

LECTURERS' EVALUATION OF UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM CONTENTS

Nguyen Hanh Dao*, Bui Thi Thanh Hoa, Pham Hoai Anh, Nguyen Thanh Mai

School of Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Science and Technology

SUMMARY

Classroom teachers, also curriculum designers and implementers, play a key role in evaluating different aspects of curriculum design including content areas. This survey research paper aims to investigate internal evaluation on the five main content areas of an English-majored-bachelor program already implemented for five years. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire of forty-six lecturers. As internal curriculum evaluator, they evaluated the relevance in terms of time allocation and significance of each content area, and they also gave ideas about weaknesses and recommendations of each content area in the existing curriculum. The findings show that all five curriculum content areas have strengths in module time scheduling and core knowledge despite several shortcomings in resources, teaching methodology and assessment for learning. Suggestions to renew the curriculum are made about the balance between theory and practice, adding new modules, integrated teaching methods, and diversifying assessment forms to support self-studying.

Key words: *Curriculum evaluation; internal evaluation; curriculum contents; teachers as curriculum leaders; survey research method.*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development, evaluation and renewal literature, theory, and reform trends have long considered teachers a key role in every single stage [1]. Firstly, the process of curriculum development generally involves such elements as objectives, content, methods, evaluation, and outcomes [2]. Secondly, teachers have first-hand experience, knowledge of instructional methods and assessment to given learner groups; thus, they are qualified as internal evaluator of each or all curriculum elements [3]. In addition, teachers' involvement in curriculum process need to be paid more attention [1], even be put in a central role in curriculum processes including curriculum evaluation [1], [4]. From internal implementers' perspectives in this research, the existing curriculum need improving and renovating to some extent within controllable resources of time, human and other physical matters. The process of curriculum renewal is an integral part to meet changing demands of growing learner body and other socio-economic sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum is conceptualized in various ways from different perspectives. In this research,

the concept is defined by Stren (1992) as the closed-loop, cyclical process of development, implementation, evaluation and renewed research and development [2]; therefore, curriculum evaluation is expected to provide resources for curriculum renewal. Curriculum is referred to as a comprehensive plan of language teaching. Elaborately, plan consists of such inter-related elements as the objectives, content, teacher development, teaching strategies, learning strategies, timing, and evaluation [2], [3], [5]. Apparently, curriculum goals and objectives are only achieved by students through curriculum content areas or subject matter they study [2]. Selecting curriculum content requires balance among subject knowledge, process skills and personal development for student while remarkably considering context of assessment and learning outcomes and students' levels of cognition [6]; feasibility and self-sufficiency in cost-effectiveness are added to the criteria of curriculum content selection [7].

Furthermore, any effective evaluations of curriculum should place the improvement of students' outcome at its heart [8], and teachers' involvement in the evaluation is the key to succeed.

Various types of curriculum evaluation have been categorized for purposes and contexts to implement. In practice, compared to external evaluation of curriculum made by external authority like investors, employers for accountability purposes [9] internal evaluation of curriculum purposefully focuses on how students' educational outcomes are achieved through experience of the curriculum [6] [9] rather than test result data [2]. Moreover, internal evaluations, also classified as formative ones, emphasizes on assessing strengths and weaknesses of curriculum elements for institutional continuous improvement and development though internal evaluation reports may be used for external accountability [8], [10]. As a result, curriculum evaluation reports can help related stakeholders make evidence-driven decision of what to maintain, adapt or eliminate in a curriculum [8].

Internal evaluation of curriculum comprises of four basic steps: *Plan*- relevant stakeholders' discussion and agreeing on objectives of evaluation; *Do* – collection of diverse data suitable to agreed objectives; *Check* – data analysis and interpretation to evaluate the extent evaluation objectives have been gained, which educational outcomes have not, and with emerging needs or lacks of teachers and other direct stakeholders; *Act* – designing follow-up activities/action plans or making recommendations for curriculum renewal or innovation [2].

Internal evaluations of curriculum are usually conducted by staff groups directly connected with curriculum including teachers [3], [8] who track and address possible problems in a curriculum [2], [11]. In summary, literature review on internal evaluation of curriculum content and teachers' involvement in such evaluation processes has set the theoretical foundation for the research implementation.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The study was done at a university school with its undergraduate credit-based program of English for Science and Technology, following the B.A. curriculum framework of Ministry of Education and Training Vietnam.

This research is a part of the four-component “Needs Analysis” project at institutional level with the aims to periodically renew a B.A. curriculum after five-year implementation. Thus, all of the staff are allocated to join directly or indirectly in the project. Under that circumstance, the research participants are 46 lecturers teaching any of the five content areas in the curriculum. They staff in three main departments of the total five in the school.

The data for this study was from forty-six responses of an online survey questionnaire. With a focus on the lecturers' evaluation of five curriculum content areas, the semi-structured questionnaire with twenty-two close-ended and five open-ended questions aims to investigate internal evaluators' opinions of to what extent the existing B.A. program has accommodated needs of students together with working environment, and what recommendations are made to compensate students' wants and lacks in knowledge, skills and qualities.

In the research, the five content areas (hereafter shortly named CA) account for approximately 75% of the total credit number (about 96-99/128-132 credits) as follows:

- CA1: Basic language skills
- CA2: English for Specific Purposes I & II
- CA3: Linguistics Theories
- CA4: Translating and Interpreting
- CA5: Modules in Vietnamese

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is carried out using “survey research methodology” [12] or “survey research approach” [13] for some reasons. First, the aim of this study is to explore lecturers' evaluations of five key curriculum content areas, which is only one aspect of institutional curriculum renewal processes [13]. Second, the research participants could give their opinions about the five curriculum content areas based on their experience, expertise and understanding; hence, this survey research helps gather information about opinions of a large group [12]. Data collected then were analysed and interpreted

to renew the existing program. This feature illustrates the relevance of using survey research approach in the study in addition to resource effectiveness and high level of generalizability for larger population, as mentioned in [12], [13], [14]. Third, through the survey instrument [12], or questionnaire, research data provided by the participants consists of quantitative data through Likert-based-multiple choice answers and qualitative data through open-ended questions about adaptation necessary for student outcome improvement. As a result, despite possibly biased and unfavoured by participants, the quantitative questions help rate the participants' attitudes toward common issues among five curriculum content areas while in qualitative questions, they rank by making reason-based choice. Rating questions cause "nondifferentiation" compared to ranking ones because rating questions also look identical by repeatedly using the same scales [14]. All in all, the study follows two steps in survey research design: making sampling plan and setting up procedures for obtaining reliable population estimates at acceptable response rates together with degree of information accuracy [12].

The survey research approach was used to answer two research questions below:

- How do the lecturers evaluate the five main content areas in BA. curriculum at the university?
- What *changes* in each of the five main curriculum content areas are needed to enhance the education and training quality of the program?

Data collection and analysis

To find out forty-six lecturers', also research participants', evaluation of the five main content areas in B.A. curriculum and their suggestions of what changes necessary for teaching quality improvement, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed and delivered to the participants.

The purposive sample of forty-six lecturers meets the requirement of population size, its

homogeneity, sample media, degree of precision [12]: 46 participants making up of 73% teaching staff in the BA. program with at least three latest years' teaching the program content. Each of them completed 22 evaluative closed-ended questions and five open-ended questions in an online questionnaire shared via email for two weeks.

The questionnaire in Vietnamese was piloted for adaptation before being delivered to the participants. The transcripts were then translated into English for research use with the verifying of translating lecturers in the institution. It is conducted on the protocol such as covering letter and consent letter sent via email; three heads of departments' checking if their staff complete questionnaire; researchers' confirmation email sent to participants with properly completed questionnaire. This protocol helps required data be collected within a short period of time.

Two data analysis methods were used to analyse the questionnaire data: descriptive approach for quantitative data from closed-ended questions and content analysis method for qualitative data from open-ended questions. The latter is also referred to as "interpretative analysis of the underlying deeper meaning of the data" [15] which handle huge amount of data logically and scientifically using computer software.

These two methods are popularly employed in survey research [13], and both data sources were compiled and coded on the theme-based principle. With the aims to use internal evaluation results for curriculum renewal as mentioned in [8], [10], three key themes were finalized to answer the two research questions, as listed below:

- Theme 1: Strengths in each of the five main curriculum content areas
- Theme 2: Weaknesses in each of the five main curriculum content areas
- Theme 3: Suggestions in each curriculum content area about resources (time, materials, module content, facilities), teaching methodology, and assessment.

The quantitative data are processed using Microsoft Excel [16] with five indicators. They are (1) necessity of modules to achieving student learning outcomes; (2) module content; (3) time allocation for modules; (4) classifying modules based on degrees of skill proficiency; (5) balance between theory and practice. The values of an indicator are based on the mean and mode of Likert scores ranging from the highest score of 5 points for “completely agree” and 1 point for “completely disagree”. If an indicator shows a value of above average score of Likert scale, that indicator is arranged into Theme 1. Otherwise, that indicator is put under Theme 2.

The quantitative data analysis results show that all five curriculum content areas have strengths such as appropriate and necessary contents to the BA. curriculum; relevant time allocation for modules compared to other modules and among internal module components.

Furthermore, each content area has weaknesses such as mis-practice or lacks (classified as Theme 2). These weaknesses are sources of the forty-six lecturers' suggestions (Theme 3). The suggestions focus on how to improve resource allocation, teaching methodology or assessment. In essence, it is necessary to change applied translation and interpretation subjects from content-based instructions, which is impossible for non-technical lecturers and students to do, into proficiency-oriented modules. Besides that, curriculum content area of Linguistics Theories should balance between theory and practice. Third, there should be enhancements in syllabus outcomes, in authenticity of materials/ references together with module information of all five curriculum content areas, and in applying technological advancements and facilities in English language classrooms. Next, diverse practical teaching methodology should be used to maximize learning opportunities and learner autonomy. Last, multiple assessment forms and tools should be employed to foster

learning and evaluate outcomes in each course and the whole BA. program.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From two data analyses based on three themes above, the following discussions and findings are made:

- *Finding 1*: The five content areas of the existing BA. program are evaluated to be core and necessary. However, more optional modules should be added to the areas of Basic language skills and Linguistic Theories. 40% of the lecturers answering the questionnaire identified some gaps in the curriculum content areas and suggested solutions of supplementing more modules, as stated in [8], [11].

- *Finding 2*: The time allocated to one curriculum content area is relevant in comparison with other areas, maintaining cost-effectiveness of the program [5], [7]. Moreover, considering the needs to balance among various aspects of curriculum [6], teachers emphasize on the balance between theory and practice in each content area, especially Linguistics Theories.

- *Finding 3*: Teaching methodology should be integrated and flexibly applied on the principles such as leading to gaining optimal learning outcomes, increasing learner autonomy, and facilitating self-studying. Proficiency-based instructions should be used to teach Basic language skills and professional skills like translating, interpreting. Such key elements of a program as syllabus objectives and teaching approach should be reviewed for improvement to make the plan of teaching comprehensive [2].

- *Finding 4*: Materials and references in the existing curriculum should be made diverse and authentic enough to support teaching and learning. This update is a must to achieve program goals [2].

- *Finding 5*: On-going assessment is relevantly applied, but using varied assessment forms will support learning. This is inter-related to other elements of a program; thus, improvement in assessment will affect the whole program [2].

CONCLUSION

This survey research showcases the significance and the ways to conduct rigorously internal evaluation of curriculum for quality enhancement with teachers' involvement. First, as curriculum implementer, lecturers can assure the validity and reliability of curriculum evaluation by giving opinions about its contents from experiences, observation and expertise. Second, internal evaluation by teachers is feasible in cost, time and effectiveness because this process can be periodically carried out. Third, internal evaluation of curriculum content areas should focus on the what (through module outcomes, content, materials/references) and the how (through time allocation for modules, balance between theory and practice, levels of skill proficiency, teaching and assessment methodology, learning strategies and other transferrable skills).

However, the study using survey research approach has several limitations in sampling process in which other directly-connected-with-curriculum stakeholders should be included and more data collected from documents such as curriculum and module/course outlines or observation of how those key curriculum content areas have been implemented.

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TÓM TẮT NGHIÊN CỨU KHẢO SÁT ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN VỀ NỘI DUNG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH ĐÀO TẠO CỬ NHÂN

Nguyễn Hạnh Đào*, Bùi Thị Thanh Hòa, Phạm Hoài Anh, Nguyễn Thanh Mai

Viện Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Bách khoa Hà Nội

Người dạy là người soạn đồng thời là người thực hiện chương trình đào tạo. Họ đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc đánh giá các mảng khác nhau của một chương trình đào tạo, đặc biệt là về các mảng nội dung chương trình. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành để khảo sát đánh giá của giảng viên về năm nội dung chính của chương trình cử nhân chuyên ngành tiếng Anh sau năm năm thực hiện. Bảng khảo sát bao gồm các câu hỏi đóng và mở nhằm cung cấp dữ liệu định tính và định lượng được tiến hành lấy ý kiến của 46 giảng viên tham gia giảng dạy chương trình đào tạo này. Là thành viên đánh giá nội bộ chương trình, các giảng viên được hỏi về mức độ hợp lý của việc phân bổ thời lượng, tầm quan trọng của những nội dung này và ý kiến của họ về điểm yếu của mỗi nội dung; ngoài ra, họ được yêu cầu nêu ra đề xuất để nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học mỗi mảng nội dung chương trình đó. Kết quả cho thấy cả năm nội dung chương trình đều có ưu điểm về phân bố lịch trình, nội dung và có những điểm yếu về phân bổ nguồn lực, phương pháp giảng dạy và phương pháp đánh giá kết quả học tập. Các đề xuất của họ bao gồm cân cân bằng giữa lý thuyết và thực hành, bổ sung môn mới, áp dụng phương pháp dạy tích hợp, đa dạng hóa các phương pháp đánh giá kết quả học tập để tăng năng lực tự học cho người học.

Từ khóa: *Đánh giá chương trình; đánh giá nội bộ; nội dung chương trình; người giảng dạy với vai trò làm chủ chương trình; phương pháp khảo sát điều tra*

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* Tel: 0904160909, Email: dao.nguyenhanh@hust.edu.vn