

A NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK FOR CURRICULUM EVALUATION IN OMAN

By

KHALID SALIM AL-JARDANI *

SAEDAH SIRAJ **

NABEEL ABEDALAZIZ ***

* Curriculum Officer for English Language, Department of Human Science, Ministry of Education, Oman.

** Ph.D, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

*** Ph.D, Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

The field of curriculum evaluation is a key part of the educational process. This means that this area needs to be developed continuously and requires ongoing research. This paper highlights curriculum evaluation in Oman, different evaluation procedures and methods and instruments used. The need for a framework for curriculum evaluation is a vital part of this research. This research ensures the need for developing the framework for curriculum evaluation by involving 7 curriculum officers. They stress the need for it in the Omani context.

Keywords: Curriculum Evaluation, Developing a Framework, Oman, Curriculum Officers.

INTRODUCTION

Reform initiatives, in terms of English language education in Oman, start at the Ministry of Education, which seeks to implement changes via a new or revised curriculum. As the principles underlying the approach represented in any new textbook or other educational reform initiative may be novel to the end users (classroom teachers and learners), problems can arise if there is a lack of explanation, orientation or a lack of effective Curriculum Evaluation process. If this area of Curriculum Evaluation is neglected, the textbook may be abandoned outright, or, more likely, a hidden curriculum could develop, with teaching and learning taking place much as it did prior to the introduction of the innovation (Kennedy, 1987 pp: 164-5). Therefore, there is a need for a systematic Curriculum Evaluation to support practitioners in the field.

In 2005 a new department, the Department of Curriculum Evaluation, was founded within the Ministry of Education. The main aim of having this department is to participate in developing the curriculum based on the learning objectives in Oman, the type of learners and society and the need for the workplace (the Ministry official website: www.moe.om). Therefore, there is a need to develop a clear and planned approach for developing and evaluating the curriculum and not to deal with it in a random way.

Every year, the curriculum section of each subject suggests

the grade which they expect the Department of Curriculum Evaluation to work on. It can be more than one grade suggested, however it seems that one grade is what's done considering the shortage of members of the curriculum evaluation department. The department uses different curriculum officers including all subjects. They also use the supervision departments and teachers in schools to evaluate the books. For example, if grade 1 Arabic language course book was selected, the members of Arabic language in the Curriculum evaluation have to plan the whole evaluation process, but can use members of Arabic curriculum section, supervisors of Arabic language, Arabic teachers in schools, as well as learners if necessary.

The lack of a framework for the public for Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education in Oman has been observed (Al-Jardani, 2011). This has resulted in a miscommunication between the curriculum departments and the practitioners in the field. Building and publicizing a framework helps to show the role and responsibility of each in developing and evaluating the curriculum.

Literature Review

Different definitions of Curriculum Evaluation are found in the existing literature about the topic. It can be defined as a systematic process for collecting and analyzing all relevant information for the purpose of judging and assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum to promote improvement (Nichols, et al. 2006; Simons, 1987 in Marsh, 2004: 106 and

Brown, 1989: 223 in Brown, 1995: 218). The definition consists of key words such as systematic, process, collect and analyse, relevant information, curriculum effectiveness' assessment, and to improve.

Curriculum Evaluation can be either a small-scale task involving a very limited number of participants if it is classroom based, or a massive large-scale task involving a number of schools, teachers, parents, officers and some community members. An action research exercise conducted by a teacher in his/her class with learners can also be part of Curriculum Evaluation. On the other hand, an internal or external evaluator evaluating a whole curriculum covering several schools, a large number of teachers and learners, and which may additionally cover the schools' surroundings, may also constitute Curriculum Evaluation.

It is not easy to find common guidelines for Curriculum Evaluation; and it is difficult to find a suggested framework for Curriculum Evaluation. This could be only found as a section in the frameworks for general curricula. However, for the author's context and some other places where Curriculum Evaluation is treated as a dependent department, a need for separate Curriculum Evaluation is essential.

As Marsh (2004: 19) defined curriculum framework as a group of related subjects put together in certain criteria to cover a specific area of study, a framework for Curriculum Evaluation can be more related to it. A framework for Curriculum Evaluation can be a set of guidelines for needs analysis, aims, focuses, purposes, types, methods, etc. of Curriculum Evaluation which can be used in a certain context in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a curriculum with the purpose of developing, changing or keeping the existing materials. This can also include the contributions of all departments including curriculum, Curriculum Evaluation, other Ministry departments, teachers, and society at large.

In the existing literature as mentioned above, only some examples of curriculum framework have been observed. These normally consist of a rationale or platform, scope and sequence, aims, goals and purpose of subjects, guidelines for course design, teaching and learning

principles, guidelines for evaluation of subjects, criteria for accreditation and certification of subjects and future developments for the area (Marsh, 2004: 21). Therefore, it has been noted that Curriculum Evaluation is only one factor in these frameworks. However, some of these elements can also be included in the Curriculum Evaluation framework such as rationale of the framework, scope and sequence of the curriculum, aims, and goals, purposes of each subject and future development of the area of Curriculum Evaluation. Other things which can be added are a vision and mission of the Curriculum Evaluation task and guidelines of Curriculum Evaluation theory and practices.

As little attention is given to developing a framework of quality standards for Curriculum Evaluation, the need to understand the complexity of the field of education is essential. A great deal of work has been done in the fields of higher education, health and business in this matter. This needs to cover school, curriculum, teacher training, curriculum development and evaluation and other areas of education.

Research Question

This study answers the following question

Is there a need for developing a framework of Quality Standards (elements) for Curriculum Evaluation?

Method

This study identifies the need for developing the framework of Quality Standards for the area of Curriculum Evaluation. Curriculum Evaluation officers within the Ministry of Education will be necessary for this research. This will be done by conducting interviews with them. The interview will be semi-structured and consist of a few questions to identify the need for developing a framework. However, there is a need to keep the interview open in order to collect opinions about the topic of the research.

The interview is structured in a way to make it easy for the participants to answer. There are 5 main questions to answer. The questions include: Do you need a Framework for Curriculum Evaluation? What do you need the Framework for? Who should write the Framework? Who should the Framework be written for? What should the

Framework for Curriculum Evaluation document cover?

The main question in this interview is the first one: "Do you need a framework for Curriculum Evaluation? As this will answer the issue of the need for the framework, however, a follow up question is both cases whether agreeing or not is the word 'why?'. Other questions can help to highlight other issues related to the topic and will be analysed in the findings section.

The interviews with both the Curriculum Officers were conducted in their chosen time and in their work place. The interviews were recorded, after taking their permission, and transcribed afterwards. The transcribed interview was emailed to the interviewees for confirmation.

The analysis of the interview ends with subtitles summarised the participants' responds. The questions of the interview will also affect the titles suggested and the usefulness of the information collected.

The Participants

There are about 9 English Language Curriculum Evaluation Officers in the curriculum Directorate. This covers both officers in the Curriculum development and curriculum evaluation departments. However, as two of them are on a study leave, only 7 of them participate in this study. They have various numbers of years' experience in the education field - between 5 and 16 years of teaching, supervising and being involved in curriculum development work. They also hold Bachelors and Masters in TESOL from various universities in Oman and overseas.

There is a need to involve all of them in this study as they are the key users of the document in the future and the ones who work directly in developing and evaluating the curriculum.

Findings

This study used semi-structured interviews as mentioned above. This has encouraged the participants to express themselves of the importance of the framework and what should it include. Follow-up questions were used to clarify things, guide participants to the topic and to ask for more information.

Here are the main findings of the study:

A Need for a Framework of Quality Standards for Curriculum Evaluation

All participants agreed that there is a need to develop a framework for Curriculum Evaluation. This includes all participants from the two departments- Curriculum and Curriculum Evaluation. This answers the research question: Is there a need for developing a framework of Quality Standards (elements) for Curriculum Evaluation?

This supports the earlier indication of the researcher in the earlier part of this study. However then, there is a need for such support from the main users of kind of a framework. The intonation of the participants was clear enough to indicate their support of the idea and shows their willingness to support the researcher.

Apart from answering the main question above, there were some other sub-questions answered by the participants.

What do you Need a Framework for Curriculum Evaluation?

Curriculum and Curriculum Evaluation officers see the framework as a reference or guide for curriculum development. CO6 sees the framework as "as a guide to enhance the Evaluation of the current curriculum in order to reach the national standards of Curriculum Development and ensure the continuous development of curriculum (Line 17-19)" The framework is seen as a reference for most of the participants to can come back to it whenever needed. This can indicate the need to have it in order to help them to reach the national standards stated by the Ministry. On the other hand it is also expected to support continuum development of the curriculum as it might include future plans too.

In addition, it is supposed to link things related to curriculum and curriculum evaluation such as objectives of the curriculum and its evaluation aspects, which help in developing new materials and revising the existing materials ones. It simply as stated by CO5 "It makes things clear when writing and developing new materials (line 18-19)" By having this type of framework, this will make the curriculum and the curriculum evaluation clearer for all user of English in the country and give them a clear picture of English use and the general aims beyond teaching it.

Who Should Write the Framework?

Participants agreed that varies people can write and participate in writing the framework. This can include curriculum advisers, consultants, and Omani and expatriate authors but along with Omani staff as suggested by CO4. Including Omanis in the Omani context seems to be normal as they are the main user of it in the country, therefore including them is essential. On the other hand, involving all parties involved in the English Teaching process in the whole nation, the ones who teach learn as well the society and the organisations which get the final outcome. This can be the higher education in and outside the country as well as the workplace.

Others argued that anyone can undertake such a task only if they have a good experience in curriculum design and evaluation, and knowledge of the context the curriculum is written for and "who has a good experience in curriculum design and evaluation (CO 1, line 27-28)". The need for the experience in the curriculum development is important. The one who will what aspects of elements he/she might need while developing and even evaluating a curriculum will have a good chance to develop and produce a supportive framework which can be a useful source for the user of it.

Who Should it Written for?

The participants agreed that the target audience of the framework should cover all educational parties who are involved in developing, writing and designing materials. This might affect the elements which will be chosen in later phases of the study as this pushes towards cover a good number of ELT aspects within a framework intended to cover almost the curriculum and the curriculum evaluation issues.

Others participants (CO 1, 2, 4 and 7) specified the curriculum officers, supervisors, senior teachers, teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum authors and designers, parents as people who should this framework are written for. This highlights the main users of a kind of a framework which can be covered.

What Should the Framework Document Cover?

Participants highlighted a number of things to be covered

within the framework. This includes the philosophy of curriculum development, the framework of curriculum development, the scope & the sequences of the curriculum document, the Quality standards of curriculum evaluation, the Evaluation process. These elements covered by CO 1 and 7 seems to be very general issues. Other participants highlighted specific elements to be included in a framework. This covers the course objectives and outcomes including linguistic and non-linguistic objectives, the important topics covered in the materials, the assessing tools and type of questions, the Evaluation of content, Instructional design, Organization of teacher's materials, assessment, , evaluation process and rational. On the other hand Co2 gave more emphasis on the evaluation process mentioning "sample instruments with clear description of when and how to use each of them, how to analyse the data, evaluation report writing, who should be involved in the evaluation process, needs analysis and a clear plan of what need to be evaluated and when (Lines 35-38)".

Some of the aspects suggested by some of the participants seem to be general which can be a title for the whole document such as "the framework of curriculum development.... (CO7 line 37)" This answer and some others cannot be a useful one to get into a clear list of the elements. However, there are some other mentioned above such as "linguistic and non-linguistic objectives (CO5 line 41)" can be a god basis for some of the elements for the framework.

The list above cover different elements related to curriculum development and evaluation. The issue of samples needed is clear in the phase 1 participants in both curriculum evaluation tools samples and report writing too. This highlights their essential need for the suggested aspects.

The main finding of this phase is that there is a need for developing a framework for Curriculum Evaluation for the Omani context as seen by the Curriculum Officer for English Language in the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman. This was supported by also answering some other questions related to different aspects of developing the framework. This also supports the need to develop the framework.

Conclusion

This study intends to answer the research question, "Is there a need for developing a framework of Quality Standards (elements) for Curriculum Evaluation?" The need for a framework is clear from the responses of the officers. All of the participants agreed with the need for such framework. This is basically to help them in their job and guide them when developing a new curriculum or revising and evaluating the existing one. Therefore, their own needs were clear shown with their agreement on the need for the framework and their willingness to take part in this study.

The purpose of framework as a reference and a guide from the officers' point of view seems to be reasonable. The need for covering most common and key aspects of curriculum development and evaluation is essential. This will help all people involved in the curriculum evaluation process with the necessary details of the curriculum developed, so they can go back to it whenever needed.

Involving the people who are part of the curriculum development process seems to be important to the officers. Therefore, the need to get officers and others involved in the process of curriculum evaluation within the inside and outside evaluation is also essential. Therefore, there is a need to keep updating the framework continuously.

Another clear point raised by the participants was involving Oman is into the process. This might be as a result of previous experience where they might be neglected in previous evaluation processes. As this effecting what officers are intend to do, the need to get them into every effort of developing the curriculum is important as they are the most suitable bodies when discussing issues related to learners' and the society needs and also the cultural issues.

The framework should be written for almost all people involved in English Language Teaching. Therefore there is a need to cover all their needs. If we consider this framework for teachers for example, so it should cover all aspects related to the English Teaching and how this could be used

as a tool for curriculum evaluation and future improvements.

The officers' suggestions of element needs to be covered in the framework seems to be varies. Some seems to be very general things such as 'the framework of curriculum development' and others are very specific such as 'when and how to use each of instruments' of curriculum evaluation.

Some of the suggested audience of the framework suggested by all participants such as trainers- their needs are not covered when answering the last question in the interview. However this seems that the focus of it is only from curriculum evaluation side and that trainers for example need to know what can be included within their training related to curriculum evaluation and how to train teachers to be positive part of curriculum evaluation process. Therefore, what should be covered from the curriculum officers seems to focus on issues related to curriculum evaluation even though they mentioned the training and the assessment things.

References

- [1]. Al-Jardani, K.S. (2011). The need for developing a Framework for Curriculum Evaluation. *Proceedings of ICERI2011, Conference*. 14th-16th November 2011, Madrid, Spain. ISBN: 978-84-615-3324-4.
- [2]. Brown, J.D. (1995). The Elements of Language Curriculum. *A Systematic Approach to Program Development*. Heinle and Heinle Publishers: Boston.
- [3]. Kennedy, C. (1987). "Innovating for a change: teacher development and innovation". *ELT Journal*, Volume 41/3 July 1987. Oxford University Press.
- [4]. Marsh, C. (2004). *Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum*. 3rd edition. Routledge Falmer: London and New York.
- [5]. Nichols, B., Shidaker, S., Johnson, G., and Singer, K., (2006). *Managing Curriculum and Assessment. A Practitioner's Guide*. Linworth Books: Ohio.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Khalid Salim Saif Al-Jardani is working as a Curriculum Officer for English Language in the Department of Human Sciences, Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. He is currently a Ph.D Student in the University of Malaya in Malaysia in the field of Curriculum Evaluation and Quality Assurance. He obtains an M.A (TESOL) from the University of Birmingham and a B.A from the University of Leeds, UK. His academic interests include the study of Curriculum Development and Evaluation, Teacher Training, and Quality Assurance in Education.



Dr. Saedah Siraj is currently working as a Professor of Curriculum, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya and the Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya in Malaysia. She obtains a Ph.D from Pittsburgh University, Pittsburgh. Her Areas of specialization are Curriculum Development, Curriculum Design, Curriculum Evaluation, Curriculum Management, Curriculum and Instruction, Comparative Curriculum, Future Curriculum, mLearning Curriculum, Family and Children Education.



Dr. Nabeel Abedalaziz is a Lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Malaya/Malaysia where he teaches courses in measurement and evaluation, educational research, Measurement theory, psychological testing, data analysis of quantitative research, qualitative approaches in evaluation, instrument design and item development, and statistics. He obtains his Ph.D in Educational Psychology major in Measurement and Evaluation at Amman Arab University of graduate study/Jordan. He was worked at UNRWA institutes from 1997-2009. Majority of his research uses quantitative and DIF techniques in the field of educational psychology.

