

# The Effectiveness of Goal-free Evaluation in Curriculum Development and in Quality Assurance Process

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## Abstract

The desire to demonstrate educational quality and the emphasis on accountability in curriculum development focuses on the need of goal-free evaluation, which stresses the role of evaluators in the process of seeking the unintended and undesirable consequences of the curriculum as well as intended ones. The concern of goal-free evaluation is to provide precise information that helps curriculum developers make necessary changes to enhance the quality of education (Briggs, 2007). The paper outlines goal-free evaluation as critical because faculty must understand how well students have made sense of what they encounter in the program. Therefore, the role of the faculty is to collect, analyze and employ this qualitative data for good decision-making regarding curriculum development. The research revealed that the process of seeking the unintended and undesirable consequences of the curriculum as well as intended ones is of great importance in shaping quality education.

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## Evaluation strategies in curriculum design

The concept of curriculum design provokes thinking about the importance of evaluation in the process of curriculum development, as it identifies the specific aspects to be changed based on new needs and new information. It is notable that these results are used for decision making, enhancement of quality education and planning future programs together with the courses. Generally, in curriculum design, the evaluation process entails the following points to be observed by the curriculum developers: assessment, which tends to measure students' outcomes, student-centered evaluation, which checks the level of students' satisfaction and professional judgment, which estimates how the faculty themselves believe the academic plan works (Lattuca, & Stark, 2009).

In the following table, I have summed up the key factors which are very strongly influenced by the evaluation process.

**Table 1.** The impact of evaluation in curriculum design

Factor	Provides the insights about:
Curriculum design	The quality of program planning and organization
Classroom process	The extent to which a program is being implemented appropriately
Learning environment	The extent to which a program is being implemented appropriately
Staff development	The extent to which the education system provides the staff opportunities to increase their effectiveness

Each above-mentioned element of curriculum could be evaluated through different evaluation strategies. According to many curriculum studies (Richards, 2001; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Wan & Gut, 2011), there are four major evaluation strategies which are very commonly used by curriculum writers and curriculum developers: Informal Evaluation, Student-Centered Evaluation, Goal-Focused Evaluation and Goal-Free Evaluation. Informal Evaluation is usually done at the course-level and seeks the information related to educational purposes, content, sequence and instructional processes. This informal observation provides a direct feedback to the instructor. Student-Centered Evaluation examines goal congruence between students and curriculum. This approach determines whether the curriculum is beneficial and satisfying to the students and at the same time, provides useful information to the instructors in terms of connecting classroom principles to students' concerns. Goal-Focused Evaluation focuses on establishing clear objectives, developing assessment tools, obtaining the desired information and interpreting the congruence between achievements and objectives. Goal-Free Evaluation seeks to clarify students' real experience - what actually happened to them, but does not focus on what faculty planned to happen. These evaluation strategies could be very successfully employed in the process of curriculum design, learning process and staff development. I have summarized the key characteristics of the most prominent evaluation strategies and their contribution to curriculum development.

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**Table 2.** Evaluation strategies in curriculum development

Types of Evaluation	Key Peculiarities
Informal	Enhances faculty members' ability to get immediate feedback and apply to necessary adjustments right away
Student-Centered	Focuses on students' comprehensions and interpretations of their educational needs, behavior and satisfaction
Goal-Focused	Focuses on learning outcomes
Goal-Free	Stresses the role of evaluators in the process of seeking the unintended and undesirable consequences of the curriculum as well as intended ones

It is quite apparent to many curriculum developers that these four evaluation strategies are of a paramount importance in curriculum development, but in this study the main focus comes to identify the role of goal-free evaluation in curriculum design and its influence on quality assurance process.

Goal-free evaluation stresses the role of evaluators in the process of seeking the unintended and undesirable consequences of the curriculum as well as intended ones. The concern of goal-free evaluation is to provide precise information that helps curriculum developers make necessary changes to enhance the quality of education (Briggs, 2007).

Goal- Free Evaluation is the evaluation of actual effects against a profile of demonstrated needs. The value of goal-free evaluation is not noticing what is expected, but noticing the unexpected (Scriven, 1967). The main goal of this kind of an evaluation strategy is to find out the actual effects of the program which might be very different from the stated goals. It is notable that the evaluator is placed in a discovery role and consequently, is an individual outside the academic program. In such evaluations, judgments are made about whether the program is performing well at its task, whether the program is needed (worth) and what actions should be taken to enhance the quality.

## Method

The research involves an interview with some graduates of the Faculty of Education and Humanities at International Black Sea University. Graduates are excellent sources for goal-free evaluation, as they may better recognize positive and negative unintended consequences. Ten subjects were chosen randomly to check their previous classroom experiences that were not specified in the course objectives. For the interview general questions were designed, as the measures in goal-free evaluation cannot be specified in advance:

Question 1: How did you change during this educational experience?

Question 2: What aspects of the program were positive to you?

Question 3: What aspects of the program were negative to you?

## Results

Most of the outcomes stated by the respondents were positive, but unexpected for me. Three subjects out of ten stressed the influential role of a lecturer in terms of sharpening their interpersonal skills and learning to model their own future teaching behavior. To that extent, the admired lecturer subconsciously provokes the state of intrinsic motivation to perform well, e.g., trying to look well and to be thus attractive for students – often students who like the lecturer learn to like the course s/he teaches. Quite an interesting comment was made by one of the interviewees regarding lecturers' appearance and the dress style. The lecturer with a pleasant appearance and good manners of lecturing creates a very comfortable environment to work with. One interviewee talked about valuing viewpoints from persons with different experiences and perspectives in a very friendly classroom environment, which kept the motivation high. This approach cannot be completely deemed as a component of goal-free evaluation, as at the faculty (due to having multicultural classes), we aim to create the environment in which multicultural students will value each other's cultures. But the factor of motivation caused by this environment could be a thought-provoking issue for goal-free evaluation of the curriculum. Interestingly enough, another interviewee also brought up the issue of learning motivation increased due to the competitive nature of the class. She was extrinsically motivated to study at our university, as it is one of prestigious universities in Georgia and the diploma used to be the main concern of her study. It is interesting to note that the working classroom climate created by her competitive group-mates was the main reason of changing her attitude towards the education process. Having a desire to participate actively in class discussions, state interesting ideas and generally, be fully aware of the topic under study, made her one of them. Future job perspective at our university was also pointed out during the interview: how the comfortable physical environment and feeling of stability may motivate a student to continue future studies in the academic field. Some negative factors during the program were identified by the interviewees: a) feeling of discomfort during class discussions due to the students, whose English skills were poor and who were not able to formulate their ideas in English properly; b) starting to dislike the course due to the burdensome workload, although s/he was doing a satisfactory academic work; c) low self-esteem due to the lack of opportunities for course success, as the English language was a real barrier (all programs at our faculty are delivered in English).

The following table provides a clear-cut picture of unintended positive and negative consequences as a result of goal-free evaluation done by the graduates of our program.

**Table 3.** Unintended Consequences of Goal-Free Evaluation

Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Role of a lecturer in sharpening interpersonal skills and learning to model their own future teaching behavior	Feeling of discomfort during class discussions due to weak students
Lecturers' appearance and the dress style to get intrinsically motivated	Starting to dislike the course due to the burdensome workload

Valuing viewpoints from persons with different experiences and perspectives in a very friendly classroom environment	Feeling of low self-esteem due to the lack of opportunities for course success, as English language was a real barrier
Increased motivation due to the competitive nature of the class	
Comfortable physical environment and feeling of stability to get motivated to continue future studies in the academic field	
Future job perspectives at International Black Sea University to get motivated to study	

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## Conclusion

- The study revealed that the positive consequences outweigh the negative ones in our curriculum, which could be deemed as an indicator of success. The positive consequences of the Goal-Free Evaluation could be used as success indicator of the curriculum and quality assurance development process.

- A classroom is a living body with different personalities in it, which may provoke some unintended and undesired consequences in curriculum. To that extent, goal-free evaluation strategy could be employed as a remedy for the drawbacks.

- Since the questions asked in goal-free evaluations are quite daunting to be formulated in a neutral way and may elicit some negative comments, having an assistance of a third party is preferable, so that the students feel free to share their thoughts and experiences.

- Goal-Free Evaluation is used for preliminary purposes to collect the relevant data for goal-focused evaluation which identifies the fundamental relationship between goals, outcomes and assessment. The closer this relationship is, the more effective and successful the curriculum will be. It is notable that the quality assurance process increasingly expects clear specifications of the goals, outcomes and assessment methods, which could be attained by the combination of Goal-Free and Goal-Focused Evaluation Strategies.

## References:

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