Program Evaluation: Utilizing Needs Analysis for Decision Making

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1. Definition of program evaluation from the literature

“Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Patton, 1997, p. 23).

“[a] systematic collection and analysis of information necessary to improve a curriculum, assess its effectiveness and its efficiency, and determine participants’ attitudes within the context of a particular institution” (Brown, 1995, p. 227).

“systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to explicit or implicit standards, in order to help improve the program or policy” (Weiss, 1998, p. 18).

2. Purpose and use of program evaluation

Various evaluation purposes: Summative, formative, knowledge generation, & empowerment

3. Useful to who?

- Stakeholders: People who have a stake in evaluation findings; Stakeholders include anyone who make decisions or desires information about a program.
- Primary intended users: A group or individuals who are in position to make decision about the program, intend to use the evaluation findings to inform their future actions, and are affected by the evaluation outcomes.

4. Characteristics of useful program evaluation

Pragmatic, participatory, negotiated, responsive, clear & comprehensible, educational, transformative, manageable, feasible, action oriented, etc.

5. Two evaluation showcases that used needs analysis for different evaluation purposes:

(A) EFL general English education program at a private high school in Japan

- **Purpose:** Direction for curriculum reform (program planning)
- **Use:**
  - Set goals of the three-year general English education program
  - Advocate value of the program on the school web page
- **Primary intended users:** Lead teacher, full-time English teachers, & curriculum coordinator
- **Evaluation questions:**
  - What are the similarities and differences in English needs among students and teachers?
  - How do needs align with the national guidelines (MEXT, 2003ab), and the university’s expectation?
  - What topics are learners interested in? Are those topics introduced in the class either by a teacher or through textbooks?
- **Evaluation method:**
  - NA survey for students, NA survey for teachers
  - Document analysis: MEXT policy statements & existing curriculum info.
- **Key evaluation findings:**
  - Teachers = students = MEXT
- Prepare for the pre-2nd level STEP test
- Carry on a daily conversation in English (greetings, communicate with the foreign exchange students, provide direction to the foreigners when asked, etc.) and travel survival English (buying and negotiating price)

• Teachers = MEXT > students
  Expressing opinions and thoughts were perceived as strongly necessary by teachers, while many students rated “telling or exchanging opinions” as low priority.

• University 1st & 2nd yr curriculum > students
  Reading authentic texts (e.g., English magazines, newspaper articles, and internet resources)

• Students & teachers > textbook
  More interactive writing tasks (e.g., emailing). Most writing tasks in the textbook were one-way tasks

❖ Actual evaluation use:
  Writing goal statement

(B) ESL course at a community school for adults in the U.S.

❖ Purpose: Provide meaningful curriculum for learners that is aligned with school, state and federal standards
❖ Use: Integrate problems that adult ESL learners face in their daily lives into the curriculum to cooperatively problem solve
❖ Primary intended users: Adult ESL learners & instructors

❖ Evaluation questions:
  ▪ What are some problems that adult ESL learners face in their daily lives that aren’t addressed in the textbooks?
  ▪ What authentic resources can be utilized to address those problems?

❖ Evaluation method:
  ▪ Surveys (questionnaires, open-ended questions, informal interviews, focus groups, and ongoing self-assessments)
  ▪ Classroom observations by a colleague

❖ Key evaluation findings:
  ▪ Learners want
    ➢ to speak in real world situations (e.g. at work, on the phone)
    ➢ to improve pronunciation
    ➢ more meaningful interactions
    ➢ to understand their mail
  ▪ Learners don’t want
    ➢ academic English

❖ Actual evaluation use:
  • Increased activities in speaking and pronunciation
• Authentic resource (e.g. bills, junk mail, and newspapers) utilization
• More dialogic focus groups to address specific concerns in subsequent class meetings

6. Online resources

❖ Program evaluation
- Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project: http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation
- Western Michigan Evaluation Center:
- The International Development Research Centre:
  ➢ Guideline for identifying intended users of an evaluation
  ➢ Guideline for identifying intended use(s) of an evaluation
  ➢ Evaluation principles
- The Online Evaluation Resource Library
  ➢ Professional development modules on key topics on evaluation
    http://oerl.sri.com/instruments/cd/instrCD.html

❖ Needs analysis/assessment
- Amie N. Casper’s website on needs analysis in TESOL programs
  http://linguistics.byu.edu/resources/volunteers/TESOLBYU_NeedsAnalysis.htm
- Keita Kikuchi’s article on “Triangulating perceptions of learners' needs:
  An alternate way of conducting needs analysis”: http://jalt.org/pansig/2004/HTML/Kikuchi.htm

7. Books and articles (* are recommended books)

❖ How-to books on program evaluation and needs analysis
Use of needs analysis in language program development and evaluation


