



Evaluation of the College English Curriculum of China

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Abstract. This essay investigates the applicability and effectiveness of Hedge's evaluation procedures in assessing China's College English Curriculum. The paper is divided into four primary sections. First, an overview of the College English Curriculum and its teaching context is provided to establish the foundation for the evaluation. Second, an examination of Hedge's evaluation procedures is presented, focusing on their relevance and utility when applied to the specific curriculum under scrutiny. Third, drawing upon Hedge's methods and additional scholarly insights, the essay introduces a set of evaluation procedures tailored to assess China's College English Curriculum. The conclusion summarizes the main ideas and findings of the study. This research aims to contribute to the understanding and improvement of evaluation processes for language curriculums in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Curriculum Evaluation · Higher Education · Teacher Education

1 Introduction and Context

The present essay is divided into four primary sections. The initial segment offers an overview of China's College English Curriculum, which will be the subject of evaluation. This introduction will provide insight into the curriculum's context and briefly touch upon the teaching environment. In the second segment, an examination of the relevance and utility of Hedge's evaluation procedures will be presented, based on their application to the College English Curriculum of China. The third segment introduces the evaluation procedures to be employed in assessing China's College English Curriculum, drawing upon Hedge's methods and those of other scholars. Finally, the conclusion offers a succinct summary of the ideas presented within the essay. To begin, a brief account of the curriculum under evaluation will be provided, as the analysis of Hedge's procedures relies on an understanding of their application to this specific curriculum.

The curriculum under assessment is known as the "College English Curriculum", which represents a consolidation and revision of two previously distinct curricula—one for science and engineering and another for arts and science. Chinese higher education reform has prompted a shift toward multi-disciplinary and comprehensive educational

institutions. Consequently, the prior two curricula have become outdated. In response, the National Education Committee conducted a nationwide educational study in 1996. The findings revealed that China's economic growth has increased societal expectations for college students' English proficiency, and students themselves are keen to enhance their practical English skills. Thus, an updated curriculum was necessary for college English instruction in China. The curriculum serves as a primary guide for English education among non-English major undergraduates in the majority of Chinese universities. Given the curriculum's vast scope, a comprehensive evaluation using fixed procedures—whether Hedge's or any others—proves challenging due to the multitude of variables present in nearly every aspect. Nevertheless, all educators bear the responsibility of evaluating their teaching content and methods [7]. Consequently, this essay will propose evaluation procedures tailored to the author's context by identifying issues within the curriculum as they arise during the application of Hedge's evaluation procedures. The university that I was teaching is a leading comprehensive institution in China, resulting from the merger of a medical college and a technology institute within the past two years. The student body comprises a diverse range of majors, encompassing arts, sciences, engineering, and medicine. The author exclusively instructs first and second-year students, for whom English is a mandatory subject. By the conclusion of their fourth semester, students must pass the national College English Test (CET) Band 4 to obtain their degree [1].

2 The Structure of Hedge's Procedures

Stufflebeam [14] posits that evaluation should encompass the delineation, acquisition, and provision of valuable information for appraising decision alternatives. Nunan [9] contends that evaluation is not merely a process of information gathering; it is also a decision-making procedure. Richards [11] further asserts that curriculum evaluation centers on information collection and decision making. In the author's perspective, Hedge's [5] evaluation procedures offer a framework that assists curriculum evaluators in gathering information and making decisions in a more natural, logical, and accessible manner. This assertion arises from the author's observation of Hedge's procedural development, which appears more akin to a process of planning, designing, and implementing. When applying these procedures, the author finds that most are straightforward due to this structure. Thus, the framework is the most applicable aspect observed in Hedge's evaluation procedures, serving as the foundation for proposing the author's own evaluation methods. Nonetheless, while attempting to address the questions within the framework, the author discovers that Hedge's factors are insufficient for their practice. As Hargreaves [4] notes, not all factors will necessarily apply to every program evaluation case, indicating the need to explore other factors specific to the author's context.

3 Rationale for the Evaluation

Identifying the evaluation's purpose can influence all other aspects of the entire evaluation process, particularly the type of evaluation to be conducted. Different evaluators will possess varying evaluation purposes, which Hedge [5] categorizes as either accountability or development. In other words, Hedge could combine the question of "when should

evaluation take place” [5] with this initial procedure rather than separating them. Specifying evaluation aims at the outset leaves little flexibility in determining the appropriate time for conducting the evaluation. If the evaluation’s purpose is accountability, it occurs at the program’s conclusion, corresponding to a summative evaluation; if it aims for development, it commences during the course, typically at the beginning, aligning with a formative evaluation [4, 5, 10–12]. The evaluation purpose is a common motivation among educators: to enhance teaching in order to meet student needs, building upon a deeper understanding of the curriculum during the evaluation process. Consequently, the author’s evaluation lacks a “value for money” [13] focus and aims at development, which is characteristic of a formative evaluation. Determining the evaluation’s purpose is considered the most critical step in planning an evaluation, as it influences all subsequent steps throughout the process.

3.1 Who Undertakes the Evaluation?

Evaluations are typically executed by “internal” and “external” evaluators [4], referred to by Richards [11] as “insiders” and “outsiders.” Summative evaluations are generally conducted by external evaluators, such as expert evaluators, while formative evaluations are performed by internal evaluators, including teachers. Evaluation is not exclusively the domain of the “expert evaluator” [4]. Hedge points out that when school authorities assume the evaluator role, teachers perceive it as threatening. Jenkins [6] elucidates that this arises from the uncomfortable overlap of curriculum evaluation questions with questions about teacher effectiveness. Additionally, Hargreaves [4] posits that evaluation cannot be solely entrusted to others. Involving teachers as evaluators presents clear advantages: they are familiar with the objectives, possess motivation, and benefit from the knowledge acquisition process in teaching and learning. Nonetheless, the author contends that “involving teachers in evaluating their own work” [5] is not without challenges.

As previously noted, the evaluation is formative, meaning that most evaluators would be colleagues. On one hand, while teachers share a similar teaching context, they differ in teaching experiences, attitudes, and competencies, potentially leading to disparate interpretations of evaluation purposes. However, this can be ameliorated through increased communication during the process. On the other hand, a more difficult challenge arises from the fact that most colleagues, like the author, have limited experience in evaluation. Consequently, during the process, teachers may primarily view themselves as evaluators of other objectives’ effectiveness rather than as evaluators of their own teaching effectiveness [12]. Hargreaves’ assertion offers some guidance in addressing this issue: “The closer the collaboration between external and internal agents, the more thorough and effective the evaluation is likely to be” [4].

3.2 What is to Be Assessed?

Nunan [9] states that “any area of the curriculum can be evaluated, from initial program planning through to the assessment/evaluation processes themselves.” Hedge [5] offers a checklist encompassing various aspects throughout the process. While the checklist is designed for course assessment, some questions are applicable to curriculum evaluation,

while others may not be relevant. Hedge [5] asserts that information for evaluation should be collected from a variety of stakeholders, but the checklist is predominantly learner-centered. The method of information collection significantly influences the resulting judgments. Even in course assessments that primarily focus on students, they should not be the sole source of information. Another aspect of Hedge's checklist is its lack of situational analysis. Hamilton [3] highlights the importance of flexibility in interpreting and implementing curricula, and Richards [11] emphasizes that language programs are always carried out in specific contexts or situations. This is particularly crucial for the author's evaluation, as various factors can influence the implementation of the same curriculum, leading to different impacts on teaching and learning. Hedge's checklist remains valuable, as its topics help identify curriculum-related issues. The author bases their evaluation on these topics, noting that while many topics in other checklists overlap, most questions differ depending on the context. Detailed checklists with further questions on each topic are included in the appendices.

3.3 How is the Evaluation to Be Done?

Riley [12] argues that to gain information about curriculum, data must be collected from numerous sources in addition to teachers' own observations. Hedge lists some methods in her checklist concerning different information gathered from different stakeholders. My checklist presented in my proposed evaluation procedures in the next part is adapted from Eraut [2], Hedge [5] and Richards [11], showing my considerations about the possible methods used. These methods need careful consideration in the context when they are to be used because potential problems may arise. First, Hedge [5] mentions one method of observation is to ask a colleague to observe your teaching and then give critical comment. It is a very good way to do the evaluation. However, in my context, it is hard for you get any critical, not even negative comments about your teaching because in Chinese culture, people would be reluctant to give negative comment on other's work even when asked to. Second, when information is from students, something has to be taken into consideration as well. For example in a face-to-face interview, some students will get nervous, become cautious with their talk, or give answers not out of their own will to avoid problems or to please the teacher.

3.4 What Should Be Done with the Information Gained?

This is the implementation period, the simple answer would be to analyze it and make decisions upon it. However, this final stage can be the most controversial part of in the evaluation process. Value and power issues would play a critical role when it comes to decision making. Therefore, Hedge's questions in this part are really something demanding negotiations among all the participants involved in the evaluation. Take the second question 'how the information is to be analyzed' for example. Even from some seemingly 'objective' data obtained from quantitative methods, the ways in which they are analyzed would have different indications. And the 'subjective' data gathered from qualitative might even be more problematic since they have to be coded or interpreted before they are analyzed. [11]. In other words, it might not a problem to be settled very easily because the curriculum itself is a social product and values are crucial to curriculum

evaluation. Besides, the result of an evaluation study can hardly resolve controversies that arise from different value positions of different stakeholders. [3] However, Hargreaves suggests one way of avoiding the problem, that is, to ‘whatever is decided on should be clear to all parties at the outset.’ [4].

4 Proposed Evaluation Procedures for the College English Curriculum of China

In part four, I analyze Hedge’s evaluation procedures in its application of evaluating the College English Curriculum in China. In this part, I am going to present evaluation procedures for the CEC. First, the procedures are based on the framework of Hedge [5]; second, I also refer to some procedures of some other authors in my other readings: Riley [12], Nunan [9], and Hargreaves [4]; in addition, my proposed procedures are planned according to the consideration of the nature of my curriculum and its context.

Why is the evaluation being carried out?

The aim of the evaluation should always be clarified at the very beginning of planning an evaluation of any kind. Though for most curriculum evaluations in China may not aim at accountability, the focus of development can vary greatly among evaluations.

Who should be involved in the evaluation?

This is a broader question than the one in Hedge’s procedures. Riley [12] points out that effective evaluation should involve collecting relevant data about all personnel involved in learning process [8]. I sub-divide it into:

Who are the evaluators?

- What sorts of evaluators are required for the evaluation?
- What roles different evaluators play in the evaluation?
- How might they affect the evaluation?

Who are the target audience? (For whom is the evaluation being carried out?)

What are the criteria for evaluation?

Evaluators should agree on the criteria in planning the evaluation because valuation is to tell the effectiveness of the curriculum, which would involve some comparisons to generalize some judgements. Therefore, Hargreaves [4] agrees that the failure to spell out criteria at the outset can lead to disagreements at a later stage about what constitutes ‘success’.

What is to be evaluated?

This is the designing stage of the whole evaluation process, and should be in great detail to insure the evaluation is all-round. I have introduced in details in part four, so here I just present the main structure of the checklist.

- Needs analysis and the Aim
- Situational Analysis
- Content
- Resource
- Methodology
- Teaching strategies and learning strategies
- Assessment and evaluation

How is the evaluation to be done?

In part four, I mentioned some methods from perspectives of different stakeholders. Richards [11], however, divided the evaluation approach into qualitative and quantitative approaches, which offers a new angle for evaluators, so I put it in the Appendix Four. The methods checklist of collecting information in the evaluation of the CEC of China would be:

- Information from students:

Students Interviews/ Student Questionnaires/ Surveys.
Achievement tests/ Exams performance/ self-rating sheet.

- Information from teachers:

Teacher diaries, journals, logs/ Teacher Interviews.
Meeting with teachers/ Teacher questionnaires.
Teacher review of material / Case study/ self-assessment sheet.

- Information from others involved

Classroom observations/ Case studies of schools.
Reviews form expert.
Adapted from Eraut [2], Hedge [5] and Richards [11].
What should be done with the information gained?

These questions should be dealt with great caution though they sound simple and easy to answer. But deep considerations are needed in providing the answer.
How is the information to be collated?

For whom the information is collected? Who are going to analyze it?

How is it to be analyzed?

Can teachers use the information freely?

What action plan might arise from the discussion?

Do all the participants have a say in producing the action plan?

Adapted from Hedge [5].

5 Conclusion

Overall, this essay examines the College English Curriculum (CEC) of China, analyzing the applicability and effectiveness of Hedge's evaluation procedures. It highlights their relevance, usefulness, and limitations while identifying additional resources to propose a tailored set of evaluation procedures for the CEC. The logical and natural progression of Hedge's framework is emphasized as the most applicable aspect, with potential issues and considerations discussed throughout the application process. Due to constraints, only an outline of the proposed procedures is provided. The essay acknowledges limitations in evaluation experience and theory knowledge, committing to further exploration in the field to refine and improve these procedures for the CEC in China.

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