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Training Programs Evaluation for Educational Supervisors in Oman: Ways to Improve

Zayid Ali Khalfan AL-Hosni, Kazi Enamul Hoque* and Abdul Rahman Idris

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: keh2009@um.edu.my

Abstract: The implementation of the evaluation training gives training meaning and significance. However, there are many researchers in the field indicated in their studies that the evaluation training program practice is still not satisfactory, and also the evaluation is facing several challenges. In this focus this paper aims to explore the educational supervisors' views regarding the ways to improve the implementing process of evaluation training programs in the Ministry of Education, Oman. This paper used qualitative approach with multiple-case study design. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and reviewing the related documents. The participants in this study were training provider, training evaluator, trainer, direct superior, and trainee. The interviewees revealed many recommendations and suggestions that could increase the effectiveness of the implementation of evaluation process and it can assist to overcome the shortcoming and lacking of the current evaluation performance.

Keywords: Evaluation training programs, relevant participants' perception, Oman

INTRODUCTION

Current conditions necessitate the need for specialized training capable of facing challenges. Training to the universal organizations is one of the major parts of human resource development (HRD). Aminuddin[1] claim that training is an investment (p. 4). Goldstein et al.[2] have specifically defined training as "the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts, or attitudes that result in improved performance in another environment". Likewise, Sims[3] sees training as "a step toward improving job performance and/or organizational effectiveness". Smith[4] confirmed the "importance of off-the-job training as a supplement for workplace learning" (p. 4).

The importance of implementing evaluation been exposed by many researcher. Phillips et al.[5] asserts that "there must be a comprehensive measurement and evaluation process to capture the contributions of human

resource development and establish accountability". Previously, Phillips[6] stated that evaluation can help to 1. determine the attainment of program objectives; 2) determine the efficiency (the strengths and weaknesses) of human resource development programs and activities which can be used to make further or future improvements;3) identify if the cost of an human resource development program has paid off; 4) decide prospective participants; 5) verify tests, cases, and exercises to ensure that they are able to measure knowledge, skills, and abilities; 6) identify which participants benefited the most from the program or otherwise where the information can be used to decide if a participant should be promoted, transferred, retained, and so on; 7) remind participants on the knowledge, skills, and abilities that have been acquired and how should they apply on the job; 8) gather data to develop future programs' marketing strategy such as determining the rationale of attending a program, the decision to attend a program, and announcement of future programs; 9) determine if training is needed or necessary to solve a specific problem; and 10) establish a database to assist management in decision making .

The decision not to undertake evaluation will result in the ineffectiveness of current and future training programs. Some of the consequences of not evaluating, as spelled out by Rae[7], among others are: the impossibility of assessing trainers, not knowing learners' reactions, inability to assess learning transfer, unawareness of success by sponsors, and impossibility of valid responses. Thus, evaluation is needed to make human resource development work better and may turn training failures into success[8].

Beside that also, Rae[7] listed the reasons for underemphasizing evaluation or not undertaking evaluation seriously: a) no strong belief in evaluating training programs; b) trainer's ignorance; c) evaluation only refers to training on definite, measurable end product like computer training; d) uncertainty of whose or which department's job responsibility; e) evaluation was not an issue when training programs were arranged; f) evaluating is so much time consuming and would interfere with training's quality time; and g) evaluation is only about handing out questionnaires at the end of the course .

Likewise, Kirkpatrick[9] claimed that most companies use reaction sheets at the end of training programs but have not gone beyond that in evaluating. The reasons being: 1) They do not consider it important or urgent; 2) They do not know what to do or how to do it; 3) There is no pressure from higher management to do more; 4) They feel secure in their job and see no need to do more; and 5) They have too many other things that are more important or that they prefer to do (pp. 18-19).

However, to date, evaluation of the training programs are not given emphasis. Goldstein et al.[2] stated that there have been a substantial number of organizations which undertook program evaluation. Unfortunately, they further argue that, "most of the evaluations focused on trainee reactions to the program rather than determining whether learning had taken place and job performance had been positively impacted" (p. 138). This assertion shows that the practices of evaluating are most of the time unsystematic and based on simple means and the evaluation

results are not the; foremost priority of the organization[10, 11, 12]. Evaluation is also overlooked or "not implemented to its full capacity"[13]. Even though there are numerous researchers in training program evaluation, most of them measure perceptions and level of use for example, Phillips[14], Al-Athari et al.,[15] Green[16] and Al-Hatmi[17].

Generally according to Galanou et al.[18] citing Kaplan and Norton (1996) claim also that "training programs generally lack practicability and their impact has not been systematically evaluated" makes several important points" (p. 235). They further states that to achieve the best quality results in investigation the impact of training programs that more research is needed in order to move away from the unplanned and poorly idea conceived (p. 235). Similar to Eseryel[19] is also citing, Hoque et al., Carnevale et al., Holcomb., McMahon et al. and Rossi et al. claim that "there is evidence that evaluations of training programs are often inconsistent or missing" (p. 4).

The Oman society always put human resource development as an important division to improve its educational system and to meet the new century's challenges, therefore Oman; in its initial stage of building its human resources had issued an education philosophy in 1978. One of its educational goals is to "accomplish a comprehensive development for the Omani society" is to "train manpower required for work and production" (Ministry of Education, Philosophy of Education, 2004, pp. 46-48) [20]. For this purpose, education will play a vital role to prepare the citizens of Oman to fill the labor market which will then qualitatively and quantitatively achieve its economic development .

The Ministry of Education, Oman continuously conducts short-term training programs for employees in different specializations and fields. Since the Ministry of Education's reformation in 1997, the training programs field is obligated to include the following: (a) follow up and evaluate the implementation of training programs, (b) follow up and evaluate trainees' application after every training program session, (c) the Ministry of Education organization, department, and school performance return from training program and (d) evaluate annual training program plans based the training program provided type in achieving the targeting the general goals of the ministry .

In line also many of the studies in the local context in Oman, finds that there is shortcoming in the existing evaluation of training program in public sector; Al-Hanasi[21]as a local study claim that the training in Oman facing many challenges, such as, there is limited and lack in training quality in both public and private sectors . He further stated that should do research about training fault reasons and develop human resource professional (pp. 64-65). Parell to Al Hansi as local studies' findings Al-Siyabi[22] also as local study substantiating this claim by listed the problem facing the educational supervisors departments in the Ministry of

Education, Oman, and one of this issues that less impact of the number of the training programs on the performance level of the educational supervisors. She further recommended that the Ministry of Education in term the planning for the preparation of qualified ES through develop activities and event of training programs in order to confirm with requirements of renewable educational supervisors work. Hoque, et al.[23] also had the same findings in their study.

Therefore the researcher is concerned, the Ministry of Education, Oman even though it has executed some form of evaluation training program, has not exercised any systematic form of evaluation model. Since most evaluation training program approaches cater to businesses and for-profit organizations, the researcher believes there is a need to develop an evaluation training program approach that suits the culture of a public sector or government service and in the evaluation of the educational training programs such as the provided training to the educational supervisors. Presently, very few researches have been done on the public sector other than the studies by Al-Hatmi[17], Phillips[14] and Sims[3]. It is hoped that the results of the current study could add to the existing literature in the field .

Finally, according to all of the previous either universal or local studies resulted shows the importance to investigate the ways to develop the implementation of the existing evaluation training program. Therefore, this paper aims to identify some ways in order to help the Ministry of Education, Oman to improve the current evaluation of the training programs of educational supervisors.

Research Question: This study attempts to answer the following question to achieve the aim: How can the current evaluation of the training programs of educational supervisors be improved?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Qualitative methodology was used, since this study was concerned to identify the recommendation and suggestions for developing and overcoming issues in the current evaluating educational supervisors training programs of the Ministry of Education. In this study multiple case study design was used, including a cross-site analysis. Researcher adopted purposeful sampling for selection site and training programs. This study gathered data from three selected training programs targeted to train the educational supervisors trainees, and centrally held in the headquarters of Ministry of Education within the 2011 Official Training Programs Plan. For the purpose of this study, the case study unite was the relevant participants', the involved participants: trainer and trainee were selected from those three training programs, also the training evaluator, training provider, and direct superior as other participants were selected according to their current official job responsibility in Ministry of Education .

Instruments: Validity and Reliability

The instruments selected to be used in executing evaluations and collecting related data are: first the one-on-one semi-structured interviews as the dominant

and the main source data collecting tool, whereas direct observations and documents analysis was used to support and supplement interview data. To avoid leading and dichotomous question, the researcher used open-ended questions in the interview, and during these process the researcher took down filed notes and recorded the interview, so that none of the information was missed. For observation, the researcher used direct observation during visit the site, while observing, the researcher took down filed notes. Finally, the researcher attempts to review the obtained documents and relevant to the implementation of current evaluation training programs .

For the validity, this study acquires assistance and opinions from experts in the field. This study was also meticulous in ensuring that each item of the instrument was devoid of misunderstanding and vagueness. At the actual event of doing evaluation, all data collected were reviewed and verified by the trainers and superiors in the Ministry of Education before an analysis and interpretation was communicated. From time to time, interview questions were revised and refined. As for the documents for review, as far as this study was concerned, they were valid as they were obtained from the Ministry of Education of Oman and not from external sources.

Furthermore the prolonged engagement and meeting were reassured by this current study through his visiting and arranging meeting of about six months at the training program sites, launched on 29th January 2011, and ending in November 2011. The researcher during this period of time attended to the training hall, and involved in all the training events related to the selected educational supervisors training programs .

Finally this current study has chosen participants from different categories such as training providers, training evaluators, trainers, and trainees to cross check the information and thus to ensure reliability of data.

RESULTS

Three training programs of educational supervisors were chosen purposefully and five respondents were interviewed. They are identified in this study as TP (Training Provider), TE (Training Evaluator), T (Trainer), TR (Trainee), and DS (Direct Superior). The analysis in this section is directed at answering this study question. The four themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the participants are as follows: active the school context roles in evaluation, utilize internet website service, establish independent evaluation center, and develop the qualification of evaluation requirements. The following extracts discussed these themes.

Activating the school context roles in evaluation (Theme 1)

The majority of the respondents interviewed were highly recommending improving the current practice of evaluation training programs of educational supervisors through activation of the school roles in terms of evaluating the long

term of the training program such as evaluating the application level of the gained knowledge and skills from the attended training programs. The participant TR gives some rationales why the school roles should be activated in terms of practices to evaluate the long impact of the training in the educational supervisors' performance. She typically said:

Now the evaluation training programs of educational supervisors in the ministry are seldom practiced to see the transferred level of gained skills and knowledge from training in the work context after this supervisor attended training, in my opinion this need to improve by follow them in the school during they supervise the teacher

TR added how the transferred of the gained knowledge and skills can be evaluated. The following extracts illustrate this point taken from TR:

In my opinion to practice the training evaluation of application level in the schools is an easy task, because the educational supervisor work are mostly done and practiced within the school, so the school it's the nature site to them and it's the suitable context to do this evaluation process

Based on that, also the involved interviews explained that the school roles to evaluate the educational supervisors attended trainees in their transferred their gained knowledge and skills to the work as a recommendation could be activated through two methods. The first way is by investing the educational supervisor visits and activities to the teachers in the school context. The respondent T expressed this: To evaluate the educational supervisors application of the gained knowledge and skills can be process during the educational supervisors' visits to the teachers, since this give the reality evidence whether the training benefited them and what they applied of the gained knowledge and skills

The participant DS is also in the line to support the activation of the school roles in carrying out the evaluation of educational supervisors' evaluation practice. DS suggested other way by linking between the evaluation practices of educational supervisor's job performance and the evaluation of transferring the gained knowledge and skills from training to the work. The following extract explained this point as stated by DS:

In my view both of the two evaluation types, job performance and application can be performed together by used the same process within the school level, so only the evaluators need to link between them and practice their evaluation process together within the school

Adopting long term evaluation (Theme 2)

The second type of the participant's recommendation that revealed in this study was related to adopt long-term evaluation. The following statement by interviewee TE illustrates this point:

The currently evaluation training practice obviously run in short time, and aim to achieve sample aims only, and seldom given depth results, since this because it only implementing in short period of time, so sure this thing need to improve in evaluation process since it will impact to improve the provided training in the ministry

In addition, the TE added regarding previous perception that his idea needs some action from the ministry by providing several training courses to the educational supervisors and in the same time adopted a long time evaluation in this courses. In his expression, TE said:

Whether we need the evaluation process to improve for the education supervisor training … this will need to extend the training program duration within several training courses, and in the same time implement long-term evaluation process, and this will assist to get deep evaluation results

The participant TP has supported the TE idea regarding the applying long term evaluation process in term evaluate the educational supervisors attended trainees, TP asserted that:

Many of the challenge in evaluation since its mostly done in short and unsystematically time, so the ministry should think now not later to apply long term evaluation within an academic year into evaluating training programs of educational supervisors, and the requirement evaluation activities should practice and evaluate within also an academic year

Utilize internet website service (Theme 3)

The third type of recommendations made by the respondents are that the Ministry of Education , Oman should apply modern way in terms of implementation of current evaluation current practice, and this could be achieved through investing the internet website service. In his expression, participant TE said:

I think to solve many of the existing problems in term practice of evaluation training, in my opinion I think need to move and use the internet … why we not practice online evaluation to the educational supervisor training program either during implementing training or after they trainees retune back to the work

Also TE in his expression, give the reasons to utilize the internet in evaluation training, TE said:

Recently because of the large number of the users of the internet website for different purposes, I think its true decision whether the ministry going taken this step forward be utilized the internet service into evaluating training

In addition, TP confirmed the previous idea regarding the role of the internet in improving the implementation, and he stated the advantages whether the ministry is applying online evaluation process. He stated this:

The evaluation through the internet or online evaluation sure have so many advantages' such as, assist in the lacking of evaluation results, able to keep in contact and exchange information and data with the attended trainees in any stage of evaluation process either to know the short or long terms results of the training, also going to save the spend money

Establishing independent evaluation center (Theme 4)

The fourth recommendation revealed that the ministry should run the evaluation process through independent center, so the ministry needs to establish

evaluation center to take the whole responsibility regarding implementation evaluation process. DS claimed that, he expressed:

To come over many of the issues that faced evaluation presently, I think the ministry need to establish independent center into evaluating training program of educational supervisors.

In addition, the same interviewer DS gives the justification why independent evaluation center should be established in the following two extracts. He stated:

To independent the evaluation by certain center it will be out of the pressure from many factors that could threaten currently to appear the reality results of evaluation process.

Furthermore, DS also claimed this:

This evaluation independent center will assist the ministry in avoiding overlapping between the evaluators in the work context, and avoid many factors can affected in carry out evaluation.

Developing the qualification of the implementation evaluation (Theme 5)

Regarding final suggestion, participant TR considered to improve the practicing of evaluation through providing specialist training in the evaluation field. She stated:

The evaluators stuff need more to qualify by improve their knowledge and skills in perform evaluation process, since currently their skills limited in the evaluation filed, so they need to increase that by provide theme training or courses in the evaluation filed.

In addition, T revealed that, the ministry need to extend the capacity of the administrative requirements. He complained:

The evaluation of educational supervisors training programs claim to open other evaluation sections and this requirement will need also to employ other staff in the department since the number of evaluation section and employees currently limited.

Besides, the data revealed a suggestion for enhancing the implementation of the current process into evaluating training programs of educational supervisors regarding extending the capacity of the administrative requirements related to evaluation finance. TP states that: the current provided budget to carry out follow-up evaluation levels is limited and mostly this levels of evaluation had been under influence of other external factors such as the available number of ministry vehicles, the set rewards for visitor members, and the condition of the available rooms in the guest houses or hotels in the visiting place

DISCUSSION

Activating the school context roles (Theme 1)

As stated from the majority of the involved respondents interviewed that they had highly concerned to improve the current practice of evaluation training programs of educational supervisors through activating the school context roles. The data revealed that this recommendation can be done in school level through two ways. The first one is through investing in the educational supervisors' schools

visits to the teachers in evaluating practicing the application level. The other way is by linking between the educational supervisors' evaluations processes of the job performance and application evaluation level, since the two type of evaluation frequently are being practiced in school context. This finding is supported with the findings of Junaidah[10] and Hoque et al.[24] as they asserted that the defines training evaluation as "a systematic process of collecting and analyzing information for and about a training program which can be used for planning and guiding decision making as well as assessing the relevance, effectiveness and the impact of various training components".

Adopting long term evaluation (Theme 2)

Suggestions for improving implementation of the current process into evaluating training program of educational supervisors is to employ a different evaluation approach relevant to the adopting long term evaluation within several training courses within an academic year. According to the interviewees' perceptions, the current period of the implementation evaluation in the present process is too low to be suitable in terms of the limited time, also it is followed incompletely systematic flow, and unordered timing in terms of carrying out the evaluation process; Therefore, in their views this time should be at least within an academic year to reach in-depth training and evaluation, since this will assist in overcoming the current evaluation process. This finding is in line with the findings of many studies such as Al-Hanasi[21]; Al-Siyabi[22] and Al-Hatmi[17]. These studies stated that there are shortcomings in evaluation resulted, and lacking source in the MOE training programs.

Utilizing internet website service (Theme 3)

The third kind of recommendations that derives from this study is to encourage the trend to use more the modern evaluation methods through applying new and convincing evaluation approaches in terms carrying out the training program evaluation, and this can be achieved through utilizing the internet since of its advantages such as that the internet is economic modern method, and will assist to save the ministry budget, assist the stakeholder to publish the consequence of the evaluation outcomes regarding implementation of the evaluation process of training programs, contribute to solve the lack in getting the consequences evaluation outcomes in the current implementation evaluation process. The internet can facilitate exchange on the evaluation feedback, and this will increase the possibility percentage in getting the response from the attended trainees, trainers, and superiors, and also all of them could be involved in terms of giving their feedback, and the internet will contribute to increasing the communication between all the involved into evaluating training programs of educational supervisors. These findings are aligned with Hoque et al.[25] who found the impact of ICT in total education management.

Establishing independent evaluation center (Theme 4)

While giving suggestion, the participant DS claimed that currently the overall implementation of the current evaluation process needs to be run through an independent administrative institution or organization. This finding is parallel to the findings of Stufflebeam et al.[26] as they asserted that in simple terms we can say that "evaluation is an essential means for finding out and acting on what is going right and wrong" (p. 30), also this finding is in line with the findings by Phillips et al.[5], as they asserts that the evaluation need to "establish accountability" (p.2).

Developing the qualification of the implementation evaluation (Theme 3)

Many of the involved participants recommended in different ways that the ministry needs to improve many of administrative requirements regarding the current practice of evaluation training programs of educational supervisors, and based to their views they were claimed that the number of evaluation employees presently needs to be increased, also need to establish more of evaluation training programs administrative sections, thus they can cover all the implementation evaluation process of all the educational supervisors subject disciplines. This finding is in line with the findings of Rae[7] who listed the reasons for underemphasizing evaluation or not undertaking evaluation seriously, and one of this reason that because of uncertainty of whose or which department's job responsibility;

Conclusion

The study revealed many limitations in the current evaluation process, and these disadvantages could be overcome with the suitable recommendations given by participants as discussed in this study. Findings regarding recommendation and suggestions are supported and in line with many findings in Omani local context that recommended to develop the current evaluation process of training program[21, 22, 17, 24]. All these studies stated that the existing evaluation of training program by the MOE is still not satisfactory, there are shortcomings in evaluating training results in the current Ministry of Education training program, and there is limitation and lack in training quality in both public and private sectors in Oman. It is evident that major changes are required in all the evaluation phases, especially upgrading of current skills in evaluation, a more systematic approach and usage of new methods for collecting and analyzing data for evaluation purposes and that an independent body must be set up to undertake educational supervisors training program evaluation to ensure objectivity of results.

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