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The MICOOL App Rubric

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This document outlines all descriptive information, evaluative questions and specific scored responses comprising the App Evaluation process designed for the *Mobile Intercultural Cooperative Learning* (MICOOL) project, 2015-2017.

The rubric provides for a systematic assessment of a given educational app's suitability for deployment in the primary or secondary school classroom, and draws the reviewer's attention to sets of thematic analysis criteria toward the completion of a useful and coherent set of comparable metrics describing the app. The rubric facilitates a standardised format for reporting of balanced scores for key themes (See: Scoring, below), allowing researchers and educators immediate evaluative ratings for apps they might deploy.

The rubric may be copied, deployed and used under **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC 4.0)** licence. This document outlines the rubric in full, providing all points of data collection in detail, for use by researchers.

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Structure

The MICOOL App Rubric comprises 5 sections; the first of which outlines essential and **recommended descriptive information** to collect, and the latter four of which comprise thematic sets of evaluative statements, with 5-point scale agreement assessed using specific responses. The thematic sections are: **Instruction**, the quality of instructional content provided within the app; **Design**, the quality and effectiveness of the app's design and presentation; **Assessment**, the effectiveness and suitability of included assessment methods, if any; and **Technical**, the robustness and reliability of the app and the availability of support for it.

Scoring (see below) for statement agreement is from 0 to 4. Thematic evaluative sections are enumerated 1 to 4, with section 0 for recommended descriptive data collection. Statements and responses in each section are sub-numbered in an expected hierarchy. Thus, a specific level of agreement with a particular thematic question may be directly referred to in reports based on the rubric.

E.g. 2.7.3 indicates a 3-point score for the seventh question of section two; "Limitations for those with learning difficulties are minimal and identifiable".

Scoring

An app's score derived from the MICOOL App Rubric is presented as an overall percentage, calculated as the mean of the four thematic sections, which are also given as percentages.

Thus, an example score of 85:(96,80,72,92) gives the reader an overall sense of the quality of an app (85%) and a more specific indication that this score is most strongly based on instructional content and technical robustness, with in-app assessment a weaker area.

Calculation of the overall score presentation in the format: $X_{\text{overall}}: (x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$, with each of the sectional scores expressed as a percentage of the maximum score (number of questions x 4), and the X_{overall} score the mean of these. Note that a special case exists for Section 3 (Assessment), such that some apps contain no assessment elements but are still relevant to the classroom and may benefit from inclusion in evaluation reports – examples are reference apps, historical event apps, etc. In such cases, the x_3 score is marked as not applicable (NA), these questions are ignored, and the overall score is calculated as the mean of the other sections. When reported, it is clear to the reader that the app contains no assessment, but the evaluation metrics of the rubric still provide an overall sense of the utility of the app, and of its content, design, and robustness - e.g. 75: (80, 70, NA, 75). Score calculation and formatting is automatic in the Google Form version of this rubric.

Data Collection: Description & Evaluation

The following sections outline the descriptive data and thematic evaluation criteria scores to be collected for a reviewed app:

0. Resource Description

The following descriptive information should be captured for an evaluated app:

- a) The full name of the app, and its publisher, and version number
- b) The platform(s) on which it is available
- c) The specific platform and device on which it is being evaluated
- d) The subject area the app relates to
- e) The stated age range provided by the publisher
- f) The stated education level provided by the publisher
- g) The assessed education level by the reviewer
- h) The date the app has last been updated

It may be useful to additionally collect:

- i) The download or sale URL for the app
- j) The cost, if applicable, and whether in-app purchases are required
- k) Information about platform-specific limitation (e.g. requires a particular model or generation of device)

In keeping with good practice, the reviewer should be clearly identified, the date of the review logged, and any additional qualitative notes recorded.

The following **initial descriptive criteria** should be then assessed for agreement with the given statements, on the 5-point scales indicated, with 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 points allocated.

0.1 *“The app is appropriate to a classroom learning context”*

- 0.1.0 Not at all appropriate. The app cannot be used in the classroom due to aspects of its design or interaction requirements.
- 0.1.1 Mostly inappropriate. The app may be adapted with some difficulty for highly limited classroom utility.
- 0.1.2 Somewhat appropriate. The app may be deployed in a classroom setting, with preparation, and use is limited.
- 0.1.3 Mostly appropriate. The app may be quickly deployed with minimal preparation, and used extensively.
- 0.1.4 Wholly appropriate. The app may be readily and effectively deployed in classrooms without additional effort.

0.2 *“The app is appropriate to an independent learning context”*

- 0.2.0 Not at all appropriate. The app cannot be used independently by learners and requires collaboration, cooperation, or essential supporting resources.
- 0.2.1 Mostly inappropriate. The app is largely unsuited to independent learning, but some aspects may be adapted.
- 0.2.2 Somewhat inappropriate. The app has elements designed for independent learning, but remaining dependencies on collaboration, cooperation, or intervention.

- 0.2.3 Mostly appropriate. The app is suitable for an independent learner, with only minimal dependencies on other persons or resources.
- 0.2.4 Wholly appropriate. The app is entirely suited to independent learning.

0.3 “The app is provided with supporting learning materials or resources”

- 0.3.0 No additional learning resources are provided by the publisher, or other sources.
- 0.3.1 Few or poor additional resources are provided by the publisher, or other sources.
- 0.3.2 A small range of quality resources are available.
- 0.3.3 An extensive range of quality resources are available.
- 0.3.4 An extensive range of quality additional resources are available and resources continue to be actively produced by the publisher or a community.

Responses to these initial criteria do not contribute to the **score**, which is derived from the four thematic sections of evaluation that follow.

1. Instruction

The first thematic section of the evaluation criteria deals with the **instructional content** of the app, assessing the clarity, reliability, authority and appropriateness of content. In each case, assessment should be made of agreement with the given statements using the specific indications for the 5-point response scale.

1.1 “The learning objectives are clearly defined”

- 1.1.0 No objectives are stated or discernible within the app.
- 1.1.1 Learning objectives are highly vague or unspecific.
- 1.1.2 Learning objectives are mostly clear as intentions, but not linked to the content or activity.
- 1.1.3 Learning objectives are clearly set out but not clearly linked to specific areas of content.
- 1.1.4 Clear, well-defined learning objectives are set out, and are linked to content within the app.

1.2 “The content is appropriate to the stated education level”

- 1.2.0 The content is wholly inappropriate to a stated or implied education level.
- 1.2.1 The content is mostly inappropriate to the level, or the educational expectations are too broad, limiting utility.
- 1.2.2 The content is somewhat inappropriate to a defined level, requiring intervention.
- 1.2.3 The content is mostly appropriate to a defined level, with minimal exceptions requiring intervention.
- 1.2.4 The content is wholly appropriate to a clearly defined educational level.

1.3 “The content contains no inaccuracies or errors”

- 1.3.0 Many and varied errors and inaccuracies are readily identifiable in the content, making it unsuitable for use.
- 1.3.1 The content contains some significant, but well-identified errors or inaccuracies, allowing limited use of the app with preparation.
- 1.3.2 The content contains only minor inaccuracies, which may be easily mitigated in use.
- 1.3.3 The content contains no inaccuracies, but minor errors in presentation are detectable (e.g. typos).
- 1.3.4 The content is entirely free of detectable errors or inaccuracies and may be wholly relied upon in use.

1.4 “The content is free of cultural or social bias, stereotypes or potentially offensive material”

- 1.4.0 The content is certain to offend, or contains readily identifiable social, cultural, or racial biases detrimental to its use.
- 1.4.1 Content is somewhat biased or potentially offensive and would require care if deployed.
- 1.4.2 Some stereotypes are presented which require intervention by the teacher to mitigate, in all cases.
- 1.4.3 The content contains mild stereotyping or other biases, which may require intervention in very specific cases.

1.4.4 The content is entirely free of bias or offense.

1.5 “The content provides for generalizable or transferable learning”

- 1.5.0 The content is arcane and highly specific, and cannot be applied elsewhere.
- 1.5.1 The content is difficult to apply more widely and problematic as a source of generalizable learning.
- 1.5.2 The content contains some transferable or generalizable learning opportunities.
- 1.5.3 The content contains many transferable or generalizable points of learning for the specific subject area.
- 1.5.4 The content contains many transferable or generalizable points of learning or development of skills which extend into other subject areas in addition.

1.6 “Content in the app is well organised and structured”

- 1.6.0 Content is so poorly set out as to be detrimental to use.
- 1.6.1 Content is repetitious, poorly sectioned, or presented without sufficient structure to aid clarity.
- 1.6.2 The content contains many weaknesses in structure which impede easy progress through the material.
- 1.6.3 The content is well organised but contains minor impediments to structure (e.g. slight repetition)
- 1.6.4 Content organisation is exemplary, providing for clarity of structure which maintains interest.

1.7 “The content is appropriately sequenced”

- 1.7.0 Content is disjointed, making it impossible to link tasks or information.
- 1.7.1 Content is poorly sequenced, making topical or sectional links difficult.
- 1.7.2 Content sequencing contains some gaps or problems.
- 1.7.3 The content presentation has a logical progression.
- 1.7.4 The content is presented in clear unambiguous stages, building usefully on previous content.

1.8 “The content is endorsed by an authoritative source”

- 1.8.0 No endorsement or links to an authority or curriculum.
- 1.8.1 Some endorsements are present from potentially relevant sources.
- 1.8.2 Content is endorsed by a single reliable source.
- 1.8.3 Content has been reviewed and deemed appropriate by a national department of education.
- 1.8.4 The content is endorsed by multiple reliable authorities, following thorough review, and is deemed appropriate for specific curricula.

1.9 “The content is usefully mediated”

- 1.9.0 Content is poorly presented in a limited medium (e.g. plain text only).
- 1.9.1 Content is limited in mediation, or mediation is unhelpful (e.g. intrusive inclusion of images or videos).
- 1.9.2 Content shows some useful mediation, supporting clarity for the learner.
- 1.9.3 Content is diversely mediated, adding interest but with potential for some minor distraction.

1.9.4 Exemplary mediation, with various media enhancing the content with clarity and utility.

The score for this section (x_1) is calculated as the total points accrued based on the 0-4 available for a specified level of agreement with each statement above, expressed as a percentage of the maximum score – the number of questions times four (36).

2. Design

The second thematic section of the evaluation criteria assesses how the content is presented, addressing aspects of the app's **design, usability and accessibility** for learners. The possible modes of interaction and activity are investigated, to draw attention to potential obstacles in use for learners. Again, evaluation is based on agreement with the statements provided, using the specific 5-point response scales.

2.1 *“The design is appropriate to the education level”*

- 2.1.0 The design requires interaction or presents information in a manner that is entirely inappropriate for the intended education level.
- 2.1.1 Learners at the stated or implied education level may struggle with some aspects of the interface or interaction.
- 2.1.2 The app's design presents no substantial difficulties of access or use but may be found patronising or otherwise jarring by users.
- 2.1.3 The design is largely appropriate, with some aspects of interaction or presentation slightly problematic.
- 2.1.4 The design is highly apt for the education level, meeting all expectations.

2.2 *“The interface is clear and intuitive in use”*

- 2.2.0 Interface elements are detrimentally unclear in their function or purpose.
- 2.2.1 Elements of the interface do not work as expected and are likely to cause confusion and require substantial care.
- 2.2.2 Some aspects of the interface require explanation, specific manuals, or assistance for correct use.
- 2.2.3 The interface is largely clear and requires only minimal learning to use.
- 2.2.4 All aspects of the visual presentation and the methods of interaction in the app's interface are unambiguous and immediately intuitive.

2.3 *“Learning progress is made clear”*

- 2.3.0 The design offers no visual or text indication of the stage of progress or remaining duration of the current task or section.
- 2.3.1 Progress may be inferred indirectly from the interface by secondary means (e.g. the size of a scroll bar), but is not otherwise reinforced.
- 2.3.2 Progress is stated using chapters or numbered sections.
- 2.3.3 Progress bars or other visual indicators situate the user within each section.
- 2.3.4 Progress in the current individual task, as well as in wider completion of learning outcomes is always clearly understood.

2.4 *“The user can navigate content easily”*

- 2.4.0 The design impedes navigation or does not allow the user to move between sections or tasks. The user lacks any sense of place in the content.
- 2.4.1 The user can move to general sections without restarting the app, but may encounter difficulties with skipping or moving through content.
- 2.4.2 The user can navigate between sections using a menu but may have difficulty finding specific information. Menu systems may be cumbersome.
- 2.4.3 The user can easily navigate using a reliable menu system, but cannot skip or repeat tasks or sections.

2.4.4 The user can quickly navigate to any content and situate themselves in the wider context of the app's content. Menus are easily accessible from all parts of the app.

2.5 “The user can exit and return to learning in progress”

2.5.0 The resource provides no way to save progress whatsoever. Exiting requires restarting completely.

2.5.1 Upon exiting and returning, the user must repeat a section from the beginning.

2.5.2 The user can save progress and exit by using a menu or button to do so. Exiting by closing the app will not allow progress to continue after restarting.

2.5.3 The user can usually exit arbitrarily, but some tasks or activities will not be saved.

2.5.4 The user can arbitrarily exit the app or the current task and their progress is always saved.

2.6 “The design facilitates multiple user profiles”

2.6.0 No profiles are present; the app cannot save progress, information or assessments for more than one user.

2.6.1 The app can save basic settings or progress for two or more users, but it is difficult to switch or access.

2.6.2 The app can save all progress and settings for multiple users, but requires an account or other service sign-up.

2.6.3 Full native profile system allowing distinct saving of data and settings per user without any additional setup.

2.6.4 Full native profile system allowing distinct saving of data and settings per user, and transfer of profile to other devices.

2.7 “The app design shows consideration for users with learning difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia, Visual impairment)”

2.7.0 The app shows no considerations for accessibility and may actively impede users with any of a number of learning difficulties.

2.7.1 The design contains elements that would severely disrupt users with a specific learning difficulty.

2.7.2 The design could limit some users, requiring on-going assistance or intervention.

2.7.3 Limitations for those with learning difficulties are minimal and identifiable.

2.7.4 The resource shows clear consideration of a variety of potential learner difficulties and best practice in design for accessibility.

2.8 “The design is responsive and adaptable to devices”

2.8.0 The presentation or interface is highly specific to particular device dimensions or orientation and will not work outside of this.

2.8.1 The app is usable on a variety of devices, but interface elements are poorly scaled or illegible on some.

2.8.2 The interface is usable on most devices, but does not responsively adapt and may waste screen space or skew elements.

2.8.3 The interface is largely responsive and works well across devices, but requires a particular orientation.

2.8.4 The interface and content is fully responsive to device and orientation and widely usable without impairment at a variety of dimensions.

2.9 “The design usefully highlights new concepts or information introduced”

- 2.9.0 Introduction of new knowledge is never highlighted.
- 2.9.1 Attempts by the app to highlight new knowledge are confusing and counter-productive.
- 2.9.2 New knowledge is inconsistently or poorly highlighted.
- 2.9.3 Highlighting of new concepts or information is present but may be mildly intrusive to learning.
- 2.9.4 Newly introduced information is highlighted and reinforced by aspects of the design, without breaking the flow of the task.

2.10 “Controls are present for progress rate or difficulty”

- 2.10.0 The rate of progress or difficulty is set and cannot be changed.
- 2.10.1 Only crude overall settings exist (e.g Easy – Hard)
- 2.10.2 Difficulty settings are present and well-explained but do not effect progress rate through content.
- 2.10.3 Difficulty settings are present and also allow for content to be skipped or progressed differently.
- 2.10.4 The difficulty level and rate of progress are responsive to ongoing assessment of learner level and fully controllable through intuitive controls.

The score for this section (x_2) is calculated as the total points accrued based on the 0-4 available for specified level of agreement with each statement above, expressed as a percentage of the maximum score – the number of questions times four (40).

3. Assessment

These criteria examine the presence and structure of assessment within the app. Uniquely among the four sections of the rubric, these statements are all inapplicable in the event that the app has no assessment. Evaluation of apps without assessment should skip this section and these should have their overall score calculated based on the mean of the other thematic sections and be reported NA for Assessment. E.g. 85: (90, 80, NA, 85).

3.1 “Assessment processes in the app are active and engaging”

- 3.1.0 Assessment is entirely passive, requiring no action by the user – e.g. showing a set of questions and answers together.
- 3.1.1 Assessment processes are minimally active and require only basic interaction – e.g. True/False choices.
- 3.1.2 Assessment requires activity using pre-defined actions – E.g. multiple choice.
- 3.1.3 Assessment actively requires text input from the user in addition to pro-forma responses.
- 3.1.4 Assessment actively requires many forms of input, and maintains the user’s interest through engaging variety and interaction.

3.2 “Assessment methods are appropriate to education level”

- 3.2.0 The assessment present is detrimentally unsuited to the education level.
- 3.2.1 The assessment present is mostly inappropriate to the education level, with some points of assessment usable.
- 3.2.2 The assessment present is mostly suitable with some identifiable and avoidable points of assessment, which are not.
- 3.2.3 The assessment present is appropriate to the education level but requires intervention or guidance in addition.
- 3.2.4 The assessment present is wholly appropriate to the education level and may be undertaken by learners of that level without additional instruction.

3.3 “Assessments are regular and focussed”

- 3.3.0 Assessment is present only in a single general summary event.
- 3.3.1 Assessment is present at several stages, but is poorly linked to the overall content structure.
- 3.3.2 Multiple points of assessment are present and linked to sections.
- 3.3.3 Assessment is highly regular within sections, though a separate activity in the app, requiring some interruptions for testing.
- 3.3.4 Assessment is a continuous incorporated process, closely linked to current topics of learning.

3.4 “Assessment results are clearly reported to the learner”

- 3.4.0 Only summary results (E.g. letter grades, or star ratings) are reported.
- 3.4.1 Results are reported as percentages or as the specific number of correct answers given.
- 3.4.2 Results are reported per question, such that learners can see which questions were incorrectly answered.
- 3.4.3 Results are reported per question, with the correct response to an incorrect question shown.

3.4.4 Results are reported and stored such that users can check specific responses, have a sense of overall progress, and improve their learning.

3.5 “Assessment results are reported or verifiable externally”

3.5.0 Assessment results are not reportable outside the app.

3.5.1 Summary results can be reported externally – E.g. sent via email.

3.5.2 Specific results can be reported externally.

3.5.3 Specific results may be exported in a number of formats.

3.5.4 Specific results can be visualised and browsed externally, assisting the learner or teacher in identifying progress.

3.6 “Assessments show interest and variety”

3.6.0 All assessment follows a single very basic format.

3.6.1 All assessment follows a single satisfactory format, but may become uninteresting for learners with continued use.

3.6.2 Assessment shows some variety as the learner progresses.

3.6.3 Assessment shows much variety and maintains interest.

3.6.4 Assessment shows variety and the user can choose methods of assessment dynamically.

3.7 “Assessments provide useful feedback”

3.7.0 No feedback is provided.

3.7.1 Only rudimentary results are provided.

3.7.2 Basic feedback is provided with results – E.g. indicating the correct answer to a question answered incorrectly.

3.7.3 Extensive feedback is provided on completion of any assessment.

3.7.4 Extensive feedback is provided throughout, guiding the learner continuously in the use of the app and with the learning and assessment processes.

3.8 “Assessment checking is flexible and adapts to user responses”

3.8.0 Assessment is not checked; answers are revealed without regard for input.

3.8.1 Assessment checking is basic and inflexible; users who provide a text-based response must exactly match an expected answer to be deemed correct.

3.8.2 Assessment allows for small errors in user-input – E.g. incorrect capitalisation, US-UK spelling variations.

3.8.3 Assessment allows for a range of alternative answers – E.g. synonyms, common misspellings, etc.

3.8.4 Assessment extensively responds to user errors with formative feedback and treats accidental user error in responses as learning opportunities – E.g. correcting spelling, building knowledge of alternatives, synonyms.

The score for this section (x_2) is listed as NA when not applicable, or calculated as the total points accrued based on the 0-4 available for specified level of agreement with each statement above, expressed as a percentage of the maximum score – the number of questions times four (32).

4. Technical

The final section of thematic investigation of the app deals with technical factors related to the **platform, control, and support** available. These statements address important areas of investigation that may be overlooked in simpler app evaluations that focus only on content and design. Agreement with the topical statements below should be assessed according to the guided 5-point responses given.

4.1 *“The app is widely available on a range of platforms and devices”*

- 4.1.0 The app is restricted to a specific generation of a particular device type, or a specific hardware profile – E.g. iPad3 only.
- 4.1.1 The app is limited to a particular device range – E.g. iPads only.
- 4.1.2 The app is available across platforms but is limited to high-end devices – E.g. latest iPad and Android tablet models.
- 4.1.3 The app is available across most platforms with a high level of compatibility with devices more than 2 years old.
- 4.1.4 The app is available across a range of platforms and device generations and multiple platforms or device generations can be used simultaneously within one classroom.

4.2 *“The app can be easily installed”*

- 4.2.0 The app is distributed in a non-standard way and may be impossible to install for some users.
- 4.2.1 The app requires expert assistance to install or configure.
- 4.2.2 The app can be installed or configured only with sustained input and effort.
- 4.2.3 The app can be installed easily, but requires additional set-up steps such as creating profiles in order to be usable.
- 4.2.4 The app is quickly and simply installed and ready to use.

4.3 *“The app is free of onerous technical requirements”*

- 4.3.0 The app directly depends on an extensive range of other hardware and software.
- 4.3.1 The app directly depends on some other software being installed simultaneously.
- 4.3.2 The app requires extensive memory space on the device or makes other substantial demands of device hardware.
- 4.3.3 The app requires an internet connection and cannot function without it.
- 4.3.4 The app has no significant requirements, or is highly optimised to adapt to their absence – E.g. Operates in a full-featured offline mode when internet access is absent.

4.4 *“The app provides useful media controls”*

- 4.4.0 No control of media within the app is present, except for hardware volume control by the device buttons.
- 4.4.1 Only limited control is available with the app – E.g. Sound on/off.
- 4.4.2 Some control of sound is available within the app – E.g. Selective enabling of sound effects or music, volume sliders.
- 4.4.3 Sound controls are present along with other media control – E.g. Ability to scrub through or skip video, controls for microphone sensitivity, etc.
- 4.4.4 Full sound and media controls are present, increasing accessibility – E.g. Ability to slow down speech playback, change text sizes, change contrast, etc., in addition to above.

4.5 “The app is free of delays caused by technical issues”

- 4.5.0 The app experiences frequent intrusive delays caused by the loading of media or the sporadic downloading of new content.
- 4.5.1 Occasional intrusive delays are present when content is loading.
- 4.5.2 Occasional minimally intrusive delays are present when content is loading.
- 4.5.3 Only an initial delay is present when the app loads on start-up.
- 4.5.4 The app loads and runs without perceptible delays or pauses.

4.6 “The app is stable in use”

- 4.6.0 Crashes are unpredictable and detrimentally frequent.
- 4.6.1 Crashes may occasionally occur unpredictably.
- 4.6.2 Crashes occur due a known and avoidable bug.
- 4.6.3 Infrequent crashes have been reported elsewhere but have not been experienced.
- 4.6.4 No crashes have been experienced or reported.

4.7 “The app is independent of external services”

- 4.7.0 The app requires users to sign up to a paid service or account.
- 4.7.1 The app requires users to sign up to a free service or account.
- 4.7.2 The app shares or stores data externally.
- 4.7.3 The app optionally allows for the use of external services or accounts.
- 4.7.4 The app is independent of external services or storage.

4.8 “Support is available within the app”

- 4.8.0 The app has no integrated help or error screens.
- 4.8.1 The app has limited error messages but these are confusing or technical.
- 4.8.2 The app contains a limited help section offering short explanations.
- 4.8.3 The app contains a substantial help section, including tutorials and support.
- 4.8.4 Help is widely integrated into the app, offering accessible support at any point and error messages are presented usefully and direct the user.

4.9 “External support is available for the app”

- 4.9.0 The app has no external support.
- 4.9.1 External support is limited to unofficial sources – E.g. Others users discussing their experiences of the app online
- 4.9.2 A support website by the publisher exists, offering basic help and FAQs
- 4.9.3 An extensive support service from the publisher exists, allowing users to make contact for support by chat, email, etc.
- 4.9.4 An extensive support service from the publisher exists in conjunction with a wide community of users offering support and resources to one another.

The score for this section (x_4) is calculated as the total points accrued based on the 0-4 available for specified level of agreement with each statement above, expressed as a percentage of the maximum score – the number of questions times four (36).