



Material Evaluation: 'Fun With English' Module

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ABSTRACT

Any module deemed necessary has to undergo a process of evaluation. The purpose of material evaluation is to reveal the strength and weakness of materials used, thus, offering vital information for improvement purposes. Therefore, the 'Fun With English' module is deemed fit for an evaluation as it has been carried out in three English motivation camps which were conducted as community service programmes by lecturers of the Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Pahang. It is hoped that this evaluation will shed some light on the success of the programmes as well as to identify the strength and weaknesses of the module itself. A framework of learner questionnaire (Ellis 1998:235) was adapted to serve this research. A number of 63 school children, who had the opportunity to experience the running of the module in the previous community service programme, were the respondents of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed after the completion of each activity. The answers given by the schoolchildren acted as data which offered essential output, suitable for a comprehensive analysis and understanding. The results are hoped to suggest language learning elements that need enhancement in order for UiTM to serve the community better.

Keywords: Material evaluation, Fun With English, language, motivation camp(s)

Introduction

'Fun With English' is an English language motivation camp organised by Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang through the Language Department's community service programme. The module has been used several times with primary schools namely Sekolah Rendah Kota Gelanggi, Sekolah Rendah Damak, Jerantut and a programme consisting of selected school children co-organised with Felda Jengka, Pahang. Thus, a material evaluation is deemed necessary to ensure that the module is relevant to the objectives of the programme as well as the needs of the participants. Since the module was tailored by in-house lecturers, this research shall offer useful information for the improvement of teaching and learning of English in UiTM or through any programme organised by the Language Department of UiTM Pahang and act as a reminder that teaching and learning processes should be fun.

Material Evaluation: An Overview

The present research follows the methodology of material evaluation. Materials are any regalia and representations that assist learning and teaching processes (McGrath 2002). These include designed materials, authentic materials, teacher-written or student-generated materials. Adaptation and modification of contents of good materials can be done based on suitability of future users (Brumfit 1979). Cunningsworth (1979:31) points out that 'a course material is not intrinsically good or bad - rather they are more or less effective in helping students to reach particular goals in specific situation'. Issues of learner factors (Mathew 1991, McDonough & Shaw 1993), learners' needs (Bruder 1978, Daoud and Celce-Murcia 1979 & Harmer 1991) and teacher factors (Bruder 1978 & Cunningsworth 1995) will also need to be added as an element of consideration in any material evaluation.

There are three basic methods in a material evaluation: impressionistic, checklist, and in-depth method. Impressionistic evaluation is concerned with obtaining a general impression of the material. Brief description of a book usually exemplifies this method of evaluation. A checklist evaluation requires a 'referred to list for comparison, identification or verification' (Collins English Dictionary 1992). Thus, it is systematic, cost effective, convenient and explicit (McGrath 2002). An in-depth method looks at language description (McGrath 2002), the issues covered, specific features (Cunningsworth 1995) and examination using predetermined questions (Johnson 1986).

McGrath's (2002) framework of material evaluation suggests that a full evaluation process should include first-glance, feedback and trial evaluation. A full picture of the framework is shown in Figure 1.

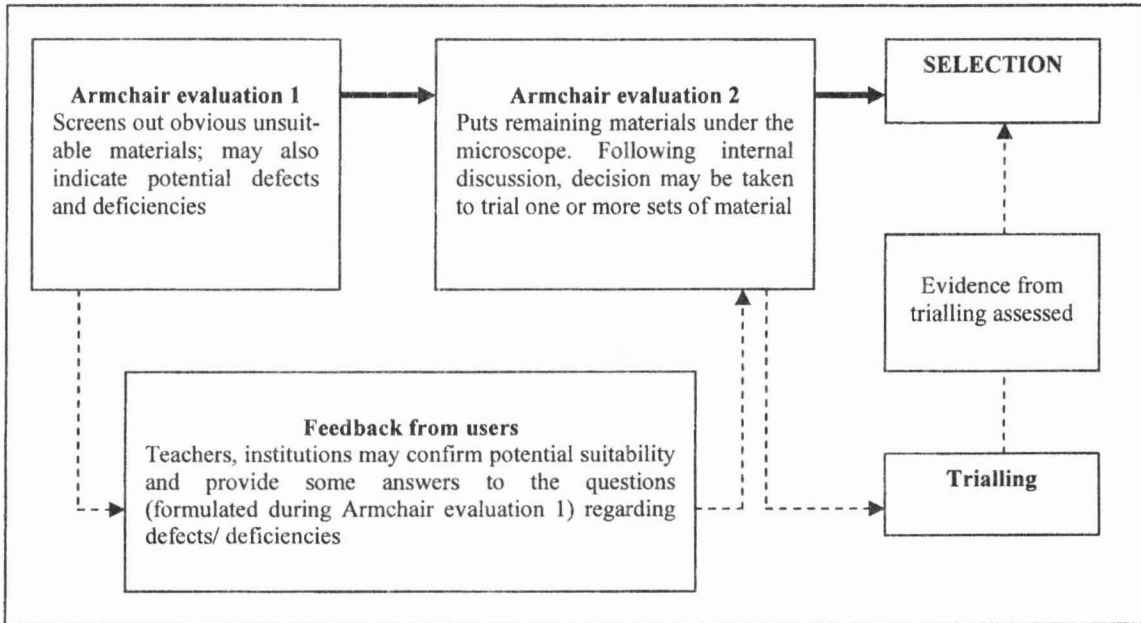


Fig. 1: Material Evaluation Framework (McGrath 2002:14)

In armchair evaluation 1 and 2, a teacher individually evaluates the material for selection. However, feedback from users would be useful for better analysis and decision making. Trialling the material suggests that the material to be actually trialled to determine its suitability.

Fun with English Module

The module was adopted from various sources and changes were made according to needs, i.e. students’ proficiency level, exposure and interest in learning English. The module has been carried out with the assistance of other fellow lecturers and diploma students in language motivation camps conducted as community service programmes.

The Tasks

There were seven tasks allocated at different stations. The participants were divided into groups and the groups had to take turns rotating between the seven stations. No two groups were allowed to be together at one station at any given time. The students had to complete all the tasks at each station together as a team. The following are the seven language tasks given to the participants:

Station 1: How’s Your Lugua?

This task requires the students to draw the *Lugua*, a fictional creature, based on the description given in the task sheet. The students need to discuss in their groups the distinctive features of the *Lugua*. They will need a dictionary to understand the features. The students then have to draw their own individual depiction of the *Lugua* in the handouts. Finally, they will choose the best depiction to be submitted as the *Lugua*. All handouts will be collected. Assessment is based on creativity and the most number of features correct.

Station 2: Matching Activities

The students will be given two small cards each containing dialogues/descriptions of a cartoon panel. They are then required to take turns matching the dialogues/descriptions to the cartoon panels pasted in front of the class within a specific time. The group with the most number of correct matches wins.

Station 3: The Hunt

The group is given a list of ten items that they have to find within a preset time limit of fifteen minutes. Each item found will be awarded a point. Failure to return to the starting point before time expires will result in the group being disqualified.

Station 4: Paper Cut

In this task, each group will be given a list of ten words. The group will have to construct a sentence for each word given. The words/letters for the sentences must be taken from the headlines of articles in the newspaper. Then, the participants have to cut all the words/letters, arrange and glue them on a piece of paper. The group must produce grammatically correct sentences in order to get points.

Station 5: Jumbled Letters

In this task, a worksheet containing a list of jumbled up letters and a pen will be given to each team leader. The participants are given 6 minutes to write down the correct words in the column beside the letters.

Station 6: Act It Out

For this task, each team will have to assign an actor/actress. The actor/actress will choose an envelope from the chief facilitator. He/she will go back to his/ her group. He/she is given 5 minutes to act out the words or phrases written on the word list. The other team members have to guess the words/phrases verbally.

Station 7: What's That?

In this task, each team will be assigned to a different category i.e. Table 1: Stationery, Table 2: Toiletries and Table 3: Kitchen utensils. Each group will be given 1 minute to look at the objects in each category. A worksheet will be given to the team leader by the facilitators. After 1 minute, the objects are covered. The group members will then start writing the names of the objects they have seen on the worksheet provided within 2 minutes. Finally, the facilitators collect the worksheet from the group and mark the answers.

Methodology

A learner questionnaire adopted from Ellis (1998) was distributed to 63 school children. As the students were divided into groups of 10, it was, therefore, easier for the lecturers cum facilitators to conduct a questionnaire answering session after they had completed a particular language task. This was done to help the students answer the questions accordingly while they could still remember everything related to the task. This method was deemed necessary as the choices of reasons on why they liked or disliked certain task were different from one task to another.

The Objectives

The overall purpose of this evaluation is to get better understanding of the benefits that the students gain from the module used in the language motivation programme. Through the analysis, investigation on the benefits, the flaws as well as areas of improvements of the materials will be carried out. It is hoped that the finding of the research shall offer insight of the success in motivating the students to like learning English as a whole and specifically those who underwent the program and to offer hints on the teaching and learning of English for UiTM students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The learner questionnaire developed by Ellis (1998) is designed to elicit learners' views on what helps them in their language learning (McGrath 2002). It is also meant for a narrow targeted evaluation where the correspondence can focus sharper in a micro evaluation task environment. The questionnaire was adapted to suit the different tasks that were adopted in the programme.

The questionnaire consists of three rank answers depending on the questions. The students have to choose between the relevant choices of 'very easy (rank 1)', 'quite easy (rank 2)' or 'with difficulty (rank 3)'; 'very enjoyable (rank 1)', 'quite enjoyable (rank 2)' or 'not enjoyable (rank 3)'; and 'very much (rank 1)', 'some (rank 2)' or 'not very much (rank 3)'. It also offers two subjective questions which require the students to highlight elements that they like, dislike or wish to do in completing the language task demanded.

63 questionnaires were distributed and collected. An analysis was done based on the data derived from the questionnaire. The data was analysed in terms of frequency count.

Findings

The tables below provide the results of the study.

Table 1: Students' Perception Towards the Activity

Name of Activities	Perception Towards the Activity		
	Very Easy	Quite Easy	With Difficulty
How's Your Lugua?	14(22%)	33(52%)	16(25%)
Matching Activities	24(38%)	26(41%)	13(21%)
The Hunt	26(41%)	22(35%)	15(24%)
Paper Cut	24(38%)	28(44%)	11(17%)
Jumbled Letters	11(17%)	33(52%)	19(30%)
Act It Out	20(32%)	21(33%)	22(35%)
What's That?	22(35%)	29(46%)	12(19%)
Total	141	192	108

Table 1 shows the result recorded for Question 1 in the questionnaire. Question 1 asked the students' perception towards the tasks given. The students had to choose between the relevant choices of 'very easy (rank 1)', 'quite easy (rank 2)' or 'with difficulty (rank 3)'. The recorded figures show that the majority of the students considered the task either very easy or easy. Among the participants, 22 students (35%) considered "act it out" and 19 students (30%) considered "jumbled letters" tasks to be difficult.

Table 2: Students' Feeling after Completing the Tasks

Name of Activities	Feeling after Completing the Task		
	Very Enjoyable	Enjoyable	Not Enjoyable
How's Your Lugua?	21(33%)	36(57%)	6(10%)
Matching Activities	33(52%)	28(44%)	2(3%)
The Hunt	40(63%)	22(35%)	1(2%)
Paper Cut	36(57%)	26(41%)	1(2%)
Jumbled Letters	28(44%)	34(54%)	1(2%)
Act It Out	39(62%)	24(38%)	0
What's That?	32(51%)	30(48%)	1(2%)
Total	229	200	12

Table 2 shows the result recorded for Question 2 in the questionnaire. Question 2 asked about the students' feelings after each task was completed. An interesting result was derived when almost all students (more than 95%) in each task stated it was either "very enjoyable" or "enjoyable". Only 6 students (9.5%) did not think that the task "How's Your *Lugua*" was enjoyable. Table 5 below will provide the reason why the students did not feel this activity enjoyable.

Table 3: Effectiveness of the Activities on Learning English

Name of Activities	Effectiveness of the Activities on Learning English		
	Very Much	Some	Not Very Much
How's Your Lugua?	16(25%)	45(71%)	2(3%)
Matching Activities	15(24%)	48(76%)	0
The Hunt	16(25%)	45(71%)	2(3%)
Paper Cut	21(33%)	41(65%)	1(2%)
Jumbled Letters	15(24%)	47(75%)	1(2%)
Act It Out	20(32%)	43(68%)	0
What's That?	24(38%)	39(62%)	0
Total	127	308	6

Table 3 shows the result recorded for Question 3 in the questionnaire which asked the students' opinions regarding the effectiveness of the activities in helping them to learn English. The majority of the students (more than 95%) claimed that the activities were effective or had some effectiveness to them in learning English. This shows that there is still much room for improvement in the module. Very few students (3%) said that "How's Your Lugua?" and "The Hunt" were not very effective for learning the language. This shows that in the respondent's point of view, both activities had only some effectiveness in learning English and, thus, needed improvements.

Table 4: The Reasons Why the Students like the Task

Name of Activities	Reason to like the Activity		
	a*	b*	c*
How's Your Lugua?	14(22%)	29(46%)	10(30%)
Matching Activities	19(30%)	8(13%)	36(57%)
The Hunt	21(33%)	12(19%)	30(48%)
Paper Cut	37(59%)	14(22%)	11(17%)
Jumbled Letters	26(41%)	23(37%)	14(22%)
Act It Out	25(40%)	8(13%)	30(48%)
What's That?	22(35%)	16(25%)	25(40%)

*refer to Appendix 1

Table 4 shows the results recorded for Question 4 in the questionnaire which asked the students to choose the reason why they liked the tasks. All 63 (100%) students answered the question by choosing either one of the reasons provided. For the task "Act It Out" the majority of the students liked the task because they (a) liked to learn by guessing words in English and (c) they could have fun while learning. In the "Matching Activities" activity, 36 students (57%) claimed that they liked the activity because they were given opportunity to use their own ability to complete the task.

Table 5: The Reasons Why the Students Dislike the Task

Name of Activities	Reason to dislike the activity		
	a**	b**	c**
How's Your <i>Lugua</i> ?	(14)22%	(28)44%	(17)27%
Matching Activities	(16)25%	(7)11%	(33)52%
The Hunt	(5)8%	(30)48%	(11)17%
Paper Cut	(9)14%	(26)41%	(18)29%
Jumbled Letters	(16)25%	(4)6%	(43)68%
Act It Out	(13)27%	(30)48%	(7)11%
What's That?	(44)70%	(7)11%	(11)17%

**refer to Appendix 2

Table 5 shows the results recorded for Question 5 in the questionnaire which asked the students to choose the reason why they disliked the tasks. All 63 students (100%) chose one of the reasons why they disliked “Jumbled Letters”, whereas for other tasks, some students did not choose any of the reasons given. This was proven by the total figure stated for each task. 43 students (68%) claimed that they could not guess the word as they were confused with the letters given in “Jumbled Letters”. 44 students (70%) said they disliked “What’s That?” activity because they did not know the name of the things shown and that consequently made it difficult for them to give the answer. The results from Table 2 stated that 6 students did not enjoy the activity “How’s Your *Lugua*?” This was because 28 students (44%) claimed that they were not skilful in drawing.

Discussion

The findings of the study showed that the materials used in the programmes were beneficial to the students as they could motivate the students in learning English. This was proven by the results recorded for the three questions on the perception, feeling and the effectiveness of the programme. The majority of the students said that the activities were easy, enjoyable to them, and helped them to learn English more effectively, however, with much room for improvement.

Results from Table 4 helped the researchers to identify the reasons why the students liked the activities. Most of the reasons chosen were inter-related as the students claimed that the tasks helped them to expand their vocabulary by guessing the words, improve their language skill by learning to spell the words in English and also to relate the English words with their surrounding environment.

However, there are areas that can still be improved. Though the students had fun doing the activities, there were certain elements which influenced their ability in completing the tasks, such as other skills which were not related to language. For example, some students claimed that they did not like “How’s Your *Lugua*?” because they were not good in drawing, which is actually a skill not everyone possesses. This indicates that some limitations on the part of the participants should be taken into account in order to make sure that all the activities are enjoyable especially for young language learners.

The findings recorded from Table 5 indicated that some students did not like certain tasks for different reasons. Most of the time the difficulty in interpreting the instruction brings limitation to the students to complete the task properly. Sometimes the students did not know the name of the things shown in “What’s That?” so they cannot give the correct answer. This could be overcome by providing multiple choices of words, rather than asking the students to come up with their own answer. This will eventually reduce the difficulty faced by the students to name things which they might not be familiar with.

Some activities conducted in the programme require the students to cooperate and work as a team. However, there should be more tasks created for individual performance as the students were happy if they were given the chance to try out the activity for themselves. Improvement on the tasks could be done by providing a balanced number of activities for individual as well as group task. This could help to bring more interest for young learners to learn and use the English language.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed feedback from participants who took part in a programme tailored for providing the

elements of fun in learning English. Although the respondents of the research were schoolchildren, there are few hints on how the same elements can be implemented and improvised in the teaching and helping UiTM students in their English language learning processes. Dull classrooms are disasters but a fun one will be enjoyed by all the students.

An analysis of the results was done and it was found that the tasks in the 'Fun with English' module were beneficial to the students as they could motivate the students in learning English. All the tasks were easy for the students to complete, enjoyable to them, and helped them to learn English more effectively. Nevertheless, there are some limitations involving other skills that are not directly related to language that need to be considered in the planning of the activities in order to reduce the complexity of a task. Improvement can be done by providing and planning balanced activities which require both individual and team effort so that the participants feel satisfied with their performance and this further develop their interest in learning the English language.

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Appendix 1

Question 4: 'I like this activity because...'

No	Activity	Reasons
1	Act It Out	a) I learn to guess words in English b) I get to know more English words c) I had fun while learning
2	How's Your <i>Lugua</i> ?	a) I learn adjectives in English b) I like imagining things c) I like drawing
3	What's That?	a) I learn more English words b) I get some help from friends c) I learn about nouns in English
4	The Hunt	a) I learn more English words b) I learn to identify the surroundings c) I learn about nouns in English
5	Jumbled Letter	a) I learn to spell in English b) I learn new English words c) I can help my friends
6	Matchmaker	a) I like cartoons b) I can guess the dialogues c) I have the opportunity to try my skills
7	Paper Cut	a) I learn to construct grammatically correct English sentences b) I learn to understand English sentences c) I can practice constructing sentences

Appendix 2

Question 5: 'I dislike this activity because...'

No	Activity	Reasons
1	Act It Out	a) I feared that I might do is wrong b) I didn't understand the words to be acted out c) I felt bored because I couldn't guess the answer
2	How's Your <i>Lugua</i> ?	a) I didn't know the adjectives in English b) I'm not good at drawing c) I don't like to imagine
3	What's That?	a) I couldn't answer because I didn't know the words in English b) I had never seen the items before c) I didn't know the uses of the items
4	The Hunt	a) I didn't know how to look for the items b) I didn't know what to look for c) I don't like walking aimlessly
5	Jumbled Letter	a) I couldn't guess the words b) I didn't knows items mentioned c) I couldn't guess because I was confused by the letters
6	Matchmaker	a) I didn't have enough time b) I had to compete with my team mates c) I didn't understand the sentences given
7	Paper Cut	a) I found the sentences to be very difficult b) I didn't understand the meaning of the sentences constructed c) I am not fluent at constructing English sentences

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