UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

ESTIMATION OF EXAMINEES’ ABILITY THROUGH COMPUTER ADAPTIVE TESTING BASED ON NEURAL NETWORK APPROACH

AZAM KAZEMI

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ESTIMATION OF EXAMINEES’ ABILITY THROUGH COMPUTER ADAPTIVE TESTING BASED ON NEURAL NETWORK APPROACH

By

AZAM KAZEMI

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DEDICATION

To

My Dear husband for his encouragement,

My parents who devoted their life to their children,

My lovely daughter, Bahar

And to all my friends in University Putra Malaysia
Examinee’s knowledge is measured through exams. A key purpose of using an exam is to determine the proficiency level of each examinee based on his/her responses to the administered test. A main problem of traditional test is that the asked questions are not match to actual ability of examinees and doesn’t measure examinee’s proficiency accurately.

Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) has been developed to address this issue. In CAT, each examinee has to answer the questions that are tailored to his/her ability level. Some of the features such as test security, immediate score reporting, improved efficiency and measurement precision have increased popularity of CAT. It uses models of proficiency estimation such as Item Response Theory (IRT). It is a statistical method with theoretical foundation that is being widely used in the field of modern educational testing technology and psychological testing. However, this model has some drawbacks.
IRT model relates the response of an examinee to a specific item to his/her ability level and characteristics of the item. But relationship between items characteristics and person’s skill are very complex and nonlinear. In addition, it relies on strict assumption and need a large amount of data to precise measurement. These limitations are the motivation behind this research to use other adaptive approach to estimate the proficiency level in the CAT.

In this thesis, we proposed a novel solution based on Artificial Neural Network (ANN) to address the above mentioned limitations. The ANN with adaptive features is a suitable scheme for solving complex non-linear problems. In addition, it has the ability to learn and generalize. These strong potentials make it an appropriate method to measure proficiency level of examinees in CAT systems.

This work has been organized in two phases. In the first phase, we use 3-PL (three parameter logistic) dichotomous and polytomous model of IRT to estimate examinees’ ability in adaptive testing. Statistical approaches such as maximum likelihood estimation method and Bayesian approach are used for this purpose. In the second phase, estimation of examinees’ ability has been obtained with multi-layer feed forward neural network with back propagation algorithm. Experiments have been repeated under different scenarios and results indicate the advantages of the proposed scheme by obtaining better accuracy in performance.
PENGANGGARAN KEBOLEHAN CALON PEPEРИKSAAN MELALUI
PEPEＦIULAN MUDAH SUAI BERKOMPUTER BERDASARKAN
PENDEKATAN RANGKAIAN NEURAL

Oleh
AZAM KAZEMI

Disember 2010

Pengerusi: Masrah Azrifah Azmi Murad, PhD

Fakulti: Sains Komputer dan Teknologi Maklumat

Pengetahuan seseorang calon selalunya diuji menerusi peperiksaan. Tujuan utama peperiksaan adalah untuk menentukan tahap kemahiran setiap calon berdasarkan jawapan-jawapan yang diberi dalam sesuatu ujian. Masalah utama yang dihadapi oleh ujian tradisional adalah soalan-soalan yang ditanya selalunya tidak berpadanan dengan keupayaan sebenar calon dan tidak dapat mengukur tahap kemahiran calon dengan tepat.

Pengujian mudah suai berkomputer (CAT) telah dibangunkan bagi menyelesaikan isu ini. Dengan menggunakan CAT, setiap calon peperikaan hanya perlu menjawab soalan-soalan yang berpadanan dengan tahap keupayaannya. Ciri-ciri seperti keselamatan ujian, laporan markah secara segera, peningkatan kecekapan dan ketepatan penilaian telah menambah populariti CAT.
CAT menggunakan model-model penganggaran kemahiran seperti *Item Response Theory* (IRT). Ia merupakan satu kaedah statistik dengan teori asas yang telah digunakan secara meluas di dalam bidang teknologi pengujian pendidikan moden dan pengujian psikologi. Walau bagaimanapun, model ini mempunyai beberapa kelemahan.

Model IRT akan mengaitkan jawapan daripada calon dengan satu item khusus dari tahap keupayaaannya dan ciri-ciri item tersebut. Akan tetapi, hubungan antara ciri-ciri item dan kemahiran seseorang adalah sangat kompleks dan tidak linear. Tambahan lagi, ia bergantung kepada andaian yang sempit dan memerlukan jumlah data yang besar bagi pengukuran yang tepat. Batasan-batasan ini merupakan motivasi di sebalik penyelidikan ini untuk menggunakan pendekatan mudah suai lain bagi menganggar tahap kemahiran di dalam CAT.

Dalam tesis ini, kami mencadangkan satu kaedah novel berdasarkan rangkaian neural buatan (ANN) bagi menyelesaikan batasan-batasan yang dinyatakan. ANN dengan ciri-ciri mudah suai merupakan satu skim yang sesuai bagi menyelesaikan masalah-masalah kompleks dan tidak linear. Selain itu, ia mempunyai keupayaan untuk belajar dan membuat kesimpulan umum. Potensi-potensi ini menjadikannya kaedah yang sesuai bagi mengukur tahap kemahiran calon-calon peperiksaan dalam sistem CAT.

Manakala dalam fasa kedua, anggaran keupayaan calon-calon peperiksaan telah diperolehi menggunakan rangkaian neural *multi-layer feed forward* dengan algoritma rambatan belakang. Eksperimen-eksperimen telah diulang di bawah senario yang berbeza dan keputusan menunjukkan kelebihan dalam skim yang dicadangkan dengan mencapai kejituan yang lebih baik dalam prestasi.
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And finally I also give my thanks to my Dear mother and my Dear father. Again, thanks to all of the people who supported me to finish my study at Universiti Putra Malaysia.
I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 24 December 2010 to conduct the final examination of Azam Kazemi on her Master of Science thesis “Estimation of Examinees’ Ability through Computer Adaptive Testing based on Neural Network Approach” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

**Shamala K. Subramaniam, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Norwati Mustapha, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

**Abu Bakar Md Sultan, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

**Azuraliza Abu Bakar, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Technology and Information Science  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
(External Examiner)

---

**BUJANG KIM HUAT, PhD**  
Professor and Deputy Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
This thesis was submitted to the senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

**Masrah Azrifah Azmi Murad, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Rodziah Atan, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

__________________________

**HASANAH MOHD GHAZALI, PhD**  
Professor and Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously and is not concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

____________________
AZAM KAZEMI

Date: 24 December 2010
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