

How to Conduct a Qualitative Program Evaluation in the Light of Eisner's Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model

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Abstract

The quantitative methodologies have been traditionally employed in the educational research so far. However, as long as with the appreciation and widespread use of the qualitative methodologies in many disciplines, many different educational areas have started to be examined in terms of qualitative research aspects. Particularly, the qualitative evaluation of the education programs has received considerable interest and there have been recently some attempts to develop a qualitative methodology for evaluating educational programs based upon the tenets of program evaluation. The evaluators have underlined the benefits of qualitative methods to boost the information shared with decision-makers and policy makers. The most inclusive endeavour has been carried out by Eisner. Eisner's program evaluation model presents the role of educational connoisseurship and criticism in educational evaluation in terms of qualitative evaluation. This study aims at examining how a qualitative program evaluation is conducted in relation with the Eisner's evaluation model.

Keywords: *Program Evaluation; qualitative Inquiry; educational connoisseurship and criticism*

Introduction

The program evaluation can be briefly defined as a process of contribution to the development of education program, decision on a program, and describing the current situation through the evaluation of application process (Sağlam & Yüksel, 2007). Throughout the historical development of the evaluation, the quantitative methods were dominantly used for the evaluation of education programs while there were very few qualitative studies. The benefits of the quantitative methods used in the evaluation cannot be denied and in literature it is emphasized that with well-designed quantitative studies, there are many advantages of the quantitative methods, such as the opportunity to decide on larger populations using the samplings, the possibility to reanalyze the research findings by other researchers (meta analysis) (Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997). Furthermore, many researchers depict the advantages of quantitative methods by describing the weaknesses of qualitative methods. Quantitative methods grasp the guarantee of correcting the weaknesses of qualitative methods. Unlike traditional qualitative approaches, which tend to be anecdotal, noncomparative, atheoretical, too legalistic, too descriptive, quantitative methods are generalizable, comparable, theory-based and explanatory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Eisner, 1991; Howe, 1992).

On the other hand, these strengths of the quantitative studies can be disadvantages in social science research and can cause some weaknesses in the studies, for instance; the issues such as perceptions, beliefs cannot be explained with numbers effectively or cannot be understood sufficiently since the context is not be described exactly (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzler, 1995). However, qualitative approaches highlight the importance of looking at issues in their usual setting and collecting comprehensive data through techniques such as case studies, participant observation, descriptive narratives, focus groups, and in-depth interviews (Ting-Toomey, 1984). The researchers search for an in depth, overall description of the subject and context in a qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Greene, 1994). Yet, many evaluation studies are unfortunately conducted at different platforms instead of the actual context they should be, the evaluator stands away from the program, thus this

case damages the quality of the evaluation and decreases its reliability. However, it is quite crucial to examine the program process in all parts in order to judge about a program. On the basis of the definitions of the qualitative methods, it can be stated that qualitative methods could address this gap in the program evaluation.

The use of qualitative method in evaluation studies was based on the emergence alternative program evaluation models in 1960s and 70s (Mathison, 2005). In this period, the qualitative method was either alone or together with the quantitative method applied in the studies. In the following years, Cronbach (1982), who is one of the pioneers of the quantitative method, stated that the qualitative evaluation is important and emphasized the significance of observations and interviews to determine the success of the program. Thus, he underlined that as well as the quantitative methods, the qualitative research methods should be used in the research. However, it should be remarked that for every program evaluation, the qualitative methods cannot be appropriate. Therefore, it is important to define that the program would be evaluated on the basis of which program evaluation method. For instance, for an evaluation study in which expertise-oriented program evaluation approach is based, applying the quantitative methods can be very difficult (Hoepfl, 1997). In this context, in such a study, it would be more appropriate to examine the qualitative data collection methods and to probe one of the qualitative program evaluation models; Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism model developed by Eisner.

Qualitative Program Evaluation Method

Qualitative research method uses a naturalistic approach to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). In other words, qualitative research can be broadly defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative evaluations use qualitative and naturalistic methods, sometimes alone, but often in combination with quantitative data. The data for qualitative evaluation typically comes from fieldwork. The evaluator spends time in the setting under study—a program, organization, or community where change efforts can be observed, people interviewed, and documents analyzed. Qualitative methods include three kinds of data collection: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Greene, 1994).

Observations: Qualitative observations depend more on evaluator or observer. In the process, checklists may be used, but typically, they are less structured (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). The evaluator makes direct observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities as a "participant observer." For example, an evaluator might participate in all or part of the program under study, participating as a regular program member, client, or student. Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviours, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience is included in observations. The stages of qualitative observations include;

- preparation through reading, chatting with informants
- articulating the purpose of observation
- looking at what occurs in program
- listening the participants
- synthesizing the information
- checking with hypothesis
- confirming and cross-checking

Documents: the evaluator's first consideration for sources and data collection methods should be existing information such as documents or reports. Existing information is cost-effective and not corrupted by the participants (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or program records; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys are samples for documents.

Interviews: Interviews are often a key to qualitative data collection. Although observations are typically the core elements of qualitative evaluation, there is so much that evaluator cannot observe (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). The qualitative evaluator talks with people about their experiences and perceptions. Thus, the qualitative data for evaluation is collected with the observations, interviews, and document reviews and analyzed with major themes, categories, and case examples through content analysis, which requires considerably more than just reading to see what is there. These themes, patterns, understandings are the products of qualitative evaluation. Findings of the evaluation may be presented alone or with quantitative data. Generating useful and credible qualitative findings through observation, interviewing, and content analysis requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, creativity, and hard work (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Considering this, the basic reason why the qualitative methods are used in program evaluation studies can be explained as to reveal the entire process and to reveal the whole story of program with information collected from the participants. Only qualitative studies provide in-depth information about what happens at the program application and evaluation process, with whom and what kind of communication is established, and under what conditions the program is applied. Through the findings of such studies, it could be possible to examine the story of the program and the experience of the participation during the evaluation process. Moreover, such studies could inform the individuals, who would decide on the future of the program, about the evaluation process and results (Davies & Dodd, 2002).

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model was developed by Eisner, on the basis of expertise-oriented program evaluation approach, which grounds on the professional expertise of the program evaluators while evaluating an institution, program, product or activity (Eisner, 1976). This approach can be used in broad context from education to different areas in accordance with the evaluand and the expertise of the evaluator. In this sense, Eisner (1985) explained that this model addresses to a form of educational inquiry which is qualitative in character and sources from the work of the critics done in literature, theatre, visual arts and education.

Considering the examples of evaluation in real life, it can be stated that for the evaluation of an education program, a program development and evaluation experts are necessary while for the evaluation of the effectiveness of a hospital services, doctors, staffs, pharmacist etc are required. Moreover, the steering committee for PhD degree, accreditation units evaluating institutions and firms, referee committee for article reviews, commissions evaluating the program on-site are some examples for this evaluation approach. The examples indicate that this approach is applied through formal and informal investigations, panels and individual examinations, which can be accepted as the tools for gathering qualitative data.

Specifically, for the context of program evaluation, this approach is represented by Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model. "Educational Connoisseurship" and "Educational Criticism" are the two basic concepts of the model. In fact, both of these concepts are related to art. According to Eisner (1976, 1985), the aim of the expertise, which is defined as "the art of appreciation and evaluation", is to reveal the awareness of the qualifications composing a process or an object and to emphasize them. For example, at theatre, the expertise can be focused on the stage, plot, performances of players, and pace but in education, the quality of program, students' activities, quality of education, learning processes and equipment so forth can be focused. On the other hand, criticism, this was defined by Eisner (1976, 1985) as "the art of disclosing the quality of events or objects that connoisseurship perceives". In order to share the connoisseurship, criticism is required. Contrary to common meaning of criticism, rather than making negative comments, criticism refers to reproduce the perception of the object. Like an art critic, who attempts to provide different viewpoints on sculpture or painting and to make them comprehensible, an education critic wants to reveal the

events in the class such as class rules, the quality of education, changes in students' behaviours. According to Eisner (1976), an expert has not got a role of critic but he evaluates the works and appreciates. On the other hand, a critic requires an expert to do the required works. Briefly, the awareness related to the program, project, and effect of teaching is duty of expertise while to announce this awareness to public is the duty of critic. Eisner used these two concepts within the context of education and proposed Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model.

By emphasizing that teaching requires artistic skills, Eisner stated that education is a cultural art and this is a process differing from an individual to another or from one environment to another (1985). In this context, he defined the aim of the educational evaluation as not only to review the products or evaluate the activities within the process but also to increase the skill that a teacher would gain.

Eisner added the concepts of connoisseurship and criticism to the evaluation literature as a result of general trend in the USA and Europe in 1970s. In those years, it was realized that quasi-experimental methods and other scientific methods are not so appropriate for educational evaluation. Due to the growing doubts about inadequacy or inappropriacy of scientific evaluation approaches, many education experts reconsidered the style and function of the evaluation. These experts got influenced from different academic disciplines such as anthropology, journalism, philosophy and law etc and hence they developed many evaluation models like naturalistic-constructivist evaluation, the evaluation responding to the needs, goal-free evaluation and adversary models (Mathison, 2005). Eisner got influenced from this trend and proposed a model on the basis of art and aesthetic.

In Eisner's (1976) model, the program evaluator resembles to the art expert and the evaluation process to the art criticism. In this context, while an evaluator is doing educational criticism on a program, class or school, firstly he describes what he sees, then interprets and lastly evaluates (Eisner, 1976, 1985). This model is developed on three main dimensions reflecting three qualitative actions. These dimensions are:

Descriptive Dimension: According to Eisner (1976), the descriptive dimension of educational criticism is related to describing the current state of program, class and school etc. Eisner (1985) explained that "verbal statement should be sharp" in the descriptive dimension. Therefore, like in art criticism, language and figure speeches are used as emphasis in educational criticism while describing the aesthetic dimensions of evaluand. The descriptive educational criticism informs about the number and type of the questions in class, the discussion time and the impression of the class on the student.

Interpretative Dimension: Eisner (1985) stated that the interpretative dimension of the educational criticism is related to the attempt to understand the meaning and significance of many activities in social environment. This dimension reveals the expert's knowledge of using multiple theories, viewpoint and models while interpreting the activities at education environments (Koetting, 1988). For instance, a critic should answer the interpretive questions such as how the teacher and students interprets the raising hands in class, what means class environment for all participants etc. Eisner specified that such activities should be commented by the evaluator and for this; there should be large theoretical knowledge and series of criterion.

Evaluative Dimension: The last dimension of educational criticism is the evaluation. In this dimension, the educational significance and effect of the interpreted experience/activities are evaluated. During this process, there should be some educational criteria to judge about the experience. According to Koetting (1988), this situation addresses to the normative feature of the educational criticism.

Combining the expertise/connoisseurship and criticism, Eisner's perspective on qualitative inquiry within the framework of Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism model addresses and allows for a diversity of teaching methodologies, alternative measurement and evaluation methods, participation of students in the overall education process. Briefly, this qualitative model conceptualizes the whole picture of education through qualitative analysis and evaluation.

Conclusion

This paper introduced why qualitative methods are important, which qualitative data collection techniques are applicable in program evaluation process, and made clear the qualitative features of Eisner's program evaluation model. The study does not examine which method is more effective evaluation, but scrutinizes the importance of employing both approaches in collaboration and highlights the worth of "words" in program evaluation studies. Thus, quantitative data are "the numbers" collected through surveys or other measurement techniques. Qualitative data are "the words" collected through interviews; focus groups, participant observation, or related methods.

"The words" lie at the underneath of Eisner's program evaluation model. Since the evaluations carried in accordance with this model typically based on evaluators' criticisms and so on the words, the model strongly has qualitative evaluative aspects. In the evaluative aspect of model, the critic or evaluator makes an assessment of the educational importance or significance of the experience he/she has described or interpreted verbally. However, the educational connoisseur/educational critic understand the value of his judgments. As is the case with any criticism, disagreement with any aspect (descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative) of the criticism is open to debate. Eisner sees this as strength of qualitative evaluation. It can be inferred from the Eisner's studies that there are two forms of qualitative evaluation in education. Evaluators as critics use qualitative forms when they become involved in making statements about reality as in arts. The result is a qualitative program. The second form is found in the studies of evaluators. The evaluator finds himself with the difficult task of rendering the indefinable qualities constituting educational program into words that will help intended users appreciate value, understand and apprehend the program more intensely.

To sum up, through the introduction and application of Eisner's Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism Model, the program evaluation can gain a qualitative stance and thus the product and process of the program can be evaluated and criticised from larger, diverse perspectives, independent from the number limitations.

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