Other types include **goal-free**, **responsive**, and **developmental evaluations**, depending on the context.

5. Setting Evaluation Criteria

Criteria should be tailored to each evaluation's goals and stakeholders' values. Common criteria include language learning potential, usability, cost-effectiveness, learner engagement, and technical reliability.

6. Developing Evaluation Questions

Well-defined evaluation questions guide data collection and analysis. They should align with the evaluand, purpose, and criteria.

7. Collecting and Analyzing Data

Both **judgmental** (qualitative, such as expert reviews) and **empirical** (quantitative, such as experimental studies) methods may be used, depending on the type of evaluation.

8. Reporting Findings and Implications

Reports must be clear, accessible, and targeted to stakeholders' needs. Findings should guide decision-making, and care should be taken to make the results useful, even if evaluations are context-specific.

9. Evaluating the Evaluation (Metaevaluation)

Metaevaluation involves assessing the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation itself, ensuring standards of utility, feasibility, accuracy, propriety, and accountability are met.

4. Implications for CALL Evaluation

- Evaluators must adopt a more **systematic, flexible approach** that reflects both field-specific needs and general evaluation principles.
- Evaluations should consider a **broad range of evaluands** (materials, activities, programs) and stakeholders, not just learners and teachers.
- Emphasis should be placed on **stakeholder collaboration, context sensitivity**, and **continuous refinement** of the evaluation process.
- Reporting should aim to **inform practical decisions** and **enhance practice** rather than only producing academic knowledge.

Conclusion

A systematic approach to evaluation in CALL, drawing on established practices in formal evaluation, can produce more credible, useful, and actionable insights. Evaluations that are carefully planned, stakeholder-driven, and methodologically sound will better support the development and use of technology in language learning.