

[Book Review]

**Evaluating Computer-Assisted Language Learning:  
An Integrated Approach to Effectiveness Research in CALL**

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<b>Title</b>	Evaluating Computer-Assisted Language Learning: An Integrated Approach to Effectiveness Research in CALL
<b>Author</b>	Jonathan Leakey
<b>Publication year</b>	2011
<b>Publisher</b>	Peter Lang Publisher Inc.
<b>Type of product</b>	Book(paper)
<b>ISBN-10/ISBN-13</b>	3034301456 / 978-3034301459

In his book, Jonathan Leakey critiques and addresses the evaluation of computer assisted language learning (CALL). Leakey uses examples from a wide range of contexts to discuss CALL evaluation and challenge current ideas of assessment. In doing so, Leakey identifies and clarifies a large number of variables involved in the effective use of technology for language learning. This book has 9 total chapters, each one with a specific focus, including insights and perspectives from various scholars and opinions from Leakey.

In Chapter 1, Leakey addresses the skepticism that has surrounded the use of CALL since its inception roughly fifty years ago. By examining the 4 main language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), this chapter acknowledges a need for a clear, accurate, and reliable model of CALL evaluation. It also points out through many qualitative studies (though none are listed as examples) that to date there is no one rubric or set of concrete guidelines available to provide CALL educators with a fair, complete, and consistent model of evaluation.

In Chapter 2 Leakey addresses the history of CALL and closely examines the literature surrounding CALL. He points out that, while CALL is in its 5<sup>th</sup> decade, the field is still emerging. Because of a surge in technology use, there have been numerous improvements and advancements which solidify the need and opportunity for enhancing pedagogy in classrooms. Leakey cites Pederson as a precursor to Chapter 6 and programs, when Pederson points out that “one obvious problem in CALL is to provide evidence that a given software package is designed and programmed effectively” (p. 55). It is the evolution and emergence of CALL which evaluates the necessity for clear assessment criteria without forgetting about all aspects of CALL, such as software efficacy. Leakey tells readers that the instructor and structure must be solid and program is in use. Programs are seen in more detail later in chapter 6, but this introduction speaks to the importance of software within CALL.

In Chapter 3 Leakey introduces what he calls the 3 Ps, which are pedagogy, platforms, and programs which he considers to be the foundations of CALL. Leakey also looks at the various components of CALL, noting the shift from asking *if* CALL is effective to focusing on *how* it is

effective in terms of teaching and learning. This chapter is crucial to the book; it outlines solid frameworks for future studies as well as reminds readers that CALL can and does lead to language acquisition.

Chapter 4 gives readers more specific routes to use for CALL evaluation. Two major models or routes are suggested as well as detailed criteria by Chapelle that instructors can utilize in their classrooms and may incorporate the 3 P's mentioned earlier in Chapter 3. The first model is a judgmental evaluation of twelve CALL criteria within CALL instruction (listed on page 75). The second model follows the Qualitative & Quantitative measures route (also listed on 75) and both models are explained and detailed by Leakey, Chapelle, and Dunkel. This chapter also incorporates a myriad of charts and graphs to depict information visually and support the content to this point.

In Chapter 5 Leakey acknowledges an important idea about CALL. He cites Felix (2004, 2005), who points out that there cannot be any one perfect design model because CALL is just too vast, and with so many variables and criteria, looking for one accurate model is impractical. He notes that motivation and engagement are key components to any model and are also pivotal to some studies cited in the text. These themes are examined more deeply in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Chapters 6-8 focus on the 3 P's. Leakey begins with platforms, and he clearly defines what a digital platform is and what is currently available in terms of identifying and evaluating platforms. An interesting analogy is given on page 133 when he compares a platform to the skeleton, and software as the muscle. This gives readers an idea of how these two specifically work together in harmony. Here Leakey, Clarke, Dunkel, and Pederson agree that the 3 P's are individual entities and these instructors consider the synergy between each P. All contributors to this chapter help explain the need for a solid foundation within CALL.

Programs, or software, are the key elements discussed in Chapter 7. Leakey describes student feedback within various case studies and research projects and suggests evaluating programs such as TellMeMore, versions 7-9, within CALL. This chapter is full of detail regarding program use and assessment and provides readers with a wealth of knowledge and information to take into the classroom, lab, or to their own research. Programs are no doubt a crucial part of CALL; they power the 2<sup>nd</sup> P in this chapter.

Leakey goes on to define and explain the final P, pedagogy, in Chapter 8. Chapter 8 emphasizes TOLD (Technology and Oral Language Development) and BLINGA (which is not spelled out besides saying the B is for Blended). These two projects were designed to "identify and correlate learning gains with a number of different variables" (p. 198). TOLD assesses oral skills, and BLINGA focuses on blended language learning and evaluation. Leakey uses many charts to try to tie concepts and results together in order to provide organization and clarity to very complex studies. According to Leakey, CALL presents opportunities for students to work with teachers instead of teachers working with students.

In the final chapter Leakey attempts to piece together the concepts, definitions, and studies presented in the previous chapters while embracing the complexity of the CALL. He also forecasts what to expect in terms of CALL and its role in the education of language learners, such as what CALL innovations may be on the way and how to respond to them in terms of assessment and usability.

Overall this book provides readers with some exceptional ideas and concepts within the scope of CALL with a few areas of improvement. Leakey set out to help educators evaluate CALL by presenting detailed accounts of what some scholars such as Chapelle, Dunkel, Clarke, and Pederson are doing and be providing feedback for various assessment methods related to

CALL. These stakeholders contribute a plethora of case study examples or scholarly insight which lends credibility to the text. He has successfully provided answers for his inquiry at the beginning of the book by presenting arguments supported by empirical evidence. By the end of the book the reader can see great depth in terms of scholarly research and evaluation as well as ideas that instructors can take into their own classrooms. Readers may want to find one clear strategy to assess CALL pedagogy but as Leakey expresses earlier, there is no one method. What Leakey does do is provide a plethora of methods and ideas by various scholars and experts so teachers can choose their own rubric or evaluation tool, while Leakey offers opinion and analysis of research to help instructors of CALL. Although some readers may appreciate a more understandable explanation and guide for CALL, there are definitions and arguments spread throughout the text. The content is highly academic and beginners may struggle with the concepts and terminology. Leakey has written a useful book for aspiring CALL instructors or learners with a high level of experience and while the book has a great number of charts and tables which may be useful, they sometimes become redundant and may distract from the content. Also, some of the studies cited may seem confusing because readers are only exposed to snippets. In summary this book offers depth to the scope of CALL and will certainly benefit anyone interested in this discipline. ESL students comprise a large portion of elementary, high school, and university populations and using technology is often an effective way to support language teaching. Evaluation needs to be clear and this book should give direction to instructors looking for new models of assessment.

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