

[Pedagogy and Interdisciplinary Studies]

The Development of Curriculum Evaluation and Its Implications for College English Curriculum Evaluation System: From the Perspective of Curriculum Theories

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Received: January 21, 2026

Accepted: February 18, 2026

Published: March 31, 2026

To cite this article: HU Pingping. (2026). The Development of Curriculum Evaluation and Its Implications for College English Curriculum Evaluation System: From the Perspective of Curriculum Theories. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 208–218, DOI: 10.53789/j.1653-0465.2026.0601.024

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.53789/j.1653-0465.2026.0601.024>

Abstract: From the perspective of curriculum theories, this paper reviews the definition of curriculum evaluation and the development of curriculum evaluation models, and analyzes its implications for the College English curriculum evaluation system. It is recommended that College English teaching should leverage the advantages of diverse evaluation models, including the “Objectives Evaluation Model”, the “CIPP Evaluation Model”, and the “Developmental Evaluation Model”. Additionally, the College English curriculum evaluation system can draw insights from these models across key dimensions such as evaluation content, evaluation criteria, evaluation methods and tools, and evaluation subjects.

Keywords: curriculum evaluation; evaluation models; The Guidelines on College English Teaching

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1. Introduction

The changes in the past College English teaching syllabuses have shown that College English curriculum policies are becoming more open, flexible, personalized, decentralized, and diversified (Xu & Fan, 2017). A prominent feature of The Guidelines on College English Teaching (hereinafter referred to as The Guidelines) issued in 2020 is that it has added a section on “College English Curriculum Evaluation” for the first time in

Chapter 5 “Evaluation and Testing”. Although the “Teaching Assessment” stipulated in The Requirements for College English Curriculum Teaching issued in 2007 introduced the concept of formative assessment for the first time, which was a progress compared with the previous teaching syllabuses, it lacked the evaluation of the College English curriculum itself. Therefore, The Guidelines has made up for this deficiency to a certain degree. It can be said that The Guidelines “inherits the evaluation concept of The Curriculum Requirements, but its content is more abundant, specific, and clear” (Wang, 2016: 7).

Many experts and scholars have interpreted and explained the new requirements of The Guidelines (He, 2020), curriculum setup system (Xiang, 2020), teaching methods and approaches (Yu, 2020), teaching administration and teacher development (Zhang & Li, 2020), intercultural communicative competence (Yuan, 2021), College English testing and assessment (Jin, 2020). However, research on the College English curriculum evaluation is still scarce. Then, what is curriculum evaluation? How to conduct it? What implications can the development of curriculum evaluation provide for College English curriculum evaluation system? This study attempts to address these issues from the perspective of curriculum theories, aiming to provide enlightenment for front-line College English teachers to better conduct College English evaluation.

2. What is Curriculum Evaluation?

As a specialized research field, curriculum evaluation started in the 1930s. The American educator Ralph W. Tyler clearly regarded curriculum evaluation as an important part of curriculum development in his classic work *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) (referred to as “Tyler Rationale”), and systematically expounded the basic framework of curriculum evaluation. *Tyler Rationale* formed the basic idea of modern curriculum evaluation, and laid the foundation for modern curriculum theory research. Tyler is therefore regarded as the “Father of Educational Evaluation and Testing”.

In the development of curriculum evaluation theory, there are mainly three views on what curriculum evaluation is:

(1) Curriculum evaluation is generally regarded as a process involving value judgments about curriculum-related activities, with Ralph Tyler being its primary representative. He believed that the purpose of curriculum evaluation is to check whether the teaching plan designed for learning experiences can really guide teachers to produce the desired results, and the evaluation process is a process of judging the extent to which educational goals are achieved through curriculum teaching (Tyler, 1949: 105–106). This view has gradually become the dominant view in curriculum evaluation research for a long time. Shi Liangfang, a Chinese curriculum theory expert, also claimed that curriculum evaluation is “a process of studying curriculum value, consisting of activities that judge the value of the curriculum in improving students’ learning” (Shi, 1996: 149).

(2) Curriculum evaluation is viewed as a process of providing information for curriculum improvement and decision-making. This view began in the 1960s and became particularly prevalent in the mid-late 1980s. The American educational psychologist Lee J. Cronbach pointed out in his article “Course Improvement Through Evaluation” that evaluation is the collection and use of information to make decisions about an educational course (Cronbach, 1963: 672). Decisions can be divided into three categories: decisions to improve the course, decisions about individual learners, and decisions about administrative regulations (Cronbach, 1963: 673).

Johnson R. K. is also an advocate of this view, believing that evaluation is the continuous adjustment of the decision-making process and results, and should be integrated into every stage and aspect of curriculum decision-making (Johnson, 1989: 22). This viewpoint particularly highlights the function of evaluation in providing useful information for curriculum decision-making. Chen Xia (1989), a Chinese curriculum scholar, also held a similar view, advocating that curriculum evaluation should help teachers make evidence-based decisions for curriculum improvement.

(3) Curriculum evaluation is seen as an interactive circular process. In the late 1980s, with the emergence of post-modern curriculum theory, the curriculum itself was regarded as a process rather than a result. Shirley Grundy, an Australian scholar, and William E. Doll Jr., an American curriculum theorist, are the main representatives of this view. Grundy believed that evaluation should not be an independent aspect in the curriculum construction process, but a process of judging the meaning of teaching and learning activities, and this meaning is obtained through the process of teachers and students' group cooperation, mutual negotiation, and reaching consensus (Grundy, 1987: 127 – 128). Doll also stated that “in essence, evaluation should be a coordinated process carried out in a public context for the purpose of transformation. Evaluation is jointly carried out and interacted by teachers, students, and all parties, as part of the circular process of ‘doing-criticizing-doing-criticizing’” (Doll, 1993: 174).

The above three views emerged in different historical periods and were influenced by different philosophical thoughts, thus forming different understandings of curriculum evaluation. Based on these three curriculum evaluation views, Liu Zhijun (2002: 30) concluded that curriculum evaluation is “a feedback and regulation system in the curriculum development process that gradually reaches consensus through the investigation, analysis, negotiation, and judgment of curriculum value, so as to promote the continuous improvement and development of the curriculum”, thus highlighting the complex, interactive, and dynamic nature of curriculum evaluation.

3. How to Conduct Curriculum Evaluation?

Modern curriculum theory has experienced a development process from the “objectives model” to the “process model”, “learner-centered model”, “coherence model”, “post-modern model”, “dynamic model”, and then to the “internal and external loop model” (Peng & Feng, 2014), thus producing a variety of curriculum evaluation models. Patton (2008) even listed as many as 79 different types of curriculum evaluation models in a checklist. Among them, the following five are probably the most influential curriculum evaluation models:

3.1 *Objectives Evaluation Model*

The Objectives Model, as the core component of the “Tyler Rationale”, stands as the earliest and most influential evaluation model in the field of curriculum evaluation theory. Tyler believed that educational goals are mainly to change students' behaviors. Therefore, the evaluation process is actually a process of collecting evidence of whether changes in students' behaviors are occurring (Tyler, 1949: 106–107). Educational goals are not only the basis for planning learning experiences but also the basis for curriculum evaluation. Specific methods and steps include: defining educational goals, identifying situations, selecting evaluation tools, collecting

evidence, developing evaluation tools, tryout, designing ways and means to record students' behaviors, testing the reliability and validity of the test, comparing the results of pre-test and post-test, analyzing the advantages, disadvantages and possible causes of the curriculum, revising the curriculum and observing its effect in the next round of teaching, etc. (Tyler, 1949: 110–123).

While focusing on students' learning outcomes, the Objectives Evaluation Model closely combines evaluation with curriculum development, making curriculum evaluation an inherent part of curriculum development, which is an important progress in the history of curriculum evaluation. In addition, this model is comparatively straightforward to operate, which has contributed to its popularity among researchers in practice (Liu, 2002: 74). Although it has been criticized by many scholars for its strong positivist characteristics, its contributions and impacts on the field of curriculum evaluation are incomparable and undeniable by many subsequent evaluation models, since it “provides an evaluation norm that people can criticize or praise, but can never ignore its existence” (Liu, 2002: 74).

3.2 CIPP Evaluation Model

The CIPP Model was proposed by the American educational evaluation expert D. L. Stufflebeam and his colleagues in the late 1960s to address the shortcomings of the Objectives Evaluation Model. They believed that the most important purpose of evaluation is not to prove but to improve, and evaluation should be a process of providing information for leaders to make decisions. For this reason, they proposed four types of evaluation: Context Evaluation, Input Evaluation, Process Evaluation, and Product Evaluation, which respectively serve the planning decisions to determine goals, the structural decisions to determine project design, the implementation decisions to control project operations, and the recycling decisions to judge project results (Stufflebeam, et al., 1971: 218), thus forming the CIPP Evaluation Model, also known as the decision-oriented or improvement-oriented evaluation model. Its specific steps are: determining the goal framework, selecting strategies and design schemes to achieve project goals, identifying and monitoring problems and their possible causes in the project implementation stage, measuring and interpreting the results during and after project implementation, etc. (Stufflebeam, et al., 1971: 218).

The key idea of the CIPP Model is that evaluation provides information for curriculum decision-making, and evaluators can adopt different evaluation strategies according to the needs of different decisions. Therefore, it is a relatively flexible evaluation model. It also “takes Tyler's Objectives Evaluation Model a big step forward towards a more perfect and practical direction” (Liu, 2002: 74). Nevertheless, in an attempt to optimize convenience for decision-makers, the model risks yielding inaccurate information, which has led to scholarly scrutiny of its applicability in practical scenarios.

3.3 Responsive Evaluation Model

The Responsive Evaluation Model was first proposed by the American curriculum evaluation expert Robert E. Stake at an evaluation conference in 1974. Prior to this, in 1967, he published the article “The Countenance of Educational Evaluation”, pointing out that evaluation is the collection of information for decision-making (Stake, 1972: 102), and believing that evaluation has two most basic roles: description and judgment. With the increasing popularity of the qualitative research paradigm based on interpretivism, Stake critically reflected on his

original evaluation views and then put forward the concept of “Responsive Evaluation”. The so-called “responsive” refers to paying attention to the experiences of all parties involved, perceiving their activities, tensions, confusions, values, etc. , especially focusing on the project’s activities, the uniqueness of the project, and the cultural diversity of participants. The purpose of evaluation is empirical understanding, not the diagnosis or development of the project (Stake, 2004: 89). Evaluators usually adopt qualitative research methods such as narrative research, case studies, to collect various data through observing project activities, interviewing participants, and reviewing relevant text materials, and conduct continuous information exchange, negotiation, and discussion with participants to discover and understand the problems, deficiencies, and obstacles existing in the project. When reporting results, through the presentation of visual space, narrative, anecdotes, etc. , readers can empathize and understand the quality of the project and make value judgments (Stake, 2004: 90). The entire evaluation process is like a responsive clock that moves continuously in multiple directions (Stake, 2004: 103). Stake also vividly depicted all the equipment that a modern evaluator needs to carry when conducting field investigations and classroom observations with a portrait painting (Stake, 2004: 96), as shown in Figure 1.

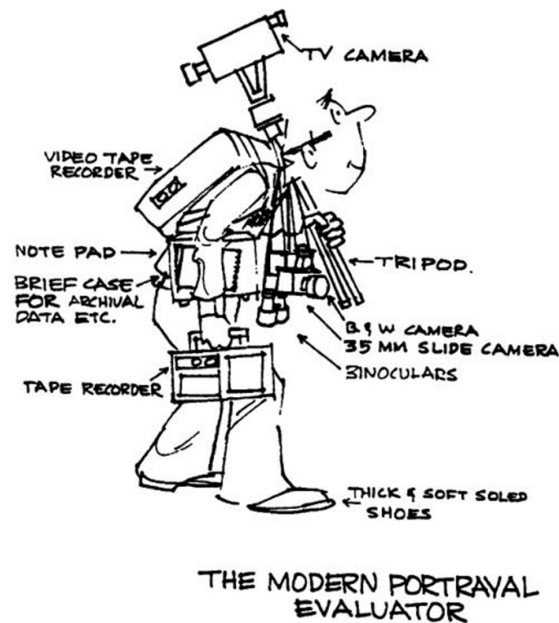


Figure 1: The Modern Portrayal of an Evaluator (Stake, 2004: 96)

However, because the focus of Responsive Evaluation is not the diagnosis, improvement, and development of the curriculum, but only to help participants understand the advantages and disadvantages of the curriculum (Stake, 2004: 196), this means that it is insufficient in solving practical curriculum problems.

3.4 Fourth Generation Evaluation Model

American scholars Guba and Lincoln summarized the previous curriculum evaluations into three generations of models: “objectives”, “decision-making”, and “impact”, believing that they are all vulnerable to the influence of managerialist ideology. They then proposed the idea of “Fourth Generation Evaluation” from the constructivist research paradigm. This model inherits the ideas of the Responsive Evaluation Model, such as focusing on the needs and problems of all parties involved, but it further divides the concept of “parties involved”

into three types of people: (1) evaluation agents, including the formulators, implementers of the evaluation, and users of the evaluation results; (2) evaluation beneficiaries, referring to the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the evaluation; (3) evaluation victims, referring to people affected negatively by the evaluation, which is the most difficult type of people to identify in the evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 201–202). They believed that evaluation needs to collect three types of information from each type of participant: claims, concerns, and issues (referred to as CC & I). The core of “Fourth Generation Evaluation” is the “Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle” based on naturalistic methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 152) (as shown in Figure 2).

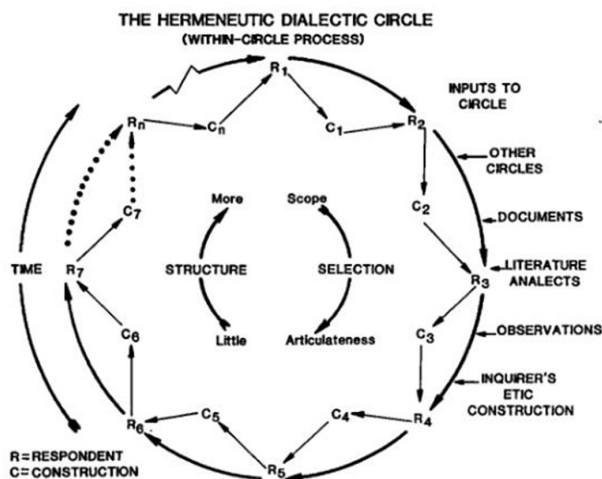


Figure 2: Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 152)

The operation process of the Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle is as follows: first, select the first respondent through convenience sampling, interview him/her to understand his/her views and opinions on the evaluation activity, and form a preliminary “emic construction”; then invite him/her to recommend or designate a second respondent who may have very different views and opinions from him/her, interview him/her, share the first respondent’s views with him/her, and ask him/her to analyze and comment. Then invite him/her to recommend a third respondent, followed by the fourth, fifth, and so on, in multiple rounds of circulation. With the increase in the number of respondents, the content of the construction increases, some prominent problems will emerge, and the questions asked by the researchers will become more focused until the collected information becomes redundant or too scattered to concentrate. Finally, the researcher adds his/her own views and opinions as an observer, that is, “etic construction”, and asks the respondents to analyze and comment, to ensure that each respondent has the opportunity to participate in negotiation and comment (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 151–155). In this process, researchers need to analyze the data immediately and compare them, and finally form a judgment acceptable to all parties, which is the so-called “co-construction”.

The organizational focus of the “Fourth Generation Evaluation” model is actually similar to that of the Responsive Evaluation Model, but due to the different even conflicting values and interest pursuits of different parties involved in the evaluation process, it is difficult for them to form consistent views.

3.5 Developmental Evaluation

The American curriculum evaluation expert Michael Quinn Patton first proposed the concept of

“Developmental Evaluation” in 1994. He believed that formative evaluation has a bias that “change” is “improvement”. From a developmental perspective, “change” does not necessarily mean “progress”, but an “adaptation” (Patton, 1994: 313). He defined Developmental Evaluation as “an evaluation process and activity aimed at supporting the development of curricula, projects, outcomes, people, and organizations. As a member of the team, the evaluator cooperates with other members to carry out long-term design, monitoring, and testing of the process and results of the project, so that the curriculum can continuously develop, adjust, and change” (Patton, 1994: 317). The purpose of Developmental Evaluation is learning, innovation, and change, rather than summative evaluation or formative evaluation. Therefore, it is “particularly suitable for innovative situations where educational goals are not predetermined and fixed, but occur naturally and change continuously” (Patton, 1994: 318).

Developmental Curriculum Evaluation emphasizes taking the all-round development of people (including students and teachers) and supporting curriculum development as goals, taking value pluralism as the basic concept, and carrying out a series of action-oriented evaluation activities through the joint participation and cooperation of all stakeholders. It reflects the inherent value pursuit of China’s current curriculum reform, so it should also become the value basis for us to establish a developmental curriculum evaluation system (Liu, 2002). However, there are no ready-made or fixed evaluation methods and steps, and evaluators need to discuss and decide with team members according to the changing situation and carry out flexible and diverse evaluation activities. Therefore, developmental evaluation has high requirements for evaluators’ theoretical quality and personality traits.

To summarize, the curriculum evaluation models have mainly experienced a trajectory from “Objectives Evaluation” to “CIPP Evaluation”, “Responsive Evaluation”, “Fourth Generation Evaluation”, and “Developmental Evaluation”. These models have provided much implications for College English curriculum evaluation in China and are reflected to some extent in the relevant provisions of The Guidelines.

4. Implications for College English curriculum evaluation

It is evident from the Guidelines that the College English curriculum evaluation system is significantly influenced by the “Objectives Evaluation Model” with respect to the two goals of curriculum evaluation: enhancing the quality of College English teaching and improving college students’ English proficiency. The influence of the “CIPP Evaluation Model” is also reflected in that the evaluation and testing system should provide information for curriculum decision-making to judge the degree of goal achievement and provide effective feedback for the implementation and management of College English courses. At the same time, the influence of “Developmental Evaluation” can also be found in the description of “promoting the continuous reform and development of College English courses”. It indicates that the evaluation of College English curricula has gradually shifted from a result-oriented approach to an integration of multiple evaluation concepts and models. Nevertheless, the advancement of curriculum evaluation still holds significant implications for the improvement of College English evaluation systems in various aspects.

4.1 Evaluation Content

In terms of evaluation content, “Developmental Evaluation” advocates that a complete curriculum evaluation

system should include three aspects: evaluation of the curriculum itself, evaluation of students' learning, and evaluation of teachers' teaching. The Guidelines not only affirms the role of the evaluation of the curriculum itself in improving College English teaching and promoting curriculum development but also stipulates specific evaluation indicators, namely curriculum design, teaching goals, teaching methods and means, teaching content, evaluation and testing, teaching management, and teacher development. In this sense, introducing the evaluation of the curriculum itself into the comprehensive college English curriculum evaluation system is truly a major innovation and progress of the Guidelines.

The evaluation of students' learning in The Guidelines is particularly reflected in the expression of "College Students' English Proficiency Testing", such as the need to "realize the combination of 'summative testing of learning results' and 'formative testing to promote students' learning'". It is evident that students' learning evaluation is more strongly shaped by the Objectives Evaluation Model, which places emphasis on both summative and formative assessment of learning outcomes through a variety of standardized tests. However, according to the concept of "valuing the all-round development of people" in Developmental Evaluation, the evaluation of students' learning should not only focus on various quantitative learning results but also pay attention to the cultivation of students' emotions, morality, will, values, intercultural communication awareness and competence, autonomous learning ability, comprehensive cultural literacy, etc. Only in this way can it be consistent with the College English teaching goals stipulated in The Guidelines.

As for the evaluation of teachers' teaching, the Guidelines unfortunately deleted the relevant provisions in Chapter 5 "Teaching Assessment" of the original The Curriculum Requirements, which stated that "teaching assessment also includes the assessment of teachers, that is, the assessment of their teaching process and teaching effects. The assessment of teachers should not only be based on students' test scores but also comprehensively assess teachers' teaching attitude, teaching means, teaching methods, teaching content, teaching organization, and teaching effects, etc." (Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, 2007: 7). Although The Guidelines seems to integrate the evaluation of teachers' teaching process, results, and teacher development into the indicators of the comprehensive College English curriculum evaluation system, this precisely confuses the difference between the evaluation of the curriculum itself and the evaluation of teachers' teaching. It is suggested that the evaluation of the curriculum itself should focus on checking whether colleges and universities have formulated school-based curriculum settings reflecting their own characteristics in accordance with the spirit of The Guidelines, the formulation, communication, implementation, document management, and revision of teaching syllabuses and examination syllabuses for various courses at all levels. "In this way, a healthy and systematic teaching implementation system is formed from the source, which objectively urges teachers to continuously reflect on and improve their own teaching and avoid blind teaching" (Peng & Feng, 2014: 56). The evaluation of the curriculum itself should also include the hierarchy and systematicity between different courses, the difficulty, reliability, and validity of the final examination papers of the courses, and the overall evaluation of College English courses by previous graduates. With the implementation of the spirit of the three-level teaching goals and three types of curriculum settings stipulated in The Guidelines, issues such as the connection, coherence, and integration between different types of courses are bound to stand out in the College English teaching reform. On the other hand, the evaluation of teachers' teaching should focus more on the evaluation at the curriculum implementation level (such as teachers' understanding of teaching goals, the

selection of teaching materials and content, the use of teaching methods and means, the formulation and implementation of students' learning evaluation methods) and the evaluation of teachers' professional development (such as teachers' participation in teaching and research activities, further study, self-reflection, etc.). Confusing the difference between the evaluation of the curriculum itself and the evaluation of teachers' teaching is likely to lead to the disconnection between theory and practice in the College English curriculum evaluation system in the future reform process.

4.2 Evaluation Standards

The Guidelines suggests that "school teaching management departments should formulate evaluation standards and feasible evaluation indicator systems suitable for their own schools according to their own teaching needs and current situation. The evaluation system should be based on self-evaluation carried out internally by the school, supplemented by other diverse external evaluations. According to the school type, regional characteristics, and student needs, various evaluation tools should be developed to carry out hierarchical and classified curriculum evaluation" (College Foreign Language Teaching Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2020: 27). In fact, the hierarchical and classified curriculum evaluation system is more importantly reflected in the College English teaching goals and curriculum settings. Since the teaching goals are divided into three levels: basic, improved, and developmental, and the curriculum settings are divided into three categories: General English, English for Specific Purposes, and Intercultural Communication, the curriculum evaluation standards should also show hierarchical and classified characteristics accordingly. When the Ministry of Education evaluates the College English teaching of various colleges and universities, it can formulate different evaluation requirements and standards according to the school level, hierarchy, and the school's talent training specifications. This can not only take into account the current situation of unbalanced educational levels in different regions of the country, overcome the drawbacks of rigidly managing and evaluating English teaching with the same standard nationwide, but also reflect fairness for colleges and universities (Peng & Feng, 2014). College English teaching should take the three-level and three-category "3+3 system" as the overall framework and continuously adjust according to the needs of talent training, so as to form a scientific, reasonable, systematic and pluralistic curriculum system (Xiang, 2016).

4.3 Evaluation Methods and Means

The Guidelines advocates a comprehensive evaluating system combining formative evaluation and summative evaluation and a variety of evaluation methods and means such as digital teaching platforms, formative evaluation software, teaching e-portfolios, learning e-portfolios, etc. (College Foreign Language Teaching Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2020: 29). Besides, teachers' micro-lectures, lesson plans, teaching portfolios, and students' learning portfolios can also be used as the evaluation basis for teaching and learning performance. Media such as WeChat, QQ, and email can also be utilized to timely collect and sort out students' feedback on teaching activities. In addition, more qualitative and diversified research methods and means such as interviews, classroom observations, open questionnaires, and text material analysis and think-aloud protocols (Hu & Liu, 2025) can be adopted to carry out responsive evaluation, fourth-generation evaluation, and developmental evaluation that aim at understanding the emotions, attitudes, needs, problems, and changes of

participants.

4.4 Evaluation Subjects

One of the important ideas of the “CIPP Evaluation Model”, “Responsive Evaluation Model”, “Fourth Generation Evaluation Model”, and “Developmental Evaluation” is the diversified evaluation subjects. This is reflected in The Guidelines that “College English curriculum evaluation involves expert institutions of College English teaching, teaching management departments, teachers, students, and social employers” (College Foreign Language Teaching Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2020: 28). Expert institutions of College English teaching are responsible for guiding the formulation and revision of evaluation standards, providing consulting suggestions for local and school-level evaluations, and can regularly organize experts to review and guide College English courses. Teaching management departments are responsible for formulating evaluation standards and implementing evaluations. Teachers and students are the main subjects of college English curriculum evaluation and should actively participate in evaluation activities, including self-evaluation and reflection on the teaching process and learning process. Empirical studies focusing on College English evaluation from the lens of students’ learning experiences such as the one conducted by Su Jianying and Zhang Qing (2025) are typical examples in this domain. Additionally, the feedback from social employers on the English proficiency of college graduates should be taken into consideration to guide the construction and development of College English courses. However, more efforts and specific measurements should be made to implement the pluralization of subjects in curriculum evaluation.

5. Conclusion

The provisions on Chapter Five “Evaluation and Testing” in The Guidelines generally reflect the influence of evaluation models and concepts such as “Objectives Evaluation”, “CIPP Evaluation”, and “Developmental Evaluation” in the curriculum theories. A review of the development of curriculum evaluation yields substantial insights and implications for the College English curriculum evaluation system, particularly in terms of evaluation content, evaluation criteria, evaluation methods and tools, and evaluation stakeholders. Particularly, regarding the evaluation content, the Guidelines still need to further clarify the distinction between the evaluation of curricula themselves and that of teachers’ instructional practices. Additionally, it should incorporate specific descriptions of the content and methodologies for evaluating teachers’ instruction. Such improvements would not only better uphold teachers’ dominant role in the curriculum but also enhance the comprehensiveness, scientific rigor, and diversity of the College English curriculum evaluation system.

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