

THE ANALYSIS OF TWO ESL/EFL WEBSITES: *ENGLISHCLUB AND ACTIVITIES FOR ESL STUDENTS*

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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed two well known ESL/EFL websites namely *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* using the website evaluation framework proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2011). The writers found that *Activities for ESL Students* met 79.92% of the website evaluation criteria with 211 of the total score; while *EnglishClub* met 79.54% of the website evaluation criteria with 210 of the total score. Thus there was no significant difference between these two websites. Both *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* are good for ESL/EFL learners.

Keywords: Website, ESL/EFL Website and Website Evaluation.

“Technology has become ubiquitous. It assists us in our personal life, our academic life and our professional life,” (Duffy and McDonough, 2011, p.5). In academic life, educators use technology as materials, tools and equipment to improve their instructions in teaching and learning process. One of the examples is that some schools in United States are now trying to use computers, e-book, CD-Rooms and even website as their teaching and learning tools instead of printed textbook (Forcier and Descy, 2008). In Indonesia itself, to the writers’ personal observation, many teachers have required the students to search for a particular website to help their learning process. These examples show that “the advent of web marks a significant historical shift in the availability of teaching and learning tools,” (Leander, 2000, p.229).

In this study, the writers chose to evaluate two ESL/EFL websites. There were two reasons beyond this. First, ESL/EFL websites are English as A Second Language and English as A Foreign Language websites which can be used as reference to teach English in language classroom or for self study (Krajka, 2002). Second, ESL/EFL websites are online resources available in the internet for English language teaching and learning (Duffy and McDonough, 2011). They are suitable for both teachers and students as ESL/EFL learners (Dudeney, 2010). However, they need to be evaluated because “there are doubts about the quality of ESL/EFL-related websites out there”, (Krajka, 2002, p.2). In this study, the writers focused only on two websites which ranked as number one (*EnglishClub*) and as number eight (*Activities for ESL Students*) in a study by Krajka (2002) which was published in TESL-EJ Journal.

EnglishClub (<http://www.englishclub.com/>), is one of the most comprehensive and richest ESL/EFL sites on the Web in terms of materials (Ciaffaroni, 2006). It was established by Josef Essberger in Cambridge, England in 1997. It offers materials concerning language components (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary) and also language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The materials cover different resources such as lesson plans and worksheets to tutorials (Krajka, 2002). Besides, it provides everything the visitors need ranging from lessons for learners through jobs for teachers. It claims to help students or teacher learn English or teach English (English Club, n.d).

Activities for ESL Students (<http://a4esl.org>) is a part of *The Internet TESL Journal*’s project (The Internet TESL Journal, 2013). It was first published in 1995. It claims to help visitors learn English as second language (A4ESL, n.d). *Activities for ESL Students* has thousands contributions by many teachers since it enables teachers to share and write quizzes and activities that they have found useful in the classroom in the website. It offers 1000 activities such as exercises, quizzes, tests and puzzle to help visitors who learn English as a second language.

This study was to find out to what extent each of the website meets the website evaluation framework as proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2011). In addition the writers would like to find out the similarities and differences of *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* based on the website evaluation framework proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2011).

For evaluating the websites, the writers would use the framework of Hasan and Abuelrub (2011). Hasan and Abuelrub propose four general criteria for evaluating the quality of a website which are content quality, design quality, organization quality, and user-friendly quality (p.15).

A. Content Quality

“Content quality is an important dimension with the characteristic of websites’ information” (p.17). It deals with the whole volume of the website information. According to Tate (2010), content is a source of value and containers (products, services, transactions, etc) of websites. Without content, websites are simply valueless. In this characteristic, content quality covers:

- a. Timely is “the currency of websites’ information” (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011, p.18). It refers to the issue of updating the websites’ content concerning the time and sources. It can be measured through three indicators which are *up-to-date information*, *how frequency the website is updated* and *when the website was updated*.
- b. “Relevant is the extent to which websites’ information is comprehensive, complete and provide the right level of details” (p.18). It can be measured through five indicators which are *organization’s objectives*, *organization’s history*, *customers or audience*, *products of services* and *photography of organization’s facilities*.
- c. “Multilanguage/culture means the websites’ information is available in different language and suitable to different cultures” (p.19). It can be measured through two indicators which are *use different languages* and *present to different culture*.
- d. “Variety of presentation means that the web information is presented in different forms” (p.19). It can be measured through one indicator which is *the use of different forms* which refers to the use of different forms of audio or text.
- e. “Accuracy means that the web information is precise” (p.19). “It is the extent to which information is reliable and free from errors” (Tate, 2010, p.11). It can be measured through two indicators which are *precise information* and *identification of the information sources*.
- f. Objective means that the website content is presented without biases (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011). “It is the extent to which material expresses facts or information without distortion by personal feelings or other biases” (Tate, 2010, p.11). It can be measured through one indicator which is *objective presentation of information*.
- g. “Authority is the credibility or the level of user confidence of websites’ information” (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011, p.20). It can be measured through six indicators which are *organization’s physical address*, *sponsor of the site*, *manager of the site*, *specifications of site’s managers*, *identification of copyright* and *email to manager*. All these 6 indicators can be used to find out if the website information is the creation of a person or organization recognized as having definitive knowledge of a given subject area (Tate, 2010). Furthermore, those indicators refer to the credibility of user belief of the web content including the author’s qualification and publisher’s reputation (Tate, 2010).

B. Design Quality

“Design quality concerns with the visual characteristics of websites’ design that attract the users and encourage them to stay longer time viewing the website and reenter it” (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011, p.20). In this characteristic, design quality covers:

- a. “Attractive means that the design of the website is innovative and has an aesthetic effect by its graphics and animation” (p.20). It can be measured through three indicators which are *innovative*, *aesthetic effects* and *emotional appeal*.
- b. Appropriateness means that the design of the website is valid to the type of website (2011). It can be measured through four indicators which are *appropriate to the type of website*, *image used*, *balancing (image, color and text)* and *number screen per page*.

- c. “Color concerns with the effective use of background and text colors when designing the website” (p.21). It can be measured through two indicators which are *background* and *text color*.
- d. Image, sound, video concerns with the use of multimedia elements within the website design (2011). It can be measured through three indicators which are *number of image/sound/video*, *size of image/sound/video* and *alternative text for the multimedia elements*.
- e. “Text concerns with the characteristics of text used within websites’ pages” (p.21). It can be measured through eight indicators which are *consistency*, *readable*, *relative size*, *capital letters*, *breathing space*, *multiple headings*, *scrolling text* and *sequential appearance of text and images*.

C. Organization Quality

“Organization quality concerns with the logical grouping, categorization, or structure of websites’ elements in order to help the user to reach the required information quickly, navigate easily within the website, feel comfortable within its layout consistency, and keep him/her informative that he/she is still in the same website”.

(p.22)

In this characteristic, organization quality covers:

- a. Index is the guideline for the web user to know the content of the websites (2011). It can be measured through one indicator which is *index or links to all website pages*.
- b. Mapping is about the navigating of the website (2011). It can be measured through two indicators which are *adequate website map or navigation bar/menu* and *current page*.
- c. Consistency means that the layout of the web page is following the same patten (2011). It can be measured through one indicator which is *the general layout*.
- d. Links refers to the working performance of the connection tools of the website (2011). It can be measured through four indicators which are *working links*, *assistant links*, *worthy links* and *visiting pages*.
- e. “Logo means that to the symbols of the website is noticeable and clear” (p.23). It can be measured through one indicator which is *the organization’s logo*. The logo has to be noticeable in each page of the website.

D. User Friendly Quality

“User friendly quality concerns with many issues that help any user regardless of his/her education or experience to find the needed information within a reasonable time, the capability of the website to maintain specific level of performance when used, and interactivity or connectivity which emphasize the existence of interaction between user and website using different tools.”

(p.23)

In this characteristic, organization quality covers:

- a. Usability refers to the easiness of using the websites (2011). It can be measured through three indicators which are *easy (to use, understand, operate, find or navigate)*, *easy to find using search engine* and *what’s new*.
- b. Reliability means that the website is reliable and the users can depend on it (2011). It can be measured through seven indicators which are *URL*, *download speed*, *browser support*, *screen settings*, *number of ads*, *efficiency* and *availability*.
- c. Interactive features refer to the follow up of using the website (2011). It can be measured through seven indicators which are *instruction*, *help function*, *FAQ*, *internal search tool*, *feedback*, *review transaction* and *tracking order*.
- d. Security or privacy refers to the safety of using the websites (2011). It can be measured through two indicators which are *secure transaction* and *privacy*.
- e. Customization refers to the process of tailoring the website content. It can be measured through one indicator which is *the tailoring process itself* in which users can tailor the web content which fits to their needs.

METHODS

In this study, the writers used qualitative approach particularly documentary analysis. The data of this study was taken from two ESL/EFL websites namely *English Club* and *Activities for ESL students*. The writers focused on the content, design, organization and user friendliness of the websites. In analyzing the data, the writers used rubrics.

First, the writers found evaluation checklist which would be used to evaluate the websites. After that, the writers developed rubrics which would be used to evaluate the data. The rubrics were used as guidance to determine if the data met the evaluation criteria proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2011). In developing the rubrics, the writers consulted some references from book (*Teaching and Learning with Technology*), online journals (*Journal of Applied Computing and Informatics & Academy of Information and Management Sciences*) and websites (*Pearson Higher Education and RubiStar*). The writers had to consult other sources in developing rubrics because sometimes the framework proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2011) did not provide further details.

Finally, the writers revisited and reviewed each page of the *English Club and Activities for ESL students* to analyze the data while evaluating it using the rubrics and the table of analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overall the writers found that *Activities for ESL Students* met 79.92% of the website evaluation criteria with 211 of the total score; while *EnglishClub* met 79.54% of the website evaluation criteria with 210 of the total score. The details are provided below.

A. Content Quality

In content quality, *EnglishClub* met 76.25% of it; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 72.50% of it. *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* got the same score for six dimensions namely *timely, relevant, multilanguage/culture, variety of presentation* and *objective*. *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* got different score in two dimensions of content quality which were *authority* and *accuracy*.

EnglishClub met 75% of *authority*; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 66.66% of *authority*. Each website got different score for two indicators of *authority* namely *organization's physical address* and *specification of the site's manager*. For indicator namely *organization's physical address*, *EnglishClub* does not provide its physical address but the country where the website is located can be found; while *Activities for ESL Students* does not provide its physical address at all. Furthermore, for indicator namely *specification of the site's manager*, *EnglishClub* provides all information about its manager while *Activities for ESL Students* provides its manager's name and contact information with no credentials about him/her.

EnglishClub met 100% of *accuracy*; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 87.50% of *accuracy*. *EnglishClub* was evaluated as free from errors while *Activities for ESL Students* contains one spelling error on its quiz title. The title of *Activities for ESL Students'* quiz should be buildings but it was written buildlings.

From the explanation above, it could be seen that in content quality, *EnglishClub* is more reliable than *Activities for ESL Students* in terms of *accuracy* and *authority*. The writers think that *EnglishClub* content is good. Accuracy shows that *EnglishClub* content is in high quality. It is written clearly and free of mistakes. Besides, authority shows that the author of the website is a reliable source.

The writers also think that *Activities for ESL Students* content is also good. Although it has spelling error yet its content is unique. Most of its products (quizzes, tests, exercises and puzzles) have thousands contributions from many teachers. The zone where it seems unclear is in authority. It does not provide full credentials of its manager. It provides only the manager's name and contact information.

B. Design Quality

In design quality, *English club* met 78.75% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 81.25% of it. *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* got the same score only for one dimension of content quality namely *color*. They got different score in four dimensions of design quality namely *attractive, appropriateness, image/sound/video* and *text*.

EnglishClub met 83.33% of *attractive* while *Activities for ESL Students* met 66.66% of *attractive*. Both of them got the same score for *aesthetic effects*. They were different in two indicators of *attractive* namely *innovative* and *emotional appeal*. For indicator namely *innovative*, *EnglishClub* was evaluated as more *innovative* because most of its pages' design is colorful. Besides, they use different specific layout for the pages in which they have pictures, graphic and table. While only few pages of *Activities for ESL Students* were evaluated as colorful which are pages that require the use of JavaScript, Java or a special plugin such as Flash. They also use different specific layout for the pages.

For indicator namely *emotional appeal*, *EnglishClub* was evaluated as more emotionally appealing compare to *Activities for ESL Students*. Most of *EnglishClub* pages use pictures, animations and graphics which can make users feeling happy visiting the website. While only few of its pages of *Activities for ESL Students* use animations and different background color which can make users feeling happy when visiting the website.

EnglishClub met 68.75% of *appropriateness*; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 81.25% of *appropriateness*. Both of them got the same score in terms of *appropriate to the type of website*, *image used within it serve functional purposes* and *balancing (image, color and text)*. Yet they were different in *number screen per page*. *EnglishClub* has four screens in one page while *Activities for ESL Students* contain two screens in one page.

In *image/sound/video*, *EnglishClub* met 66.66% of it; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 100% of it. Both of them get the same score for one indicator namely *alternative text for the multimedia elements*. Yet, they were different in two indicators namely *number of image/sound/video* and *size of image/sound/video*. Most of *EnglishClub's* pages have more than three images, one sound and one video within the same pages. In its listening part section, the pages consist of one video and eight sounds in one page. Furthermore, *EnglishClub's* images/sounds/videos use bigger size. On the other hand, each page of *Activities for ESL Students* has not more than 3 images/sounds/videos. Generally, each page of *Activities for ESL Students* has no essential image, one sound and no videos. Furthermore, the overall website pages use small size of *image/sound/video*.

In text, *EnglishClub* met 81.25% of it; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 75% of it. They were similar in five indicators of text which are *capital letters*, *breathing space*, *multiple headings*, *scrolling text* and *sequential appearance of text and images*. They were different in three indicators of text namely *consistency*, *readable* and *relative size*. *EnglishClub* use consistent text elements (style and type), readable text and appropriate text size throughout the website pages; while only few pages of *Activities for ESL Students* use onsistent text elements (style and type), readable text and appropriate text size.

In design quality, it could be seen that *Activities for ESL Students* is superior to *EnglishClub* in terms of *appropriateness* and *image/sound/video*. The writers think that the design of *Activities for ESL Students* is good. It perfectly meets the indicator of *image/sound/video*. The zone where it seems to falter is the *emotional appeal*. It lacks of multimedia and has no essential images. On the other hand, the writers think that although *EnglishClub* is not superior to *Activities for ESL Students* in terms of design yet its design is not bad. It is emotionally and visually pleasing.

C. Organization Quality

In organization quality, *EnglishClub* met 80.55% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 83.33% of it. *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL students* were similar in one dimension of organization quality. Both of them met to the same extent of *consistency*. They were different in four dimensions of organization quality. They met to different extent of *index*, *mapping*, *links* and *logo*.

Activities for ESL Students does not provide index, mapping, links and logo in all of its pages; while *EnglishClub* provides them throughout its pages. *Activities for ESL Students* only provides those features in most of its pages which are related to its objective such as quizzes, test and exercises pages.

In terms of links, *EnglishClub* met 62.50% of it while *Activities for ESL Students* met 100% of it. They were different in three indicators of links namely *assistant links*, *worthy links* and *visiting pages*. In organization quality, *Activities for ESL Students* is superior to *EnglishClub* in

terms of *links*. Yet both of them are well organized, easy to use, easy to understand and easy to find.

D. User Friendly Quality

In user friendly quality, *English club* met 83.82% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 85.29% of it. In user friendly quality, *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* got 100% score for two dimensions namely *security/privacy* and *customization*. The websites got different score in three dimensions of user friendly quality which are *usability*, *reliability* and *interactive feature*.

In user friendly quality, *Activities for ESL Students* is more user friendly than *EnglishClub* in terms of *usability* and *reliability*. The overall pages of *Activities for ESL Students* load quickly and do not require any sophisticated computer equipment. Users with an out dated computer and browsers which are not ready with the latest web standard could get the same benefits as users with web application.

On the other hand, *EnglishClub* is not as user friendly as *Activities for ESL Students*. The pages load slowly, the multimedia elements within it are in large size, it is not supported with many browsers, it cannot work in many different screen settings. Thus, users who use mobile phone, internet explorer and out-dated computer with no latest web standard will have difficulties in accessing the website.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In content quality, *EnglishClub* met 76.25% of it; while *Activities for ESL Students* met 72.50% of it. In design quality, *English club* met 78.75% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 81.25% of it. In organization quality, *EnglishClub* met 80.55% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 83.33% of it. In user friendly quality, *English club* met 83.82% of it; while *Activities for ESL students* met 85.29% of it. Overall the writers found that *Activities for ESL Students* met 79.92% of the website evaluation criteria with 211 of the total score; while *EnglishClub* met 79.54% of the website evaluation criteria with 210 of the total score. Both *EnglishClub* and *Activities for ESL Students* are good websites for those who learn ESL/EFL.

The writers hope that the findings of this study would give contribution to the studies of website evaluation, increase the teachers' and students' awareness of the use of websites for their language teaching and learning process. The writers also hope that the further study with similar topic can be conducted by adding more websites to be evaluated. Another suggestion for the further study is to ask assistance from other people (teacher/students) to evaluate ESL/EFL websites.

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