Evaluating a Developed Framework for Curriculum Evaluation in Oman

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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 study 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 study-which includes 34 samples- evaluates of the framework developed by the researcher. In this study the curriculum officers are included along with English language supervisors from different regions in Oman and selected officers from the Office of the Undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning who seem to be closer to the policy makers and who have an English language background. These were involved in evaluating the framework which led to the development of a modified framework which they agreed to use in their own and the whole Omani ELT context. The study highlights the need for making the framework public and continuing to develop and evaluate it regularly. One of the key issues, presented within this study, is the need to develop a general framework for ELT in Oman. This covers all aspects related to the area with the focus on different parties such as learners' assessment and teacher training by highlighting their role in the whole process. The research ends by discussing the need for two future research projects in similar contexts. This includes research into stakeholders' needs and expectations in Oman and also developing specific learning outcomes for each grade of the curriculum.

Keywords: evaluating a framework, Curriculum Evaluation, developing a framework, Oman, Curriculum Officers

1. 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. 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 (Al-Jardani 2011).

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(Al-Jardani 2012).

2. Research Questions

1. How useful are the elements included in the Framework for Curriculum Evaluation for the Omani context?

2. What improvement could be made to the framework?

3. 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, collectand 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.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages which using a framework might have. Marsh (2004) stated some ofthe advantages.

*   The curriculum will be more coherent and orderly.
*   High-quality curriculum development is likely to occur because planning criteria and standards apply consistently across all curriculum frameworks.
*   New content and skills can be easily accommodated in curriculum framework including various multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary variations
*   Curriculum frameworks developed at a national level; have the potential to become accepted as national frameworks
*   Better chances to add up some extra activities such problem-solving, higher-order thinking skills and others.

Here he also suggests some disadvantages of using curriculum frameworks:

*   If they are too detailed they become very directive for teachers.
*   They can become instruments of compliance used as a mean of control by central education authorities without considering differences of context.

This shows that developing and using frameworks have more advantages and it is very easy to overcome the disadvantages. This can be done by developing a simple and to-the-point document which should be developed in such a way as to guide and support different participants.

4. The Framework

There are 13 sections/elements included in the framework for Curriculum Evaluation. Each section covers the suggested element. For each section, a detail of issues is covered as follows:

The framework starts with an introduction covers the main issues and the main terminologies definition used within the document.

4.1 Rationale and Policy of the Ministry of Education

This covers the rationale beyond teaching English in Oman. This covers the expected changes in educational philosophy, the role of English in the society, students' and parents expectations, and increasing level of students of the knowledge of outside world, students' awareness and change of educational technology.

4.2 Vision of the Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education

This covers the vision of the curriculum evaluation departments.

4.3 Mission of the Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education

This section highlights the mission of the department too.

4.4 Stakeholders' Needs and Expectations

This covers the use of English in Oman in different parties and the expectations of employers, higher education institutes, parents and the society in general.

4.5 Aims and Learning Objectives and Outcomes

This seems to be a long section as it covers the general learning objectives for the three levels of schools (Basic Education Cycle 1: grades 1-4, Basic Education Cycle 2: Grades 5-10 and Post Basic Grades 11 and 12). It also covers the learning outcomes for the same levels. This section ends with specific objectives of different levels too. This covers different skills and strategies intend to be developed for each level of schools.

4.6 Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Objectives

This section covers two main issues, the linguistic and the non-linguistic objectives. In the linguistic objective part, vocabulary, grammar, and the four skills (Reading, writing, listening and speaking skills) are covered in the sense the methods used to use them within the curriculum.

The non- linguistic objectives cover the culture, learning strategies, and attitudes and motivation. How these objectives are tackled in discussed within this section.

4.7 Methods & Approaches

This highlights the methods and the approached utilized within both syllabus, the English for me (grades 1-10) and the Engage with English for grades 11 and 12.

4.8 Textbooks & Materials

In this section, a description of the curriculum is provided and also point out and highlight the components of the English Language Curriculum in Oman.

4.9 Resources

This section presents some useful online resources covering different aspects which teachers and other can use. This covers searching, Internet guides and resources, crossword puzzle makers, poetry, journals, references, story telling, publishers, pronunciation, writing, teacher training, and organisation.

4.10 Instruction Time

This section covers the instruction time- number of periods for English subject. This cover grades 1-12.

4.11 Assessment

The assessment section highlights two main issues. These are the weighting of each element including the four skills and their weight within the continuous assessment (daily assessment through observation), Class test and the end of semester test. The other issue presented within the section is the mark grades and their remark. This starts with 90%- 100% as Excellent to 49% and less as need future support.

4.12 Teacher Training

This section covers the key aspect of in-service teacher training and courses covered within the training department.

4.13 Management & Evaluation

This is also a long section, as it covers different subtitles related to Curriculum evaluation. This includes the purpose of curriculum evaluation, who should be involved, gathering the information, the result of evaluation and record keeping for the process of curriculum evaluation

The document ends with a list of references used for developing the framework.

5. Participants

There are three types of participants in this study as mentioned above: the Curriculum officers, selected officers from the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office and the supervisors for English Language.

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.In some cases where there is a need for participants' quotation, the sample of this study are 7 Ministry Officers (CO1- CO7) in order to use of their participants' actual words.

Officers from the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office represent both genders and have different qualifications and experience. They are holding Masters and one of them a PhD in Education. They have also different years of experience in education which varies from 4-16 years. Having collected this information which

they filled in the questionnaire, but there is no plan to examine any difference related to these differences. Moreover, in some cases where there is a need for participants' quotation, the sample of this study are 9 Ministry Officers (MO1- MO9) in order to use of their participants' actual words.

Senior Supervisors and supervisors of English Language represent the whole Sultanate. They also represent both genders, and have different qualifications and experience. Most of them are holding a MA in education. Their years of working as teachers, senior teachers, and supervisors are between 16-21 years. In some cases where there is a need for participants' quotation, the sample of this study are 18 Supervisors (SS1-SS18) in order to use of their participants' actual words.

6. Method

Questionnaires are probably the most commonly used data collection instrument for eliciting information about attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Holland and Shortall, 1997 and McDonough, 1997: 171; Drever and Munn, 1999). In order to ensure that the questionnaire gives valid results, the researcher uses easy and comprehensible statements within the questionnaire. Therefore, questionnaire is also used for this study.

There are essentially two methods for administering any questionnaire. These are called face-to-face administration, where the researcher is present while the respondent or respondents complete the questionnaire, and administration by mail, where the questionnaire is sent by post to pre-selected respondents (Holland and Shortall, 1997). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will send the questionnaire through emails. Participants are given enough time to fill out their questionnaire and email it back within an agreed time.

Good planning of the questionnaire is important. This includes forming the questions. The questions should be clear, understandable and specific. Each question should have a purposeand is selected in terms of its form such as open-ended or 'choose an option'.

This research project employed both open-ended questions and fixed response questionnaires. Open-ended questions are composed of items which require respondents to elaborate on their attitudes, opinions, perceptions, etc. (Swetnam, 2004).

7. Research Instrument

This will be done by developing a questionnaire, with two parts, which include the framework for participants. They are as mentioned above are the Curriculum Evaluation Officers, members of the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office and English Supervisors (see Appendix A: Data collection instrument). Their impact on the framework will be evaluated and based on that a new modified version of it will be produced.

Part one presents the elements of the framework. This includes appearing of the actual texts of the framework as the participant click on one of them and at the end of that element there is also another link called "Back" and by clicking on it, the participants come back to the element and choose the level of usefulness of that elements and so on with the rest elements. In the same part, there is a chance for participants to write any suggested changes or improvements for each element.

Part 2 includes three statements regarding to the coverage of the document, the order and the usefulness for their own working context. Participants rake these with the level of agreement (Agree strongly – Disagree strongly).

There is also a box provided for any general comments and suggestion for the participants to fill if there have any.

On the other hand, the questionnaire has two parts. Part 1 is a ranking scale examining the usefulness of the suggested items of the framework. The second part included some statements about the framework and participants choose how far they agree with them. This will analysed using the SPSS and a comparison with be done as there are three types of participants involved in this study (the Curriculum Evaluation Officers, members of the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office and English Supervisors). For all questionnaires aspects such as validity and reliability coefficient, the percentiles, median, and the mode of each item and each question will be collected and analysed.

8. Findings

Analysing the questionnaire and the two parts of it, here is a table shows the validity and the reliability of it.

Table 1. Reliability coefficient and validity of the questionnaire

No of Items	Reliability coefficient	Validity
18	0.928	0.963

The questionnaire contains 18 items suggested by different experts as a result of a previous study by the researcher.

The value for reliability coefficients for the questionnaire by using the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.928 which shows that it almost has a very good reliability. As Validity refers to the accuracy of an assessment; it's 0.963. This was calculated as the square root of the reliability coefficient. This shows that the questionnaire is also valid in this case.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part 1 looks at to what extent the suggested elements are useful for inclusion in the framework for Curriculum Evaluation. The second part covers general things about the framework; the coverage of the content, the order of the elements and usefulness for the participants' working context.

8.1 The Usefulness of Including the Suggested Elements in the Framework

The part 1 questionnaire was developed electronically. This allows the participants to look at each element and by clicking on the specific element; the whole text of the actual framework appears. For example, if a participants click on the Rationale element in the questionnaire, the rationale text will appear directly and then after reading it, participants can click on the batten "back" to return him again to the element and then he/she can choose to what extent having the element "rationale" is useful from their point of view (Useful 5- 1 Useless). Then the participants can go on with the rest elements.

There is also a space titled as "suggested changes/improvements) for each element. Participants can write specific comments related to each element on things related to specific changes suggested whether related to the content itself or even any language errors found. These comments are analysed qualitative at the end of this section.

The following table shows the mean, Median, Standard Deviation and the Interquartile range of each item for *part 1*. More complete statistics is in appendix E.

Table 2. The Mean, Median, Standard Deviation and the Interquartile range of Analysis of Part 1 of the questionnaire

No.	Items	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Interquartile range of Analysis
1	Rationale	4.18	5.00	1.00	2.00
2	Vision	4.29	5.00	1.14	2.00
3	Mission	4.26	5.00	0.99	2.00
4	Stakeholders' needs and expectations	3.88	4.00	1.07	2.00
5	General Learning Objectives	4.56	5.00	0.70	1.00
6	Learning Outcomes	4.44	5.00	0.89	1.00
7	Specific Learning Objectives	4.41	5.00	0.78	1.00
8	Linguistic and non-linguistic objectives	3.97	4.00	0.90	2.00
9	Methods & Approaches	3.97	4.00	1.06	2.00
10	Textbooks & Materials	3.97	4.00	0.87	2.00
11	Resources	4.06	4.00	1.07	2.00
12	Instruction Time	3.71	4.00	1.12	2.00
13	Assessment	4.18	4.00	1.00	1.00
14	Teacher Training	4.06	4.00	1.07	2.00
15	Management & Evaluation	4.38	5.00	0.78	1.00

The table above shows that all suggested participants were able to send their questionnaires back. Reminders were sent too to check the receiving of the emails and few phone calls were conducted to encourage few participants to send their answers which arrived two weeks later compared to the majority of them. This shows the difficult of sending and receiving questionnaires. This might happen as the questionnaire takes a longer time to fill in as participants need to look through the whole framework and fill in the two parts of the questionnaire.

The mean and other figures presented in the above table the high level of agreement on the usefulness of all elements. The mean of all items are very high except for the 'Stakeholders' needs and expectations' and 'Instruction Time'. For the 'Instruction Time' item which got the lowest mean (3.71) but still high level of agreement. There is a general trend on the usefulness of all items as there more than 50% of the participants chose option 5 as the highest usefulness for about 60% of the items (9 items).

From this, keeping all elements in the framework as they are seen as useful elements to be kept within the framework of Curriculum Framework is a key finding on this part of the questionnaire. With this high percentage of usefulness, this shows that participants show a high degree of the usefulness of the framework elements for the Omani curriculum evaluation context and their own specific workplace. This answers the first research question of this study. This also supports to keep all elements within the framework for the final draft of the framework.

The second part of the questionnaire is analysed in the coming section, which discussed three statements in which a question of how far participants agree with them.

Part 2 highlights the answers of three questions about the framework. This shows how far participants agree with them.

Table 3. The Mean, Median, Standard Deviation and the Interquartile range of Analysis of Part 2 of the questionnaire

	Item	Mean	**Median**	Std. Deviation	Interquartile range of Analysis
1	The content of the document covers all that is expected.	3.68	4.00	0.94	1.00
2	The order of items of the framework is reasonable.	3.91	4.00	0.62	0.25
3	The framework is useful for my working context.	4.35	4.00	0.60	1.00

The table above shows the participants responds to the items. The directions of the three items are between agreed and agree strongly, and the mean is between 3.68 for item 1 and 4.35 for item 3.

8.2 The Content of the Document Covers All That Is Expected

Item 1 seems to be more argumenta item as participants might have some other items to be included in the framework, although the item is still agreed on. Based on this, the content of the document covers all that is expected by most of the participants. The document items are in a reasonable order as suggested by the participants and strongly agreed on that the framework will be a very useful document in the participants' situation. This includes the curriculum evaluation offices, the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office and higher level of policy makers' offices and schools and supervisors offices too. However, one of the participants MO 2 commented regards the item "*The content of the document covers all that is expected*" statement   by saying that "*May be because it's not clear enough! - the word "expected" is wide and it means different things. The expectations of designers are different from evaluators' expectations, etc.*"

8.3 The Order of Items of the Framework Is Reasonable

This shows that the participants have shown a high agreement on the order of the elements in which the document appears. The order suggested by the experts in previous study seems to be reasonable. Therefore, the participants stressed the need to keep the order of the elements of the framework.

8.4 The Framework Is Useful for My Working Context

With the highest mean compared to other two statements. This shows strongly that participants show the usefulness of the framework for their working context. This means that the framework can be a good document for the English Language Teaching in Oman. However, this shows also that this document can be used in their specific working context. This covers the Ministry itself including the policy makers, the Curriculum department as well as in different region in Oman. This covers schools and every teacher if possible.

In order to find differences between the three types of participants: the Curriculum officers, selected officers from the undersecretary of Curriculum and Learning office (M) and the senior supervisors for English Language (S). One way Anova for both parts of the questionnaire is shown the table below.

Table 4. One way Anova analysis for both parts of questionnaire

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Part1 of the questionnaire	Between Groups	.535	2	.268	.501	.610
	Within Groups	16.538	31	.533		
	Total	17.073	33			
Part2 of the questionnaire	Between Groups	.135	2	.068	.240	.788
	Within Groups	8.741	31	.282		
	Total	8.876	33			

By analysing the statistical significance for both parts, it shows a sig of (.610) in part 1 and (.788) in part 2 between the three types of participants which shows that there isn't a clear differences between them which can be analysed in depth. Based on this the previous finding on the usefulness of the framework for the English Language teaching context in Oman is supported as there is not clear different between participants who represent different work places. This includes schools and different regions, the curriculum developing department and the policy makers in the Ministry itself.

8.5 Suggested Improvement for the Framework

Specific comments suggested, in part one of the questionnaire, the need to make this available for teachers and other departments such as training. The right for different practitioners to be updated is clear seen in the participants'' comments.

Other common comments about *Stakeholders' needs and expectations* is that this should be considered in the curriculum development stage not the evaluation which might be that this need to put in the curriculum development framework not the curriculum evaluation one. It is suggested that it's only for a whole change, there is a need to consider different issues and *Stakeholders' needs and expectations* is one of them. However, looking back to the literature, there a need to have only curriculum framework as it is a continuous process where is affects every elements in curriculum evaluation process as shown in this model.
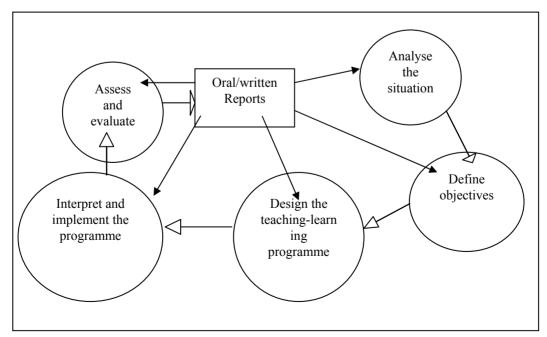

Figure 1. A modified Curriculum Model

There are also a common comment about *'Instruction Time'* and *'Teacher Training'* as they are observed in other documents. The instruction time can be seen in the teacher's book or the beginning of the year's circulars, and the training issues can be seen within the training documents. Therefore, the mean of these two items where a bit less than others.

As a general comment at the end of the questionnaire, it was stated that there is a need to review such framework from time to time and involve teachers and supervisors in this process. To add there is a need also to involve all practitioners in schools, and within the Ministry. All can be involved to develop their own part and review it with the help from other parties.

Moreover a participants suggested continuing developing it from time to time by involving different practitioners from in and outside the classroom "*Needs to be extensively negotiated with teachers, supervisors and reviewed form time to time* (SS5). This supports including all practitioners in the process of keeping the framework updated. This helps to keep them updated and to get their continuous input in the process of curriculum evaluation.

9. Conclusion

Participants in this study show a rich input on the usefulness and practicality of the product. This shows a good evaluation of the framework. On the other hand, the questionnaire is a reliable and a valid one. Based on this, result can be trusted.

Part 1 findings show that different participants agree on the usefulness of all items (74%-91%). This shows a very high agreement with selected items by the experts. Therefore, there is a need to keep all the items and develop them according to the comments suggested by the participants. The same things appear in part 2. Part 2 also highlighted that different participants of different position have similar responses and a general agreement between them can be highlighted.

Apart from this, there are two other issues discussed in the findings section. These are the availability of the document and the need for continue developing it. The entre context affect some of the participants as most document are not available in schools at the moment and the need to make them available for all people in the field and the Ministry itself and also make it easy to be access. This seems to have a general agreement within the whole participants.

The need to develop a clear framework covering all ELT aspects which covers all needed information for all parties and researchers. This framework can be the basis for such project. There is also a need to continue developing by creating a systematic process of developing the framework as well as the curriculum evaluation task itself. This is a key issue as this will help to keep the framework up- to date and to keep everyone involved in the process and the curriculum itself.

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Appendix

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire

Evaluating a developed framework for Curriculum Evaluation in Oman	
Dear Participant This study intends to answer the following questions: • How useful are the elements included in the framework for the Omani context? • What improvement could be made to the framework after using (testing) it?	
Name:	
Gender:	
Qualification:	
Job Title:	
Work place:	
Years of experience in the Curriculum filed:	
Years of experience in the Education filed:	
Date:	

A. The following items were suggested by a number of experts, involved in the earlier part of the research, to be included in the framework for Curriculum Evaluation. How useful are these for inclusion in the Curriculum Evaluation Framework?

• *Press the Ctrl key and click on the item to direct you to the text, Click on the 'Back' link to return to the items again.*

Items	Useful 5	4	3	2	Useless 1	Suggested changes/improvements
1. Rationale and Policy of the Ministry of Education						
2.Vision of the Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education						
3.Mission of the Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education						
4.Stakeholders' needs and expectations						
5. Aims and learning objectives and outcomes General Learning Objectives						
Learning Outcomes						
Specific Learning Objectives						
6.Linguistic and non-linguistic objectives						
7.Methods & Approaches						
8.Textbooks & Materials						
9.Resources						
10.Instruction Time						
11.Assessment						
12.Teacher Training						
13.Management & Evaluation						

B. How far do you agree with the following statements?

Item	Agree Strongly	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
The content of the document covers all that is expected.					
The order of items of the framework is reasonable.					
The framework is useful for my working context.					

C. General suggested changes/improvements

Thank you for your cooperation.

The researcher,