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EVALUATION AS A FEED BACK AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM: THE THEORY AND A TRIAL

A. Otu. Umoru-Onuka, *Ph.d*

*Institute of Education University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Abstract

This paper discusses the concepts of evaluation, feedback and accountability and shows how evaluation is a means to both feedback and accountability. Evaluation implies verification of the true state of programme implementation while accountability stresses efficiency of the programme and takes off from where evaluation ends. Feedback however deals with the information, which could be used to improve a programme performance. However, the paper further shows that evaluation as an accountability mechanism reveals the strength or weaknesses or opportunities of a programme or the threats to the programme. As a feedback mechanism, evaluation facilitates decision-making process and improvement of a programme. The study also reveals that sometimes evaluation data are neither used as feedback nor accountability mechanism and suggests that evaluation data should be utilized for feedback or accountability purposes. The result of the study is that evaluation as both accountability and feedback mechanism improves teaching / learning process as well as student performance.

Introduction

Evaluation has been given various meanings by various evaluators depending on the object of the study (evaluation project) being undertaken. Here are some of these views about evaluation:

Beeby (1975) defines evaluation as “the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence leading, as part of process, to judgment of value with a view to action...”

Implied in this definition is the fact that evaluation is a process, which uses information, which has been processed to pass a judgment, on the worth of a thing. Ajayi (1990) views it as a means used to determine the achievement of goal using a plan of action; thus involving process and goal.

Alkin (1972) contends that the impact of an evaluation is making available processed information for decision-makers to enable them make a choice from alternative options.

Sourmelis (1977) posits that evaluation is a determination of worth or value of a thing. Pogue (1986), Bajah (1986) and Umoru-Onuka (1990;2001) all agree that the purpose of evaluation determines the meaning to be attached to it. Bajah further notes that evaluation reflects concern for information on outcomes of programme and judgment regarding the desirability or value of the programme.

Obvious from these definitions and views on evaluation is that there are two schools of thought viz: The information seeking evaluation school of thought and the value or judgment determination school of thought. Ajayi (1990) underscores this main point when he states that evaluation involves process and goal. The second school of thought lays emphasis on the value or judgment aspect. However, in this study, evaluation can be defined as the use of processed information to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of a programme.

Some Features of Evaluation

Gronlund (1971) cited in Umoru-Onuka (2001) categorizes the features of evaluation as follows:

Improving learning, instruction and achievement

To report to parents or sponsors the pupil's or the institution's performance.

Employing the results (outcomes) for planning purposes

To give a feed back for programme revision.

While Hedgette (1979) cited in Ajayi (1990) states that evaluation process includes: establishment of standards; review of performance, determination of efficiency (accountability), and taking corrective measure. Either view of evaluation as process or purpose shows that there is a great deal of feedback and accountability import in any evaluation effort. This is so because efficiency is the main thrust of accountability while the improvement of a programme is the thrust of feedback. One obvious thing about evaluation is that it is an exercise, which is both interdisciplinary and is useful to all disciplines because it also aids planning.

An Evaluation is Defined by its Purpose

The purpose of an evaluation exercise determines the type of evaluation to evolve. Thus, an evaluation used to determine the impact of a social intervention programme on its environment ('publics') can be termed an impact evaluation, which would provide information that helps to determine, for instance, the effects of an instructional strategy on the performances of both the students and the teacher. Job evaluation determines the magnitude, context and content of a particular job as well as the prerequisites of those who have to carry out the functions attached to the job. Project evaluation determines the successes or failures of the particular project and also how to improve its performances. Performance evaluation is used to find out how the individual staff of an organisation has performed. An evaluation aimed at generalizing a phenomenon is termed an *evaluation research*. It employs research methodology, which allows for generalization of its outcomes. Its outcomes are thus generalizable. The crux of an evaluation investigation is that it is used to judge the worth or value of social projects, programmes, plans or policies (de Hegedus, 1995).

Thus an evaluation meant to determine the worth or value of plans, policies, projects or

programmes must possess the understated features:

Information about the object of evaluation; the ability to compare its outcome with the criterion being evaluated e.g. expected outcome of a project, an opinion on whether or not there is value in what has occurred.

There are also seven possible levels at which a project can be evaluated as follows:

Input level which refers to resources invested in the project; activities, which are taking place as a result of the input; the third level, which is the participant level – the person playing one role or another; immediate reactions constitute the fourth level of evaluation; the effect of the project on the participants change in knowledge, attitudes, skills or aspirations resulting from participation in an education programme; practical application level: how applicable are the results of the project; final impact level which refers to the level of attainment of the ultimate objective of the project.

Yet there is also the ex-ante evaluation, which is conducted before the completion of the project (also referred to as formative evaluation). Its purpose is diagnostic; it examines as well as explains the existing situation in the light of a model of casual relations among the variables that are working in the course of executing a project. Some refer to this type of evaluation as 'on going' or monitoring or developmental evaluation (ARMTI, 1987). A summative evaluation measures progress toward objectives or goal, and is carried out at the completion of a project to determine its level of performance or accomplishment of the project objectives. An ex-post evaluation, which is considered as impact evaluation measures the aggregate effects of a project and thus provides information for programme managers and policy makers.

Obviously all forms of evaluation provide information, which facilitate decision-making or judgment of worth or desirability of programme. Programme performance reveals the levels of programme's accountability (Babarinde, 1992; Ogunwuyi, 1992; and Umoru-Onuka 2001). The outcomes of an evaluation also provide feedback for programme improvement (Umoru-Onuka, 1996). This is so because evaluation is sometimes used to determine the cost-benefit or effectiveness of a programme.

All evaluation exercises reveal any or all of **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities (potentials) and threats (SWOT)** of a programme or project, if properly and effectively carried out. Such outcomes would be both useful as accountability and feedback measures. As earlier pointed out, evaluation has developed over the years to become useful as a planning, implementation and management tool in every field of human endeavour. It is also a very useful tool in measuring the impacts of educational programmes as well as the level of their accountability. It does provide feedback for programme improvement.

Evaluation Strategy

There are various ways of carrying out evaluation. The way in which a particular evaluation exercise is executed is informed by its purpose. For instance a comprehensive approach which takes a look at its conception and planning stage to decipher the intended inputs into

the programme and the intended objective(s) of the programme and what the implementation process should be is formative.

But if its purpose is diagnostic, all you do is to examine the context and the antecedents of the programme or the process in some cases. An investment evaluation will employ the return-on-investment (ROI) strategy while a holistic evaluation may investigate the discrepancies between inputs as intended and as realized, transformation or process as intended and as realized and the product as intended and as realized. An evaluation research suggests that scientific research methodology be employed to allow for generalizability of the result; because other forms of evaluation are project specific. Evaluation model to be employed is dictated by the evaluation need. Thus, in carrying out an evaluation, one must first decide the need, secondly investigate its use and make consultation with vested interests in the project. Then design the evaluation which entails planning the evaluation methodology including sampling, developing instrument, determine the data collection strategy to adopt, form of data analysis and the form of report writing to adopt. This last element incorporates the result / finding and then the recommendations and conclusions, which in turns gives the details of both accountability and feed back data useful to decision makers, who may read the report.

The result / outcome of an evaluation provides information on the almost exact state of the evaluated programme and this is either feedback into the system for improvement, thus becoming a feedback mechanism or is used to judge or place value on the project as to its desirability or otherwise. Thus providing information on the programme accountability.

Accountability

Since it has been revealed above that evaluation is a tool for measuring the level of programme accountability, we need to understand the concept of accountability. In a layman's language, the term 'accountability' can be viewed as, one being, answerable or responsible for one's own action in the execution of his duties.

However, several people had given various meanings to the concept of accountability especially with regards to (educational) programme execution. For Suchman (1967), programme accountability without evaluation is non-existent and Umoru-Onuka (1996) agrees when he states that programme evaluation reveals the extent of programme accountability. Thus, the interdependence between evaluation and accountability cannot be downplayed. Obemeata (1984) also emphasizes that accountability calls for programme to determine the extent to which the programme implementation leads to achieving its goals. This of course is done through programme evaluation. All these views emphasize the fact that accountability does not consist only as financial report of a project, but also of efficient utilization of all resources invested in a project whether human or otherwise.

Anderson (1971) cited in Umoru-Onuka (2001) states the following about accountability and evaluation:

Both imply determination of the effect (planned or fortuitous) of educational programmes of institutions. But whereas evaluation as traditionally practiced has been concerned solely with impact or outcome (effectiveness), accountability and efficiency in the relation between outcome and resource utilization.

Thus, evaluation, which focuses only on determining outcomes or impacts of a programme, may not reveal any meaningful level of programme accountability unless it proceeds to compare the relation between resource utilization (input and process) and outcomes of the programme. Virtually all educators who talk about the concept of accountability regard it as a by-product of evaluation (Ogunwuyi, 1992; Babarinde, 1992; Obemeata, 1984 & 1985 and Umoru-Onuka, 2003). Therefore, accountability can be perceived as the process or means of determining the relationship between outcomes and resource allocation and utilization as well as a review of programme impact on its clientele.

Accountability portends stewardship as means of responsibility and answerability and stewardship means evaluation of performance with regards to a particular trust reposed in one. An accountability programme is meant to unearth the actual performance of a programme or to reveal the strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats a particular programme possesses. In other words what are the strengths i.e. what are the positive effects of the programme and how can they be further enhanced. It also implies what are the successes of the programme? What are the weaknesses or failures of the programme? What are responsible for the failures? Can they be improved and how?

Accountability also asks the questions: what were the opportunities that are there to improve the programme, which were not explored? How can they be explored and incorporated into the programme for better performance and efficiency? What were the threats to the success of the programme? How can these threats be overcome? Can they be internalised or not? Is there any need for the reorganization of the programme, to make it successfully? A number of writers had suggested various types of accountability among which are the undermentioned:

Umoru-Onuka (2003) reports that Smith (1971) conceives of accountability in various forms as follows:

Programme accountability - which involves program executors taking responsibility for the success or failure of the program; Process accountability- involves ensuring that each element of the programme implementation components is appropriate for success; Fiscal accountability — which deals with the financial property of the programme;

And that Rebarber (1991) stresses that accountability system must include:

Clear and measurable goals that describe intended outcomes; Assessment tools that measure progress towards these goals; incentive: that rewards goal-achievement and ensures adjustment in case failure;

Whereas Alkin (1972) contends that there are three types of accountability namely.

- (a) Goal accountability — making the highest policy making body accountable to the public for selecting and ensuring execution of goals and objectives.
- (b) Programme accountability—making an intermediate body responsible for development and selection of instructional programme appropriate for stated objectives.
- (c) Outcome accountability, which involves the teacher as instructional manager being accountable to the intermediate body (authority) for producing the envisaged, programme result.

Umoru-Onuka (1996) sums up it: that evaluation reveals the degree to which a programme is accountable for achievement of its goals. Accountability can be grouped by type as follows: (1.) fiscal, which deals financial report on a project. (2.) Goal, which determines the ultimate objective of the institution; (3.), programme, which deals with the implementation process; and (4) outcome dealing with the level of attainment of programme objectives.

Feedback

Haymen and Rodney (1975) view evaluation as helping to provide Feedback with which goals can be compared to outcomes especially when feedback identifies what the goals are and indicates the nature and extent of any discrepancy between what is intended and outcome. Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1980) see feedback: as information input in a system, transmitting messages of the system operation to indicate whether the system is operating as planned or not; information concerning any type of planned operation relayed to responsible person for improvement. Obemeata (1984) describes evaluation as multidimensional effort aimed at improving a programme, facilitating decision making, feedback, accountability and judgement.

From these cited works, it is obvious that there is a linkage among evaluation, accountability and feedback. Feedback may be viewed as a broad term for the coupling of parts of an output of a system in order to influence or control the next input to the system. For instance, the testing of a teaching / Learning method result could be regarded as feedback. Keith and Gubellini (1975) define feedback as the capacity of a machine (or system) to evaluate its own performance and then correct it (whatever) or whenever it deviates from plan. Feedback implies, therefore, the fact that output returns to the system as input for corrective purpose. Onietan (1989) contends that feedback from past products of an educational programme form basis for course development. Thus, feedback is a system, which compares output/ result with a criterion. According to Damachi (1978) the object of feedback is control

Roy-Macauley (1988), Ehindero (1986), Bajah (1980) and Umoru-Onuka (2003) agree that evaluation is a feedback mechanism thus emphasizing the link between evaluation and

feedback. While Eisner (1979) sees evaluation also as a feedback mechanism for educational development. Onietan (1989) reveals that he was going to use course participants' feedback to improve the training, stating that the most important sources of feedback of a programme are its beneficiaries.

The following diagram depicts how feedback function in a system.



Fig 2: A feedback Loop

The import of these views is that feedback is an essential ingredient for improving a system. The shortfalls in evaluation and accountability findings are feedback into the system to put right whatever went wrong in the first instance. Therefore, there cannot be *evaluation*, feedback mechanism where evaluation has not taken place. It is also worthy of note when one takes cognizance of (SWOT), that feedback mechanism on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats enables effective decision to be made on either improvement, maintenance of status quo of or cancellation of a programme or the avoidance of certain pitfalls in the programme execution.

Thus evaluation plays active role in providing information for feedback mechanism. However it has been discovered that in the Nigerian educational system Evaluation have been put in abeyance and thus it is either used as feedback mechanism nor used to place value or to judge performance (accountability thus neglected). This was consistently the contention of the Academic Staff Union of University during 1996 seven-month-old strike (see ASUU, Ibadan Release Jan-Oct 1996).

The objective of the work

This study sought to relate the concept of evaluation to the concepts of accountability and feedback and to demonstrate how evaluation can be used as a tool for both accountability and feedback mechanism. The work sought to demonstrate that evaluation as a tool for accountability and feedback mechanism (A/F) can improve student performance.

The following evaluation questions were thus posed.

- (i) Does your school evaluate teaching and learning?
- (ii) Is the result of evaluation exercise reported to stakeholders?
- (iii) Has the result of evaluation been to counsel students and teachers concerning their performance?

Method

10 secondary schools and 100 teachers (10 each per school) were randomly selected for the administration of a checklist.

A checklist constructed by the researcher and validated by expert opinion and qualitative content analysis was used to gather data as follows.

S/NO	Item	Response		
		Often	Seldom	Never
1.	Does your school evaluate teaching and hearing?			
2.	Are the results use for feedback and accountability?			
3.	Is the application of A/F beneficial?			
4.	Does their application improve teachers' effectiveness?			
5.	Does the application of A/F improve learning?			
6.	Does the use of A/F in better Student performance.			

Students Performance was checked by taking the percentage of student that got 5 credit and above in each of the ten schools to verify effect of the use of the accountability / feedback mechanism on the student performance.

Results and Discussions

Item No.	Often No. of Trs	Seldom No. of Trs	Never No. of Trs	No. of schools involved
1.	100	--	--	10
2.	57	13	30	7
3.	54	11	40	7
4.	52	15	33	6
5.	51	17	32	7
6.	51	17	32	6

The frequency of those teachers whose schools routinely use evaluation as accountability / feedback mechanism were 57 from 7 schools with an average of 8 per school, though all 10 schools claimed to have evaluated their teaching and learning process. Those who used it at all were altogether 70 teachers from seven schools while three schools did not engage in evaluation of teaching and learning process at all. 54 teachers 94.7% of those who used it from the seven schools claimed that it was beneficial. It meant three of the fifty-two who often use did not understand what they did; hence they could not see the benefit. However 52, 51 and 51 teachers respectively saw that evaluation used as accountability - feedback mechanism improved teaching, learning and student performance, these show 91%, 89.5% and 89.5% levels of improvement respectively. In all a total of 70% of the teachers sampled used evaluation as accountability - feedback mechanism, while 30% did not use it at all. The overall result is that the use of evaluation as accountability / feedback mechanism promotes both teaching / learning process as well as promotes student performance. The results confirm the finding of Umoru-Onuka (1996) and the view of Umoru.-Onuka (2003).

The following table shows the actual student performances over a period of six years (1995-2000) using the year of external examination only rather than sessional examination results, school were labeled A, B, C etc in descending order of use of evaluation as feedback and accountability mechanism.

Student Performance in percentage at credit level (5 and above)

School	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
A	61	63	65	64	65	66
B	59	59	58	63	61	64
C	57	58	59	61	57	63
D	53	60	61	59	57	57
E	53	59	57	58	59	57
F	52	57	55	58	51	56
G	51	56	54	50	51	53
H	41	41	42	41.9	39	43
I	39.5	40.1	41	43	38.8	37
J	35.7	40	39	42	38.9	36.1

The above chart corroborates the fact that in those schools where evaluation was used as a means of accountability and feedback, there was improved teaching / learning process as well as improved student performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The work dealt with evaluation, accountability and feedback in some details, especially with regards to the link between evaluation and each of accountability and feedback. And found that in Nigeria, evaluation reports are seldom used for either feedback or accountability yet where used it was found to have improved teaching/learning process as well as student performance.

It was found that evaluation is major tool for determining both accountability of a programme and feedback mechanism for further improvement of the programme input in order to engender the desired programme outcome. The various views on evaluation and its link to accountability as well as feedback were highlighted. It was also shown that accountability and feedback resulting from evaluation exercise could greatly enhance programme performance.

It was also found that there can be no accountability in educational programme except evaluation has first taken place, and also that financial accountability is but one of several aspects of educational accountability.

It was also discovered that feedback could only come from the process of evaluation of a programme. And because of its importance for decision making on a programme's worth and/or for the improvement of programme, evaluation is, therefore, a necessity and in fact a must. Hence the importance of evaluation to educational accountability and feedback mechanism of an educational programme cannot be overstressed.

It is thus recommended that evaluation of school programme be inbuilt into the programme from the outset for effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluation reports should be reviewed and implemented if such exercises are to be useful and if our educational system must be moved forward. Using evaluation data will promote feedback for programme as well as promote programme accountability. This will in turn result in the improvement of teaching / learning and student performance respectively. All schools in Nigeria should, therefore, ensure that they evaluate their teaching / learning process and feed the result back into the system by intimating the concerned (teachers, parents and students among others) with the outcome for the improvement of school learning outcomes. In fact it is desirable that each school be given evaluation as they have guidance counsellor.

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