



Importance of Program Evaluation in English Language Education

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Received: 02 Oct 2023; Received in revised form: 04 Nov 2023; Accepted: 12 Nov 2023; Available online: 22 Nov 2023

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Abstract— *The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of program evaluation in English language education. Evaluation is a part of our life and we often evaluate every aspect of our life. We make value judgment like ‘The film is super’, ‘He is a nice person’ or ‘She is very kind’ etc. In fact, we are good at negatively evaluating others very often. These judgments are based on our feeling towards them and our preferences. Such type of everyday casual judgment can become a piece of research if there is a question, data analysis and interpretation of the data. The paper explains the meaning and types of evaluation and it argues that program evaluation is very important in English language education since it provides evidence for improvement, consolidation, refinement and modification of the program. This paper also discusses the possible evaluators of the program, types of information needed for the evaluation and the methods to be used in evaluating an English language educational program. Furthermore, the paper explores some practical steps for designing a program evaluation.*



Keywords— *program evaluation, improvement, English education*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of program evaluation in English language education. Evaluation is a part of our life and we often evaluate every aspect of our life. We make value judgment like ‘The film is super’, ‘He is a nice person’ or ‘She is very kind’ etc. In fact we are good at negatively evaluating others very often. These judgments are based on our feeling towards them and our preferences. Such type of everyday casual judgment can become a piece of research if there is a question, data analysis and interpretation of the data. The paper explains the meaning and types of evaluation and it argues that program evaluation is very important in English language education since it provides evidence for improvement, consolidation, refinement and modification of the program. This paper also discusses the possible evaluators of the program, types of information needed for the evaluation and the methods to be used in evaluating an English language educational program. Furthermore, the paper explores some practical steps for designing a program evaluation.

II. TEST, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Before defining the term evaluation, it is better to know two common terms that are used in language education: test and assessment. They are used as synonyms; however, both of them are different. Test is “a way of discovering, by questions or practical activities, what someone knows, or what someone or something can do or is like” (Cambridge Advanced Learners Electronic Dictionary, 2005). Genesee and Upshur, (1996) defined it as a method used to collect information about something observable. Test is a tool used to measure the performance of a learner. In short, it can be any instrument that measures skills, performance and knowledge of learners.

In contrast to test, to assess is “to judge or decide the amount, value, quality or importance of something” (Cambridge Advanced Learners Electronic Dictionary, 2005). Assessment “refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner’s language ability or achievement” (Brindley, 2001, p. 135). According to Nunan (1992) it is “the process and procedures whereby we determine what

learners are able to do in the target language” (p. 185). Furthermore, assessment is the process and procedures that determine learners’ knowledge and skills. In other words, it is the process of estimating or measuring the ability of a learner using grades and marks and assessment uses test scores. In conclusion, assessment is the process and means of judging learners’ level of knowledge and skills whereas tests are only one of the tools used in assessment.

Although the terms assessment and evaluation are used interchangeably, they are not the same since assessment is only a part of evaluation. Evaluation is an umbrella term that includes both tests and assessment as they are tools used in evaluation. Assessment is specific and narrow, whereas evaluation is general and broad. According to Genesee (2001) assessment is used to know the achievement of a learner whereas evaluation includes all aspects of learning and teaching. “To evaluate is to assess the worth or value of something” (Robson, 2000, p.3). Cambridge Advanced Learners Electronic Dictionary (2005) defined it as “to judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount or value of something.” Similarly Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003) defined the term evaluation as “a judgment about how good, useful, or successful something is” (p. 534). Gronlund (1981) defined it narrowly as “a systematic process of determining the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by pupils” (p.5). According to Nunan (1988) evaluation is not “simply a process of obtaining information, it also a decision-making process” (p.118). Evaluation makes value judgment about something using the data collected in order to improve it, modify and to change it. Evaluation is the process of judging the value and the quality of something. In short, evaluation is the process of collecting information, making inferences from it and reaching a value judgment based on the data.

III. PROGRAM EVALUATION

According to Fink (1995) program evaluation is the examination of a specific program systematically with an aim to assess or improve it. It is judging the quality of a program or a study by collecting and interpreting data. Likewise, Patton (2008) defined it as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, for use by people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions” (p. 39). Program Evaluation can be specific and general. Specific evaluation is done by assessing a program against its stated objectives or assessing its features, strength and weakness. Furthermore, it is done to see the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. According to Chen (2005) there are three steps involved in

program evaluation: identifying stakeholders’ needs, choosing suitable method for the evaluation and doing it. The current trend in program evaluation is to use mixed methods. To put it in another way, program evaluation is the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information about a program to improve it. Improvement of the program can be done at two different timings: during the program or after the program depending on the type of evaluation used.

3.1 Types of Program Evaluation

Program evaluation can be divided into three types based on the focus, the purpose and the duration of the time. In terms of focus program evaluation can be either process oriented or outcome based. Process oriented evaluation focuses on the ongoing planned activities of the program whereas outcome oriented focuses on the result of the activities. The former evaluates how far the activities are carried out while the latter deals with what outcome it has produced (Scheirer, 1994). There are two group of program evaluation depending on the purpose. According to Scriven (1967) purposive program evaluation is of two types: formative and summative. Formative evaluation examines the working of the program by examining the data during the program. The main purpose of formative program evaluation is to develop and improve the ongoing program. Unlike formative evaluation, summative evaluation is done only after the program is completed to see the merits of it. Summative evaluation is not capable of improving the ongoing program; however, it provides information for the modification of the succeeding program. Both formative and summative together provide comprehensive idea about the program. The third type is based on the time that evaluation takes to complete it. Program evaluation can be both large scale and small scale. Professional evaluators or researcher do large scale evaluation whereas practitioners like teachers do small scale evaluation in their teaching context.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In English language educational context, program evaluation is very important because the success and the failure of a program directly or indirectly affect the society in general and the learners in particular. It is imperative to see whether a program is successful or not and find out the reason why it has failed to achieve its intended outcome. Program evaluation enables us to discard the program or change it if it is not working appropriately. It tells us whether to continue with the program and help us to discover how to improve it and what should to be done further. Program evaluation helps us:

- To see whether a program is successful or not;
- To discover the reasons for the failure;
- To find out whether objectives are achieved or not;
- To understand why objectives are not achieved;
- To provide some remedial measures;
- To make appropriate and effective decision;
- To decide whether a program or course needs to be changed, modified or altered;
- To see the effectiveness of a program;
- To guide stake holders;
- To determine which activities are better;
- To see what has been achieved so far;
- To maximize the success rate of an ongoing program;
- To improve an ongoing program;
- To see whether the students are learning what they are supposed to learn;
- To see whether a program is working the way it should be;
- To provide information about of the program;
- To assess and enhance collaboration among different stakeholders;
- To understand the needs of different stakeholders and accommodate them in the program;
- To ensure whether the needs of different stake holders are included in the program and
- To determine the priorities of the program.

Evaluation provides evidence for the program which encourages and enables the evaluators to assess the effectiveness of the program. It helps them to make decision and to decide the appropriateness of the program. Program evaluation tells us the suitability of the program and the stake holders' and the participants' preferences, needs, worries and concerns about the program. Furthermore, evaluation can consolidate, improve, develop, refine and advance the program.

V. WHO EVALUATES?

An English language educational program is a part of society and created by society and it is functioning in social context. Therefore, the following multiple competing stakeholders are involved in the program evaluation.

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Students
- Parents
- Policy makers
- Funding authority
- Community

- Employers

All will have their own different and varied perceptions about the program, the evaluation and the purposes of program evaluation. Teachers are considered as right people in carrying out formative evaluation (Brown, 1995). Since the emergence of student centered approaches in education students are involved in evaluation (Nunan, 1988). Furthermore, learners are active participants in evaluation; therefore, involving them in the process of the evaluation makes learners feel responsible. Even outsiders like research scholars and experts can also evaluate a program.

VI. TYPES OF INFORMATION NEEDED

What types of data are required for a program evaluation? Multiple data are needed in order to have a very comprehensive picture of the program. Both qualitative and quantitative information are used to evaluate a program. Data from wide range of sources from inside and outside classroom are collected. In short, all relevant information related to the program is to be collected. To be specific, we need information about:

- Student's performance, their needs and interests,
- Student's previous learning experience, preferred learning styles and learning strategies;
- Students' issues, worries and concerns;
- Their attitude towards education, learning English, the program and the instruction;
- Their view on teaching, teachers and instructional materials;
- Students' personal, family, medical and health background;
- Needs of the different stakeholders;
- Needs of the labour market;
- Aims and objectives of the programs;
- Teaching methods, learning methods and the students' evaluation methods;
- Demands of the society;
- Status of English;
- The value that the community has on education and learning English;
- Vision and mission of the institution that provides the program;
- Course syllabus, course description and curriculum and
- The intended advantages of the program.

VII. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Variety of methods and techniques are used to collect the required data for the evaluation. Both qualitative and quantitative data are needed for the evaluation. The following are the most common techniques that are used in program evaluation:

- Tests, Exams and Continuous Assessment Tools;
- Questionnaire;
- Need Analysis: students, employers;
- Interviews- in-depth interviews are done to explore the views, attitudes and perception about the program;
- Observation. It can be both participant and non-participant observation;
- Learner diaries and self-report;
- Students writing journals;
- Portfolio analysis;
- Counseling sessions with students, parents and other stake holders.

VIII. PRACTICAL STEPS IN DESIGNING EVALUATION

Evaluation consists of four related components: deciding the purpose, identifying and collecting relevant information, analyzing and interpreting the collected information and making appropriate decisions based on the evidence collected (Genesee and Upsur (1996). Nunan (1992) suggests these eight steps to be followed while designing a program evaluation.

a. What is the purpose of the evaluation?

First, we must have clear and definite aims and objectives before starting the evaluation.

b. Who is the audience for the evaluation?

Second, we need to identify the people who are involved and interested in the evaluation.

c. What principles and procedures should guide the evaluation?

Third, the principles and procedures that guide the evaluation should be stated precisely before starting the evaluation because each participant will have their own set of beliefs, perceptions and objectives. For example, if we have more than one interest group in your evaluation, then we have to decide no one will have privileges, special rights like vetoes. There should not be any secret reporting to anyone; however, we need to keep data confidentially.

d. What tools, techniques and instruments are to be used?

Fourth, we decide the types of information needed and how they are going to be collected. Since tests and assessment alone cannot provide a complete picture of the

program, multiple techniques are to be used to collect data from different sources.

e. Who should carry out the evaluation?

One of the most important decisions to make about the program evaluation is who is doing the evaluation. Many options are available. We decide whether the evaluator is an outsider like an expert or insiders like teachers and students.

f. When should it be carried out?

Depending on the purpose of evaluation decide whether it is during the program or at the end of the program.

g. What is the time frame and budget?

It is essential to have realistic time frame for the evaluation and plan the budget.

h. How to report the evaluation?

Finally, we need to decide how to report the evaluation. Is it qualitative or quantitative?

IX. CONCLUSION

Evaluation provides evidence about a language education program so that we can make informed decisions about it. Evaluation can be done during the program or at the end of the program based on the purpose of the evaluation. Varieties of information are required for program evaluation. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative techniques are used to collect information about the program. Either an outsider an expert or an insider like teachers can evaluate a language education program. The current trend is to involve students in the process of evaluation. The main limitation of program evaluation is that it cannot generalize the information as the evaluation is context specific and subjective.

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