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Edited by

Oshiotse A. Okwilagwe

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Contents

27

Learning Outcomes: The Imperative of Evaluating Course Materials in Mass Communication Curricula

Introduction

Teaching is integrative and is viewed as a science and as an art. There are processes or actions that a teacher should undertake which constitute teaching. The scientific basis of teaching ensures that the process is based on sound scientific reasoning, reflection and according to Arends (1991), it entails the 'use of best practices' that are known to be effective to help students learn. As an art, teaching should not be mechanistic and routine. It is a process that involves the linking together of complex processes of activities, one to another, until the execution of the set out activities. It is characterised with 'improvisation, spontaneity, style, pace, rhythm...' (Gage, 1984; cited in Arends, 1991).

Teaching and learning can be conceived as being directly intertwined. Effective teaching is only achieved when learning has occurred. Learning is, therefore, teaching dependent, irrespective of whether the process involved is internally or externally applied. Teaching has been variously defined but suffices it to say here that the meaning of teaching is considered from two perspectives; Brunner (1996) and Clark & Starr (1986) as cited by Moore (1992:6).

These educationists respectively see teaching as 'an effort to assist or shape growth' and an attempt to assist students in acquiring or changing some skills, knowledge, ideal, attitude or 'appreciation.' By implication teaching is expected to bring about change in behaviour of the learner that is relatively permanent, otherwise, learning has not taken place. As identified by scholars the common characteristics of good teaching should:

i.   be well organised;

ii.   contribute to cognitive development of the learner;

iii. be a process that is effective and efficient;

iv.   not be general ability dependent; and

v.   contribute to the overall development of the learner.

The process of teaching as described in this paper may be seen by some educationists as addressing instruction at the lower levels of education while prescribing a different medium for higher levels of learning to which the teaching and learning of Mass Communication belong. At the higher level of education. Mass Communication is taught at a higher level of abstraction and so will be more apt in this paper to subscribe to lecturing method as the usual mode of delivery.

Nonetheless, Mass Communication course lecturers play similar roles as secondary school subject teachers and are expected to achieve the same effects of promoting positive learning outcomes in the learner. In the educational setting, outcomes could include cognitive, affective and psychomotor achievements. Academic outcomes usually are measured in terms of examination scores (results) and standardised ability test scores. Affective outcomes such as motivation, attitude, interest and others can be measured by personality tests while psychomotor development can be measured through psycho-productive approaches.

According to Communication Capstone (2000), mass communication occurs when a small number of people send messages to a large anonymous and usually heterogeneous audience through the use of specialised communication media. In the context of this paper the specialised communication medium of interest is the textbook. In any teaching – learning situation, communication is a dual expectation between the teacher and the learner – key actors in the process.

The teacher expects the learners to come into the learning situation with all the characteristics they possess including what they know and can do; and the learners in turn expect that enabling and effective learning opportunities are provided for them to achieve the set standards. One way of providing an enabling learning environment at the tertiary level is by providing learners with readily available and effective textbooks to facilitate learning. Students' learning and achievement appear to be central to the existence of higher institutions and perhaps accreditation of programmes of these institutions. Rogers (n.d) seems to support this view as she asserts that stakeholders in education, policy makers, the public and even students are increasingly seeking to use information about student learning outcomes as an integral part of making judgements about the quality of accredited programmes and of institutions.

Information about students' learning can be obtained through assessment. Assessment should play a crucial link between effective teaching, students' learning and educational standards. In tertiary institutions, it is imperative that an effective assessment plan be put in place that will be used to establish assessment procedure and programme outcomes. According to Western Washington University Centre for Instructional Innovation (2003-2007), faculty members are increasingly using assessment results more than ever before in making decisions about course sequencing, improving teaching methods, faculty allocations, choice of instructional resources, prorgramme and curricula improvement among others. The increasing and important role of using students' teaching and learning excellence in explaining programme effectiveness and guiding programme changes according to Western Washington University Centre for Instructional innovation,

are enough evidence for prompting educators to undertake proper planning and execution of course curricula so that programme and instructional effectiveness can be achieved.

The Role of Evaluation in Education

Educational evaluators are of the consensus that the concept of educational evaluation is a difficult term to define because of the possibility of two persons looking at the same object or phenomenon, to see it from different perspectives based on the context, experiences and methods of approach adopted. This misconception applies more to educational programmes evaluation than to the evaluation of learning achievements. Evaluation is also very practical, since people make some forms of evaluation on a daily basis without actually knowing they are evaluating.

To properly situate the topic of this paper in perspective, the discourse has been extended to cover evaluation of learning achievement and evaluation of educational programmes, as it pertains to performance in Mass Communication curricula. To this end, evaluation of learning achievement is defined as the process of examining the learning opportunities and experience teachers provide for students; and making judgement about their usefulness and effectiveness in the immediate or nearest future. Similarly, the definition of evaluation of educational programmes will be guided by the views of Alkin (1970) who sees evaluation as the process of ascertaining the decision areas of concern, selecting appropriate information, collecting and analysing information in order to report summary data useful for decision makers in selecting among alternatives.

Evaluation of outcomes in education has become increasingly important to parents, students, teachers and other stakeholders in recent times. Educators, in particular, are now more conscious of the need for accountability or the demand to be answerable to others. This has led implementers of curricula (teachers and course materials developers) to be more committed to planning their roles and responsibilities by carefully interpreting and executing instructional delivery with a view

to achieving the desired end. Evaluation, therefore, serves specific and general purposes. In specific terms, evaluation serves the following usefulness:

i.   helps in course and instructional policy decision and practice. An effective teacher is expected to make decisions relating to instructional delivery, curriculum or course(s) taught, students' interest in school, certification and classification of students taught;

ii.   improves teaching-learning process. This could be in the form of SWOT analysis by identifying the strength and weakness of instructional action, making maximal use of any available opportunity and minimising any threat that might present itself during the course of training or the programme with a view to achieving the desired end. Mass Communication course lecturers could do SWOT analysis in relation to their instructional activities and /or to the students taught for effectiveness;

iii.   diagnosing students learning needs and being able to tailor instruction to meeting their needs;

iv.   ensures teachers' professional development and needs with a view to achieving effectiveness, efficiency and continuity in learning;

v.   aids in planning students' future educational and vocational goals;

vi.   source of information to parents, students and other stakeholders on course/school achievement to enable proper planning to be made and prioritising contending needs;

vii.   ensures continued resource allocation to course or programme and materials; and

viii.   source of obtaining approval for the performance of a programme, department, faculty, institution or an entire educational programme, for continuity and sustainability.

Methods of Evaluating Performance of Mass Communication Curricula

There cannot be evaluation without measurement. In the hierarchy of evaluation process. measurement is at the lower level while evaluation is higher. Evaluation of learning outcomes cannot take place without first making use of raw data generated through measurement. At the tertiary level, measurement provides these data through the scores obtained by students in tests, assignments, term papers, projects, oral presentations, written examinations and others. Evaluation of performance can be at the students' level and at the programme level. According to Obemeata (1985) three basic steps are necessary in the evaluation process at the students' level. These are:

(i)   stating achievable education objectives or a unit of it in measurable terms;

(ii)   obtaining the evidence empirically (data obtained from written examinations); and

(iii) using the evidence in making judgement.

When a lecturer says Olu scored 39% and Dayo scored 70% in a course, we are in the realm of measurement. If the lecturer goes further to say Olu failed the test while Dayo passed the test then we are evaluating. Similarly, when we say 60 students are to transit to the next course or level, while 40 students are to re-sit the course, we are making judgement. Information as these that portray students' learning achievement has implications for the teacher and the students alike; and the effectiveness of the curricula or programme(s) being run. It is common knowledge that many lecturers in our higher institutions hardly re-teach course contents identified by students as being badly taught, nor do they use the results of mid-semester tests, assignments and term papers of their students in improving their instructional delivery, provide remedial or immediate feedback to the same cohort of students. This scenario exists in most cases because the semester examination would have been written before such tests are marked. As such feed back from such tests are not used to improve the course or programme

nor developed course materials. What should be done in situations like these?

Methods that can be adopted to evaluate performance in writing Mass Communication texts are numerous but can be classified into three basic forms. These are **formative** and **summative** evaluation proposed by Scriven in 1967 and **performance** assessment. Formative evaluation describes the evaluation of the learning environment, course materials or training with the intent of providing information that will help to improve the course. Summative evaluation describes the evaluation of learning environment, course materials or training with the objectives of providing information on the outcomes of a course of instruction, training or its use to the students. These forms of evaluation involve the use of pen and paper test as a standard to gauge learning achievement. Performance evaluation has to do with determining what a student can do rather than what he knows. For instance, can a particular student conduct an interview and report same in any medium to the comprehension of the audience or set up radio or television studio and present a particular programme on air? Performance is usually done by experts who are not necessarily the trainers and they make use of quality samples.

There is also what is called **prognostic** and **diagnostic** evaluation. Prognostic evaluation could be done by a Mass Communication lecturer with a view to finding out if the training being given to a group of students prepare them well for a future career or a higher course. Diagnostic evaluation has the sole objective of identifying existing problem(s) or needs of the learners before the outset of mass communication programme, course or during the course of the programme, so that the needs can be catered for. Diagnostic evaluation is formative in nature. Commonly used instruments of students' evaluation are achievement tests, psychological tests and systematic observation. These are explained as they relate to writing Mass Communication curricula.

(a) **Achievement** tests: these are the major instruments used in measuring students' learning in the cognitive domain. Sources of data for such tests are essay questions, multiple choice questions,

term papers, projects and the like written in a semester or session. Achievement tests can serve the function of formative or summative depending on the use intended. In the first instance, if a Mass Communication lecturer is interested in making decisions that would impact positively on his/her instructional delivery and on the future of the students, then the test to use is formative. In the case of final examinations taken at the end of a course; it is summative and they hardly serve the purpose of improving the participating cohort of students.

Achievement tests are of two types, teacher-made-test and standardised achievement test. The latter is published by recognised bodies or publishers while the former consists of essay and multiple choice tests usually developed by course lecturers. These former types are discussed here. Most courses in tertiary institutions are usually evaluated using either the 'extended' or 'restricted' essay questions or a combination of the two to which students respond freely. These types would serve the need of a Mass Communication lecturer in assessing the curricula because, it is necessary to say at this point that the skills required for constructing good test items are not learnt in a day but over a long period of time through practice. A few examples are illustrated here:

1. In two sentences, explain the process of communication using the mass media, (restricted type).

2. Explain succinctly two common theories of mass communication in Nigeria (extended typed).

3. Discuss the features of mass communication in half a page (restricted type).

In the construction of essay questions the following are some basic principles to follow as identified by Obemeata (1988 and 2002):

i. ensure that the items measure higher level of cognition (e.g. application, analysis and others);

ii. ensure that the items do not measure general questions e.g. communication;

iii. keep the language as simple as possible;

iv. avoid ambiguity of the test items; and

v. ensure you increase the number of test items to obtain a wider coverage of the course content and to provide a more accurate picture of the students' total achievement.

b. **Psychological tests:** these are tests that measure intelligence, aptitude and personality. Personality tests involve the use of attitude scale, rating scales, interest and other self-report inventories. The way we see and do things, go a long way to influence our thinking and our performance. It is necessary for a Mass Communication lecturer to know how to evaluate these traits. These tests can be used by a lecturer to measure, students' behaviour in Mass Communication curricula or lecturer self assessment. Because they are specialised tests, expert skills are needed for constructing them, so as to reduce to the barest minimum the weakness of subjectivity that is inherent in them. In spite of the inherent defect in rating scales and other inventories, these instruments have come a long way as tools in assessing behaviour and other personality traits like self-concept, attitude, interest, motivation and others. An example of a rating scale is presented as an appendix in this paper.

c. **Systematic observation:** other approaches that can be successfully employed to assess written contents in Mass Communication curricula are by **direct observation, self-evaluation** and **continuous assessment.**

i. **Direct observation:** this is a process that objectively captures a lecturer's or student's behaviour as they occur in class. The behaviour is analysed in frequency or in sequence of occurrence of the observed behaviour. Though, debate is ranging in Nigeria universities and elsewhere on whether students should evaluate lecturers' performance during the course of a programme, it is a well known fact that this process has come to stay in many Universities in developed nations of the world today. Heads of

departments, students or an external audit can assess what goes on in our classrooms. Irrespective of who does the evaluation, Yoloye (1985) is of the view that self evaluation and student evaluation should be for ultimate course improvement, while external evaluation could be for certification and course improvement.

ii. **Self-evaluation:** Mass Communication lecturer can do self-evaluation of their courses on regular basis by asking for their students' inputs into the course and assessment that can help modify the course as the semester or course progresses. They could have an independent assessor or a colleague take formative evaluation of their instructional delivery and use the result to provide feedback that can help modify the course and students' progress. This can ease off students' learning problems when identified early in the course.

ii. **Continuous assessment:** this is an approach to evaluation of student learning. The philosophy behind this approach was to eliminate the anxiety prone, one-time-shot end of semester or year examinations students faced which usually led to the failure of many students. The philosophy and design of the process was supposed to be systematic, continuous, comprehensive, cumulative, objective and guidance oriented. However, both at the lower level of education and even at the tertiary level, what is mostly practiced are continuous testing. The danger in its present form is that it is a complete detraction from the norm and purpose it was meant to serve. Teachers and lecturers do not have a cumulative and continuous judgement of their students' learning. There is, therefore, the need for implementers of Mass Communication curricula at the tertiary level of education to have fair, balanced and updated records of students they teach.

Maintaining Standards in the Evaluation of Performance Outcome of Curricula

Standard-based reforms have become a driving force behind every educational policy the world over. Standard has been defined variously, but in this context we will say it is an acceptable level of the quality of a thing as conferred on it by a people. It is the minimum level of competence below which performance should not fall. Quality in this context will be defined as 'a function of how much value has been added to the abilities of learners regardless of their levels' (UBEP, 2002). Since achievement scores will be used to pass value judgement on students' progress and/or for certification, it is imperative that these scores are objectively arrived at by those who implement a given curriculum. Such quality criteria should include:

i. setting realistic and achieveable standards;

ii. determining behavioural objectives of the course; and

iii. evaluating the set objectives.

i. Selecting realistic and achieveable standards

Standard should be set on the content to be taught. Content standards should drive the curriculum and instruction. Such content standards should specify what students should know and are able to do at each level of their programme. Content standard should be rigorously determined and should consist of important, relevant and challenging experiences that are consistent with educational goals and objectives of the educational system of the country. Implementers of Mass Communication curricula should be knowledgeable about the demands of the contents set. They should be vast in how to effectively handle the contents and develop instructional strategies to help students achieve the set standards. Such standards should cover the evaluation of learning outcomes in terms of their nature and types.

ii. Determining behavioural objectives of the course

Every course to be taught should be properly conceived. Its conception should start by outlining relevant and achievable behavioural objectives

for it. This is usually called Bloom taxonomies of objectives because they were first put forward by Bloom (1956). These objectives are six in number (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation). They are in the cognitive domain and are hierarchically arranged. They give direction to the behaviours to be taught and the learning outcomes to be evaluated in the course. Behavioural objectives should be exhaustively and clearly stated in measurable terms for ease of evaluation at the outset of the course development. They are to guide the lecturer on what to teach in terms of depth and scope and what to evaluate. By implication, they should be achievable. Examples of achievable objectives in mass communication studies are: students should be able to:

i.   develop effective listening and writing skills; and

ii. use the skills of listening and writing to effectively analyse social problems.

iii.   Evaluating the set objectives

Every course, be it Mass Communication or any other, is expected to have some objectives it sets out to achieve. These objectives are set out with a view to exposing learners to acquire knowledge, skills, principles, facts and developing some positive affective traits and the teacher must be committed to achieving these objectives. It is imperative that the course lecturer evaluate the programme with a view to ascertaining if set objectives are being achieved and if they are meeting the set standards. According to Obemeata (1985) 'course evaluators should ascertain what changes are produced by a course and 'the aspects that need to be revised'. He further asserts that the outcomes of a prescribed course should not be course specific but should be general, so as to cater for career choices, general understanding, development of intellectual powers and aptitude for future learning in the field.

It is with this understanding of a well thought-out and organised curriculum that quality and worthwhile course materials can be developed to fit the curriculum. Otherwise, any course materials written

without recourse to these important issues will only be at dissonance with set objectives of the course.

Process of and Criteria for Developing Mass Communication Course Materials

Course materials development cuts across a variety of things among which are reference and prescribed textbooks usually developed in a systematic manner to fit Mass Communication curricula. Course materials writers need to pay particular attention to five key areas. These are:

i. **Situation scanning:** this includes careful determination of the level of competence required of the students at the end of the course, their intellectual background in terms of their ability and capability (that is, are they undergraduates or graduate students? what is their preferred learning styles?). And availability of learner support in the environment among others.

ii. **Planning the course contents:** this involves asking the question, what is the action plan? Planning is essential so that the course writer does not lose sight of important matters. Decisions have to be made with respect to the content to be selected in terms of their currency, relevance, scope and depth. The ability of the lecturer to break down main content into small and manageable units and sequencing of these units as well as the form the activity will take will have to be planned before plunging into the writing proper.

iii. **Sourcing for resources:** resources are the materials that will be used to guide students' learning as they interact with the course textbooks. They include extracts or illustrative materials from the print media and internet, reading list and other relevant websites.

iv. **Developing the materials:** this involves how the materials gathered are to be put together to make a meaningful whole. In doing this, the following criteria can serve as a guide:

1. *Language:* There is need to avoid communication difficulties. The language of communication should be simple and should convey the meaning of concepts, principles, facts and others, of the course and the thoughts of the writer.
Language should not be used to create an atmosphere of mystification.

ii. *Content coverage:* It must be related to the course objectives and outcomes. It should be correct and current. Outdated ideas will not do any student any good.

iii. *Coherence of ideas:* main topic must be linked to the sub-units. The ideas in the main and sub units should flow from the beginning to the end of the chapter and possibly down to other chapters. Idea presentations and illustrations where used, should capture learner's immediate environment.

iv. Illustration: where appropriate, relevant illustrations, charts, diagrams, tables extracts and others should be provided to drive home the point or ideas, principles and relationships being presented.

v. *Quality of learner activities:* these should challenge the learner and motivate him. Of primary importance is that they should be tied to the learning outcomes and the peculiarity of learners' proposed working environment.

v. **Evaluation of draft:** there is need for the writer to do a self or peer review of the written materials. In self evaluation, the writer needs to allow some time lag between when the materials are completed and the review, during which he/she would have ruminated on the ideas documented. A revisit to the document puts the writer in a better position to take a closer and deeper look at the posture taken and make relevant modifications where necessary. A peer review may involve an objective criticism of a colleague who is an expert in the field with a view to improving the quality of the materials. Basically, areas to dwell on will include:

language, content coverage, coherence between and among the main topic and sub-topics and the quality of the learners' activities. Lastly is a proper editing of the materials.

Methods of Post Training/Job Performance Evaluation in Mass Communication Curricula

Sometimes, it is imperative that course implementers or respective lecturers, faculty and departmental heads or University management are interested in the performance of their graduates in the world of work, and would want to conduct an evaluation of this. The essence of course is to assess the areas of strength and weakness of their products with a view to modifying the programme implementation strategy or review course materials. What are the methods open for conducting such evaluation?

Several evaluation methods that exist for carrying out on the job performance evaluation of graduates or trainees derive their workings from models or approaches. These models and approaches serve as framework for the study. It is not possible to touch on all the available methods in this paper, but a few relevant ones have been discussed. Some examples are In-put-out method, Discrepancy evaluation, Impact evaluation, Need assessment and Tracer study approach.

Impact Evaluation

This type of evaluation studies the impact of a course of training or programme on beneficiaries. Its objective is to determine the competencies of the people on the job in terms of the application of the knowledge, skills, abilities they have acquired during training and the effectiveness of the course programme. It also includes testing the effectiveness/adequacy of the curriculum course materials put into the training. Impact evaluation need not restrict its activities to the beneficiaries only; rather other members of the community (stakeholders) who directly and indirectly interact with the graduates should be interviewed. Their responses will go a long way to modify the existing programme or course and textbooks and to make them relevant to the needs of the society since these needs are dynamic.

Questions that could be asked include: Did the staff fit into his/her new job or social setting? How has the new role performed enabled him/her to demonstrate relevant knowledge, skills, competencies and others? Did clients, the public and colleagues learn new things or benefit from him/her? How was he/she a good change agent? Questions like these should constitute the questionnaire items. The elegance about impact evaluation is that baseline data or pre-measures of the activities of the programme should be taken. It is against these baseline data that the new data collected on the subjects are judged, to determine if there was any change (positive or negative effect). Another beauty of the model is to compare the activities of graduates in the establishment of interest with those of another establishment who do similar line of activities /job but are graduates from other institutions. The differences between these two groups usually show the degree of competencies involved.

Needs Assessment

This kind of evaluation can be conducted at micro or macro level to determine the inadequacies of the graduates in their respective job schedules in their primary places of assignment. There may be need to ask for their job description and how well they fit into these duties. It is also important to ask what their challenges are? And how they have been meeting these challenges? They could then indicate areas where they need assistance. A good need assessment should go beyond the graduates being evaluated to their immediate boss, supervisors and other relevant stakeholders in the community. Their response will form sources of input into modifying the existing Mass Communication curricula and course materials.

Tracer Study Approach

This is more of a method of doing research than a model of evaluation. The technique involves tracing the particular cohort of graduates to the various places of employment they have worked till the present. Bhola (1990) describes it as tracing 'the path of progress of a person or persons over time'. The kinds of questions that should interest the

evaluator are similar to the ones outlined in the previous models. The knowledge, competencies and skills exhibited in their job descriptions are indications of the quality of performance they exhibit in their job. Again, as mentioned earlier, any observed deficiencies are areas that need remediation for the course lecturer and/or overall department / faculty programme(s) and course material writers.

Conclusion

This paper presented a holistic view of methods of evaluating performance in Mass Communication curricula. The paper took a cursory look at what constitute teaching and discussed the general and specific roles education play in teaching and learning situations. The paper dwelt in detail on the various methods that can be used to evaluate learning achievement, performance and process of developing course material (textbooks) in Mass Communication curricula. It stressed on the need to maintain standards which should cut across the strands of the course or programme to ensure quality course material and the products.

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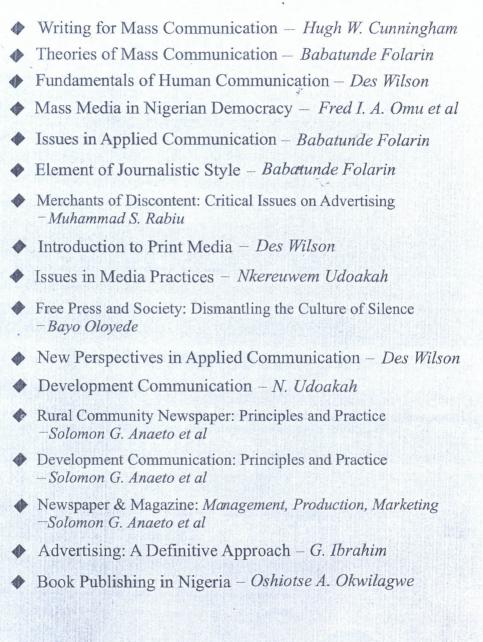
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