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# Determinants of evaluation use within the South African education sector

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# DETERMINANTS OF EVALUATION USE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SECTOR

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in 50% fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management, Monitoring and Evaluation).

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## Abstract

Central to the discipline of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is the issue of evaluation use. This preoccupation with evaluation use is due to the fact that whether you are a commissioner of evaluation or an evaluator, there is an expectation that evaluations will lead to use. The purpose of this research was to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of three organisations in the education sector. The findings revealed and the factors that influence evaluation use can be categorised into two groups, namely characteristics related to the evaluation, and characteristics that are related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used. While there may be multiple stakeholders in an evaluation, the responsibility to ensure use lies mostly with the commissioners and the evaluators. Each of these key stakeholders has specific responsibilities that create a conducive environment for evaluations to be used.

(152 words)

Key words: Evaluation use, determinants, education, South Africa, user factors, evaluator factors, evaluation factors and organisational factors.

## Declaration

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of a Master of Public and Development Management (MM) in the field of Public and Development Management, Monitoring and Evaluation in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



Thabisile Amanda Zuma

September 2020

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my firstborn child Carmelo. The news of your arrival came just as I began this journey. Thank you for holding on tightly and for coming into the world, once I was ready to submit. You were all the motivation I needed to complete this project. I love you.

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## Contents


1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ....4

1.1 Research focus....5

1.2 Why the narrow focus on the education sector in South Africa? ....6

1.3 Motivation for selecting the three organisations ....7

1.4 The problem statement ....9

1.5 Purpose of the research/ purpose statement....9

1.6 Research questions....10

1.7 Summary of the main research findings ....11

1.8 Summary of the chapters of this research report....16

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW....17

2.1 Introduction....18

2.2 Defining use....19

2.3 Types of evaluation use ....21

2.4 Determinants of evaluation use....24

2.5 Evaluation use in the South African context ....29

2.6 Gaps in the literature review ....29

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION .....30

3.1 Research paradigm ....31

3.2 Data and data gathering ....31

3.3 Semi-structured interviews....35

3.4 Sampling ....36

3.5 Data analysis ....39

3.6 Preliminary information gathered in the interview process ....39

3.7 Accessing the field. ....42

3.8 Reflecting on Reflexivity....44

3.9 Validity and reliability....47

3.10 Limitations ....48

3.11 Ethical considerations ....50

4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS ....52

4.1 Theme 1: Factors that motivate individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations ..... 52
4.2 Theme 2: Definition of evaluation use ..... 58
4.3 Theme 3: Types of evaluation use ..... 63
4.4 Theme 4: Determinants of evaluation use ..... 71
**5. CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..77**
5.1 Recapping the themes discussed in chapter four ..... 78
5.2 Conclusion ..... 86
5.3 Ideas for future research and Recommendations ..... 90
**6. Annexures ..... 95**
6.1 Annexure 1: Assessment of evaluation reports ..... 95
6.2 Annexure 2: Request for Interviews ..... 98
6.3 Annexure 3: Consent Form ..... 99
6.4 Annexure 4: Interview Guide for research on determinants of use in the education sector: Zenex Foundation and the DBE. ..... 101
6.5 Annexure 4: Interview Guide for research on determinants of use in the education sector: Jet Education Services ..... 105

## List of abbreviations

**DBE:** Department of Basic Education

**M&E:** monitoring and evaluation

**NECT:** National Education Collaboration Trust

**NES:** national evaluation system

**NGO:** non-governmental organisation

**PIRLS:** Progress in International Reading Literacy Standards

**RAPID:** Research and policy in Development

**SAIDE:** South African Institute for Distance Education

**STEM:** Science, Technology, English and Mathematics

**TOR:** Terms of reference

## List of tables

Table 1: Summary of the five different types of uses

Table 2: Summary of factors that influence use

Table 3: Evaluation Reports and Interview Respondents

# 1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

King & Alkin (2019) remarked that "time has been kind to the concept of evaluation use" and that there is now wide acceptance and recognition of its importance in the field of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Although this was not always the case, evaluation use is now an integral part of the way that evaluators and commissioners think about evaluation. This is evident in the efforts to professionalise evaluation, the distinct role of evaluation use in numerous evaluations and the extent to which researchers continue to focus on the topic of evaluation use. This research contributes to the field of M&E by building on what has been researched by other scholars concerning exploring the determinants of evaluation use in the context of the education sector in South Africa.

This research study is primarily about evaluation use; therefore it is necessary to start with a definition of how evaluation use has been defined in the context of this research study.

"Evaluation use," although a term that has many definitions within the M&E field, can broadly be defined as the extent to which the process of undertaking an evaluation and the findings derived thereof has the potential to contribute to improved learning and understanding of the unit of analysis (programme, policy, or project). This can then influence decision making, or provide information that can be used for accountability judgements. This definition of evaluation use draws from ideas from different scholars and will be the working definition for this research report (Kelly & Kelly, 2017, El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996, Sandison, 2007, King & Alkin, 2019, Alkin & King, 2017).

The motivation for undertaking this research is that it is evident that the issue of evaluation use is central to the discipline of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), yet there is no general understanding or consensus of some of the key concepts of evaluation use. This preoccupation and concern with evaluation use is partly due to the fact, whether one is a commissioner of evaluations or an evaluator, there is an expectation or a hope that the process of evaluation and results thereof will lead to some form of use. Evaluation commissioners are often interested in using evaluations to inform changes to their policies, programmes and even behaviours, while evaluators tend to be interested in conducting quality evaluations that can be used to influence

policies and programmes. In the early evaluations that were conducted, the emphasis was placed on the instrumental use of findings and it was apparent that evaluators expected their reports to lead to decision making. This was however not always the case as contextual complexities and political influences made this type of use difficult to achieve. After the realisation that the role of evaluation is not always explicit and direct, the instrumental conceptualisation of evaluation use shifted to the idea of enlightenment and conceptual use (Acree & Chouinard, 2019). The different types of use are explored further in the summary of findings and in the literature review chapter.

In South Africa, some researchers have attempted to understand what the determinants of evaluation use are in the different sectors but there is still insufficient research on exactly what use is and what its determinants are. The literature review contains more information on scholars that have written on use as well as some of the developments in South Africa. This research has used several data sources to come to a conclusion of evaluation use and its determinants.

To come to an understanding of use, the research started with a literature review of both local and international literature produced by leading scholars in the field of research and M&E. The literature review was then used as a basis to develop key research questions which in turn influenced the data collection choices. There was a deliberate focus on education and as such, all evaluation reports as well as the interviews are from organisations within the education sector. The latter sections will detail the research approach and the reasons for the choices made, key research findings, analysis and finally conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.1 Research focus

This research focused on the determinants of evaluation use within the education sector in South Africa. A sample of organisations including the National Department of Basic Education (DBE), an education donor in South Africa called the Zenex Foundation (Zenex) and an M&E non-profit/service provider called JET Education Services. The research honed into the way evaluations are conducted, that is, evaluation characteristics as well characteristics of the commissioning organisation and how this influences the way in which evaluations are used. After compiling a literature review, this research looked at a sample of evaluations that have been done by each organisation and conducted interviews with key evaluation staff. This research

explored different types of evaluation use and the factors that contribute to use so as to come to a conclusion about the key determinants of evaluation use.

## 1.2 Why the narrow focus on the education sector in South Africa?

The education sector has always played a leading role in using evidence to drive decision making and has been at the forefront of developing the M&E discipline. According to (Hogan, 2009), while it is difficult to trace the historical developments of evaluation, it can be noted that the first documented formal use of evaluation took place in 1792 within the education sector when William Farish utilised the quantitative mark to assess students' performance. The 1970s are also classified as the period in Great Britain where education was reformed through evaluation. There are many more examples from Europe, America and other parts of the world where education was at the forefront of developments in evaluation.

Within the education sector in South Africa, M&E has now taken root more broadly across government, donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There has been widespread interest in, and support, for evaluations, particularly in the understanding what the determinants of evaluation use are. The education sector presents an opportunity where much can be learned and there are possible lessons on best practices and common challenges.

Education is also one of the sectors where there is evidence of evaluation projects, particularly the commissioning and undertaking of evaluations. The national Department of Basic Education (DBE) has a unit dedicated to research, monitoring and evaluation and they have undertaken many internal evaluations and external evaluations conducted through the National Evaluation System (NES) which was established in 2009. The provincial departments of education also have departmental evaluation plans that model the national government evaluation system and there is a commitment to M&E, particularly from the government (Goldman et al., 2019).

There are a number of NGOs within the education sector in South Africa that have a track record of dedicating resources to M&E, including the likes of National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), DG Murray Trust, Bridge Project, JET Education Services, Centre for Development Enterprise, Kagiso Trust, Tshikululu Social Investments, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, South African Institute for Distance

Education (SAIDE) to mention a few. This is a further indication that the education sector does take evaluations seriously.

## 1.3 Motivation for selecting the three organisations

Acquiring data from the three chosen and differing types of organisations within the education sector, provided insights, highlighting some similarities in that their primary focus is in education, they all demonstrate a track record for implementing evaluations either as commissioners or implementers of evaluations, or both, and they presented evidence of dedicated capacity and formal systems for implementing evaluations. They also present some unique differences that have different implications for determinants of use, that is, they are each either producers or commissioners of evidence in the form of evaluations and they have different funding and accountability models. Regardless of the differences and similarities, all the selected organisations are important role players in the education sector and they present an opportunity for us to learn about the different determinants of use.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) presented an opportunity to learn from a government department which has made significant strides to institutionalise M&E, and more importantly to use evaluations that have been completed. In the case of DBE, institutionalising M&E means that there is evidence of dedicated capacity to undertake M&E activities, there are research and evaluation reports that influence programme design and implementation and there is evidence that the departmental leadership pays attention to and makes use of the outcome and recommendations made in the M&E reports. The DBE through a dedicated unit called Research, Co-ordination, Monitoring and Evaluation, produces several national monitoring and evaluation reports. In the period between 2011 and 2017 alone, the department reported having produced 15 reports (Department of Basic Education, 2019). This commitment to producing evidence possibly indicates that there is some level of senior-level buy-in with commitment from the Minister and Directors-General to undertake research, monitoring and evaluation. The Minister and the President regularly make reference to evaluation reports produced by the department to promote new programmes or to justify choices for what the department prioritises. This is also a department that was instrumental in the establishment of the National Evaluation System (NES) and it continues to participate by conducting evaluations through that system (Goldman et

al., 2015). The DBE also has dedicated capacity to manage evaluations and a budget with departmental evaluation champions in place to manage the process of undertaking evaluations. Lessons from the DBE can hopefully be applied across government because all the departments face similar constraints.

Over the past 25 years, the Zenex Foundation has commissioned over 70 evaluations (Adam, 2019). The Foundation claims that the results were used extensively to inform Zenex's own work as well as share its learning's with others.[1] Even in the interviews, both the evaluation managers and the evaluators cited examples of when results from evaluations influenced programme design, choices about programmes to implement and modifications in already existing programmes. Furthermore, all programmes that are approved by the Zenex Board of Trustees are approved with an evaluation budget. This implies that evaluations are embedded in the organisational practices and they are prioritised and budgeted for. The Foundation has become known within the donor community for producing and sharing evidence from evaluations and for being a learning organisation. Zenex, therefore, presents an opportunity where other donors can learn. It is therefore important to examine these claims and to understand how their practices resulted in use and how they can improve.

JET Education Services is an independent, non-profit organisation that works with government, the private sector, international development agencies and educational institutions to improve the quality of education and the relationship between education, skills development and the world of work. Education evaluations are quite a specialised area and JET is one of the leading credible evaluation service providers in education. Their involvement in different education sector projects with a range of organisations characterises them as having a deep understanding of M&E challenges in education. Other non-profit organisations can learn from the work that JET has done.

1 https://www.zenexfoundation.org.za/newsroom/item/357-commissioning-evaluations-at-zenex-foundation

## 1.4 The problem statement

The practical problem is that not much is known about the determinants of evaluation use. The literature on evaluation use shows that evaluation use is influenced by a number of factors, including the way in which the evaluation is conducted by the evaluators and factors within the organisation that has commissioned the evaluation. While this may be true, evaluators still have a hope or expectation that their evaluations will lead to decision making or some form of problem-solving within an organisation. Commissioners are also under pressure to justify the money that they spent on evaluations, especially in a context of limited resources and competing interests. Evaluators may be of the view that their evaluations would automatically result in use. Yet the reality is that evaluations and their use are influenced by a number of factors, some of which are out of the evaluator's control. Commissioning organisations may have also had to learn that if they are interested in using evaluations to inform change in policies and programmes, then they too have a role to play. A lot of the research that exists suggests that evaluation use is a multidimensional phenomenon best described by the interaction of the different types of uses. More evidence is needed however to understand how this multi-dimensional phenomenon relates to the factors that influence use. Reports published by the three selected organisations suggest that their evaluations have resulted in changes to policies and programmes. However, there has not been a study done to understand what the different types of use are and what factors may have influenced this use. All stakeholders would benefit from a better understanding of what the factors are that influence evaluation being utilised.

## 1.5 Purpose of the research/ purpose statement

The purpose of this research was to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people that have been involved either in undertaking evaluations or those that have managed the commissioned evaluation projects. This study looked at a number of evaluations conducted by the Department of Basic Education, the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services and then spoke to evaluation stakeholders to: comprehend what they understand by evaluation use and its determinants, what they believe is their responsibility towards ensuring use, as well as what processes they have put in place to ensure evaluation use. This research will add to the knowledge that currently exists in these areas and will form part of an effort

to use research to strengthen South Africa's evaluations conducted by both the private, public and NGO sector.

## 1.6 Research questions

This research report responded to the main research question which is "What are the determinants of evaluation use in the basic education sector in South Africa?"

- What is the evaluation use?
    - How do different individuals define use?
    - Is the understanding of evaluation use common or different across different stakeholders and what are the implications?
- Which types of evaluation use are the most and least popular based on the evaluations that have been assessed and by the respondents that have been interviewed?
    - What makes this type of use popular?
    - Does the type of evaluation use differ depending on the type of organisation, the evaluator or type of evaluation?
- What are the key determinants of evaluation use in the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services?
    - What factors make it difficult or easy to use evaluations?
    - Is evaluation use a product/function of the organisation or of the evaluation?

This was primarily a qualitative research study that set out to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people that have been involved in evaluations. This study employed a purposive sampling method. The respondents were selected based on the fact that they have a deep understanding of evaluation by virtue of their experiences, positions they hold and their involvement in evaluation projects. The selected evaluations were the key determinant of who got selected for the interviews. Only people who participated in the implementation of the evaluation were interviewed.

Data for this research study was gathered using interviews as one of the methods of data collection. The interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide that contained a set of topics to be covered. There were customised research guides for the

evaluators and for the commissioners. The interview questions aimed to ascertain what evaluators and managers of evaluations expected to gain from undertaking evaluations and whether these expectations were generally met, to find out what people understand by evaluation use and whether based on their understanding of use, have they seen any evidence of use.

The study also reviewed evaluation reports which were assessed for quality and use, by using a tool that was also developed using the literature review. All evaluation reports were assessed using a rating scale of one to five (where 1 is bad and 5 is extremely good) and then allocated a number that reflects its quality based on the assessment. The respondents were given an option to choose the reports because they had to allocate them based on the extent to which they could respond to questions relating to them and whether they had permission to speak to those reports.

## 1.7 Summary of the main research findings

The findings of this research study can be categorised into four main themes. After undergoing the entire research process, the first thing that became apparent is that to understand the determinants of evaluation use, it is important to understand what motivates individuals and organisations to do evaluations and what they expect to get out of an evaluation process. This initial inquiry gave rise to theme one which is about the motivation for undertaking evaluations. The second theme which is equally important was the theme of defining evaluation use. In defining evaluation use, it becomes evident that evaluation use can be defined according to the different types of use. This then introduced the third theme, which relates to the types of evaluation use. The last theme forms the core of this study: the determinants of evaluation use. Below is a summary of the findings.

### *1.7.1 Summary of findings for Theme 1: Motivation for undertaking evaluations*

The literature review highlighted that inherently, evaluations are motivated by the possibility that the evidence generated from them will be used. Both evaluators and commissioners go into evaluations with different expectations and this research study set out to understand what commissioners and evaluators expect when they undertake an evaluation: whether they actively employ strategies to ensure that these

expectations are met and the extent to which evaluations have been used and what they consider the key determinants of use. The interviews revealed quite explicitly that, indeed, people who undertake evaluations do want to see them being used. The research found that people who have been involved in evaluations for longer periods of time understand that some challenges and constraints compromise the extent to which evaluations can be used.

Most participants undertake evaluations expecting to learn something. Another key finding was that the expectation of evaluators at times differs from that of the commissioners depending on what each stakeholder's interests are. These findings were particularly interesting and useful for this study because they not only reflected the findings of the literature review that people who undertake evaluations do so with certain expectations, it revealed what those expectations are as well as how they differ according to the different evaluation stakeholders. A different perspective that came out of the interview process is that while some people had clear expectations, others never go into evaluations with a general expectation and that what they expect to get from an evaluation depends on the nature of the evaluation. In other words, all evaluations are different in that they are commissioned and designed for different purposes and to have a general expectation for all of them could be difficult.

Evaluators that partook in this study expressed that when they undertake an evaluation, they have an expectation that the results from the evidence that they generate will find its way into decision making, learning, changes in the way people understand their progress and ultimately the way in which people behave. While this is the idea, respondents did express that for this to happen, a number of things must be in place, including, an openness to learn on the part of the stakeholders, producing evidence that is credible and that resonates with the already held views of the stakeholders, effective communication strategies and the resources to make changes.

In the commissioner interviews, it was clear that they too expect to see evaluations being used and that they too understand the challenges with evaluation use. Commissioners who undertake evaluations view them as useful tools and sources of information to make critical decisions. They have expectations that evaluations will yield information and results that was previously unknown, or, validate positions that they hold but did not have the empirical evidence to support. Evaluations are therefore

quite a critical tool and are taken seriously. Moreover, commissioners understand that for there to be effective use of evaluations, they must play a role in being clear about what their information needs are, how and when the information is meant to be used and bringing together the different stakeholders so that there is joint collaboration and a common understanding for undertaking evaluation in the first place; how the process evolves and its implications for the various stakeholders.

### 1.7.2 Summary of key findings for Theme 2: Defining evaluation use

The findings from the literature review revealed that there is no standard definition of evaluation use. Different scholars offer various perspectives either defining evaluation use with a particular focus of the use of the findings, the use derived from participating in the evaluation process or a combination of both. The way that interview participants defined use was evidently influenced by their previous experiences, the type of organisations that they are part of and their typical involvement with evaluations. Government respondents, donors and NGOs had varying perspectives on what evaluation use is. Even in cases where the ideas were similar, the focus tended to differ. Government respondents tended to have a big picture focus which links evaluation use to the extent to which evaluations can influence policy or the broader education sector. In contrast, evaluators spoke about the importance of designing evaluations that were responsive to a client's needs while applying rigorous research methods to answer questions making sure to maintain an open line of communication with the stakeholders at all times. Smaller NGOs on the other hand, defined use based on the way they see evaluation. They defined use as the extent to which evaluations can be used as a tool to showcase successes and motivate for funding and to demonstrate their credibility.

While there were some differences in what participants emphasised when defining evaluations, there were some similarities. Evaluation participants, in the literature review alone, made reference to evaluation use as the application of findings from an evaluation to make decisions, as a reflection tool, and as the extent to which the process of being involved in an evaluation will result in changes in thinking, actions, designs and implementation, not just for the people involved in the evaluation but also for the sector.

### 1.7.3 Summary of key findings for Theme 3: Types of evaluation use

According to the literature review, there are five types of evaluation use, namely, instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, enlightenment and process use. The literature associates instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic findings use, while process and enlightenment use are associated with process use. The respondents were asked questions relating to the different types of use so as to get a sense of what the common types of use are and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process.

Table 1: Summary of the five different types of uses

| **Process Use** | **Describes changes in thinking and behaviour, as a result of one's participation in evaluation.** |
|---|---|
| **Instrumental use** | The direct application of results from the evaluation to make decisions that lead to changes in programmes. |
| **Conceptual use** | When the evaluation findings contribute to the way that staff or programme implementers understand their programme or the problem being addressed. |
| **Enlightenment use** | Describes a situation where the findings from an evaluation add knowledge to the field and thus may be used by anyone. |
| **Symbolic, persuasive or legitimising use** | When evaluations are used to justify or legitimise a position that has already been taken |

Most participants could cite examples where there was evidence of instrumental use. The study found that instrumental use is only possible if there is a clear plan about how and when evaluation results are intended to be used. Even with the best evaluations and the best intentions, if an evaluation is not delivered on time, then it cannot influence decisions. Another key finding is that for there to be instrumental use, a programme must exist, there must be scope for changes to be made and the evaluation stakeholders, particularly the commissioners must be willing to make changes based on the findings from the evaluation. The evidence of instrumental use of evaluations shows that evaluations are taken seriously and that evidence from evaluations is changing the way that organisations design and implement their programmes.

To understand the conceptual component, the participants were asked whether people's knowledge or understanding of the programmes that they were part of evaluating changed as a result of participating in the evaluation. All the respondents said yes. Examples of when this had happened included things such as a deeper understanding and a sophisticated grasp of the issues surrounding the programme being evaluated, including understanding the rationale behind programmes, how they were designed to be implemented and what success would look like, which in almost all the cases resulted from participating in the evaluation process.

In order to ascertain whether there was any evidence of process use, participants were asked what, in their view, were the benefits, if any, of participating in the evaluation process. The biggest benefit cited was that there was knowledge transfer. In evaluations that involved multiple stakeholders, there was evidence of a transfer of knowledge. People were able to not only share insights but to also learn from others. This was an important finding because it confirms the idea that evaluations are categorised according to findings and process use and this is one such example where, even in the absence of the use of findings, the participants of one evaluation derived benefits of knowledge transfer. Another benefit that was noted, was building partnerships. Participating in the evaluation process helped people to build broader networks and stronger partnerships. The last benefit cited was exposure to new job prospects. There were several cases where people used the experience, exposure, networks and knowledge gained from participating in an evaluation to access other career opportunities. During this research study, there was no evidence of symbolic use

### *1.7.4 Summary of the main findings for Theme 4: determinants of evaluation use*

The literature review highlighted that the factors influencing evaluation use can be broadly categorised into two groups, that is, characteristics related to the actual evaluation, and characteristics related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used. Since this study is about finding out the determinants of evaluation use from the perspectives of the people who had been involved in evaluations, it was important to find out who, in the participant's view, was responsible for ensuring use and defining the role of the different stakeholders to ensure outcomes

are implemented. Based on the findings from the interview process, all of the respondents agreed that while there may be multiple stakeholders in an evaluation, the responsibility to ensure use lies heavily with the commissioners and evaluators. According to the findings of the interview process, the evaluation commissioners are responsible for developing clear terms of reference with a clear purpose, and developing evaluation questions. It is important to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved and have good communication skills. This can also lead to a wider dissemination of results. The evaluators have a responsibility to design and conduct good quality research that responds to the needs of the commissioning department and to be honest about what is realistic. They must maintain an ongoing relationship with the client and other stakeholders. The last and most important finding was that evaluators must present findings in an accessible way and in time for results to be used.

## 1.8 Summary of the chapters of this research report

Chapter two covers the literature review which highlights the importance of this research, based on existing literature as well as identified gaps. The literature review will define evaluation use and unpack its related concepts, summarise the different types of evaluation use and explore the various frameworks for thinking about the determinants of evaluation use. This encapsulates a review of literature by leading scholars in the field of M&E. Chapter three contains details of the research approach that I adopted for this research report, how successful it was and the extent to which it differed or was similar to to my initial proposal to undertake this research. Chapter four presents the findings and some initial analysis of the study based on results of the entire research process. Chapter five presents a discussion that stems from the analysis of the themes that were generated from the research process, the conclusions and recommendations. The report ends with a conclusion that responds to the evaluation purpose and questions.

# 2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two highlights the importance of this research based on the literature that exits as well as identified gaps. For this research, literature that is relevant to the topic of evaluation use has been reviewed and the literature review will define evaluation use and unpack its related concepts. This chapter starts by introducing the challenges relating to evaluation use and developments over the last three decades. Starting with the challenges and studying the different developments was important because, in the absence of this theoretical basis, it would not be possible to truly understand the determinants of evaluation use and to ultimately make recommendations for improvements going forward. While this is important for the M&E field, it is especially important for the education sector, particularly in South Africa where there is evidence of evaluations being conducted and evidence generated but the sector still faces many challenges in achieving its key outcomes. Evaluation use is then defined with a particular focus on what scholars agree on and where they differ. This study needed to define evaluation use because even in the initial reading and even interviews with participants, it became apparent that there is no one way to define evaluation use and so before concluding on what are the determinants of evaluation use, it was important to state upfront what is meant by this term. This was especially important for the education sector because they conduct many evaluations. The literature then describes the different types of evaluation use and the frameworks or/and factors that influence evaluation use based on reviewed literature. This chapter concludes with a focus on evaluation use in South Africa and the gaps that have been identified in the literature. This theoretical approach was deemed adequate for the study because of its comprehensiveness. This approach was carefully selected after a thorough consideration of what approach would be most suited to respond to the research questions. The theoretical approach offered an opportunity to understand key evaluation concepts, understand how they are applied practically within organisations, to make decisions about which questions to ask which stakeholders, what to focus on and how to analyse the data. In the end, the results of the study can be used by the education sector to improve evaluation use and ultimately their outcomes.

## 2.1 Introduction

Any pursuit to understand the history of evaluation use requires that it be located alongside the general history of programme evaluation. While there are many contestations about the characteristics of evaluation, the one thing that is generally agreed upon is that, at its core, evaluations are concerned with the utility of both its processes and its results, making evaluation use an integral and grounding feature of evaluation history (Alkin & King, 2016). Evaluations are therefore a practical tool and understanding evaluation use is vital. Given the importance of use, it is understandable why there is so much research out there that attempts to understand the concept (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). King & Alkin (2019) make a distinction between two broad categories for formal theories of use. The first is *prescriptive use theories* and nine theorists are aligned to this category. The second category of theories of use was advanced by other theorists and these are *formal models of evaluation use* and they include two theoretical models, that is (a) a theoretical model of evaluation utilisation and (b) the ecological model of evaluation use. All these theorists seem to make evaluation use a central feature of the design and implementation of evaluations. They focus quite closely on the context, situation dynamics, and involving potential users of evaluations with the hope of fostering some kind of use, whether of its process or results, or both.

Studies that explore the linkages between theories of evaluation use have long been conducted and although the field of evaluation has shifted and grown over the years, academics and practitioners are still preoccupied with and interested in evaluation use (Fleischer & Christie, 2009 and Díez, Izquierdo, & Malagón, 2016). The research ranges on several topics from an enquiry on what is use, its origins, to what factors inhibit or enhance the practice of evaluation use. These are all important questions given the centrality of use in the field of evaluation. As stated in chapter one, inherently, evaluations are motivated by the possibility that someone, some agency, or community will make use of the information in decision making (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009). The reality, however, is that not all evaluations result in changes (El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996). This is further compounded by the fact that people judge the success of evaluations based on the extent to which they have been used and the benefits they have realised for commissioners, evaluators and the beneficiaries of evaluations (Genesis Analytics, 2017).

Evaluators who undertake evaluations have a hope or an expectation that their work will be useful to policy makers. This statement was even truer 30 years ago when evaluators naively expected that the results from evaluations they had conducted would be routinely used as the central input into policy decisions (Díez et al., 2016). The reality, however, is that this is not always the case. The realisation by evaluators that in the political world decisions are not easily made has been a bitter pill to swallow because evaluations are a costly exercise and there is some pressure for organisations to justify spending large amounts of money for evaluations (Acree & Chouinard, 2019).

Because undertaking evaluations costs time and money, it is good to be able to demonstrate some kind of benefit from undertaking the exercise. This is why it is so important to understand (a) the different types of use, (b) key determinants of use, and most importantly (c) how organisations can increase the likelihood that their evaluations are used (El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996).

## 2.2 Defining use

Since this study focused largely on evaluation use, it was fitting to start by defining evaluation use or to at least state upfront the definition chosen for the purpose of this study. This research, through the literature review and the interviews, explored what the different stakeholders understand by the term “evaluation use”.

Ever since scholars attempted to define the term “evaluation use”, they have tended to comment on the components of what counts as use instead of offering a precise definition. A simple definition of evaluation use is the extent to which evaluation findings are incorporated in the further development of a programme or more broadly, the extent to which evaluation processes, products, or findings are applied to produce an effect (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). This simple definition of use implies that the process of undertaking an evaluation, the products that emanate from an evaluation or the findings from an evaluation in any way influence the way in which programmes are implemented, then that can be considered use. This definition goes beyond just the findings and takes into account what influences the process as well as the various products that can emerge from evaluations. In the later section of this chapter, there is a detailed discussion of the different types of evaluation use and this particular definition relates to three, namely, instrumental, conceptual and process use.

Another definition of use implies the direct application of evaluation findings where there is observable evidence of how a programme or the viewpoints within an organisation have changed as a result of the evaluation (El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996). The change is not always easy to measure or attribute to the evaluation (Sandison, 2007). Use, therefore, is broad and can relate to any change that is observed where it is possible to attribute it to the process, the results or the dissemination of evaluation. This definition is also quite similar to the first and places emphasis on the fact the changes have to be observable and not merely implicit or known only to the users but it must be possible for external observers to see.

King & Alkin (2019) define evaluation use as a situation where evaluation contributes to stakeholders learning, influences decisions, results in some form of improved understanding or provides information that can be used for accountability judgements. This definition brings another perspective to stakeholder learning. This is likely to indicate some form of conceptual or enlightenment use and stakeholders could be those involved in evaluations and those outside of the evaluation process.

It is clear therefore that most definitions of evaluation use define it with some reference to the different types of evaluation use. Use is therefore defined as a case where there is direct use (instrumental), conceptual enlightenment which is seen as (conceptual), use that results in some impact on organisational policies and practices (symbolic), and use where there is some form of a contribution to the management of the organisation (organisational learning or capacity building). This use implies that evaluations lead to changes in actions and attitudes, with or without the implementation of recommendations (Alkin & King, 2017),

The definition that is used in the context of this research is that evaluation use is the extent to which the process of undertaking an evaluation, the products derived from an evaluation, or the findings of an evaluation, contribute to improved learning and understanding of: the unit of analysis (programme, policy, project), influences decision making, or provides information that can be used for accountability judgements (Kelly & Kelly, 2017, El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996, Sandison, 2007, King & Alkin, 2019, Alkin & King, 2017).

## 2.3 Types of evaluation use

Evaluation scholars who have contributed to the study of evaluation use have created terminology for different types of evaluation use and most of the literature typically identifies five types of use. Other types can also fall in these categories but for the purpose of this report, the five listed below are used (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Initially, when evaluators spoke of evaluation use, the most common categories were instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive or symbolic use (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009). With the advancement in the field of evaluation, the other two, namely, enlightenment and process, also became commonly referred to.

While there are numerous conceptual limitations with regard to evaluation use, the evaluation literature is generally consistent in recognising evaluation findings and evaluation processes as the two primary sources of evaluation use. The literature also seems to be in agreement that instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic use is associated with the application of findings use and when evaluators conduct evaluations, they probably hope that their findings are put into effect because this is easier to measure. Process use and enlightenment use, therefore, fall in the second category which is process use. This is slightly harder to measure but that does not make it any less legitimate or important than findings use (Acree & Chouinard, 2019). Categorising use according to the different types is important because most of the literature on the use of evaluation and in fact most people who define use tend to focus on usage once the evaluations are completed, yet literature also demonstrates that use can be derived throughout the evaluation process (Genesis Analytics, 2017).

**Process use:** If one considers that most people had a narrow understanding of use which is associated with findings use, then it is clear that the addition of process use was an important development in the history of evaluation use. This type of use emerged as a term to address ways in which the evaluation processes, rather than findings, affected individuals and organisations (Acree & Chouinard, 2019). Process use was introduced by Patton in his work on Utilization-Focused Evaluation (1997) and it is the idea that participants of an evaluation benefit from an evaluation by merely taking part in the process. It describes changes in thinking and behaviour as a result of one's participation in evaluation, regardless of whether the actual results are used. Process use implies that there may not even be direct changes to the actual policy or

programme but the way people think and behave changes as a result of the influence of the evaluation (Harnar & Preskill, 2007).

Some explanations seem to suggest that process use runs parallel to instrumental or conceptual use. Process use is however not an additional use category but rather it refers to the source of the stimulus; in this case the stimulus is the process and not the findings. Thus process use has both instrumental and conceptual consequences. This means that the process may lead to decisions or changes in thinking and understanding (Alkin & King, 2016). This was the case for several evaluations that were reviewed as part of this research process. In the programmes that were being evaluated, changes were being implemented as the evaluation process was unfolding. Programme implementation was being modified while at the same time people's understanding and behaviours were changing.

**Instrumental use** is when results from the evaluation are used to modify the object of the evaluation in some way. This means that evaluation occurs and decisions are made or a problem is solved, stemming directly from the findings of an evaluation. This is probably the type of use that evaluators and commissioners wish to accomplish because changes are made from an evidence base (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, Peck & Gorzalski, 2009, & Sandison, 2007).

Instrumental use is however slightly idealistic. The idea that an evaluation report would come up with recommendations that will be considered and then feed into decision making neglects to acknowledge that evaluation reports exist within an ecosystem of other information sources. It is rare that an evaluation report becomes the sole source responsible for changes in decisions and actions. Evaluators who act under this assumption are naïve and to some extent uninformed. This is the kind of thinking that could lead evaluators into believing that they have been unsuccessful (Alkin & King, 2017). During the interviews, respondents were asked how they managed results from evaluations in the context of competing information sources. Six out of nine respondents said that the evaluation was merely an input in the knowledge basket and that the users often considered evaluations against what other evidence was saying. There are cases where evaluations are designed in such a way that they will provide 'the answer' but in most cases, evaluations provide 'a perspective'.

Evaluations are therefore often considered amongst other information sources and not in isolation.

**Conceptual use** is at a cognitive level where evaluation findings contribute to the way that staff or programme implementers understand their programme or the problem being addressed. The results offer a new understanding or a new way of thinking about the programme (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). Conceptual use is very close to process use because both types of use do not necessarily involve the use of evaluation findings and recommendations. The idea is that the change in knowledge results in change of behaviour and thus some improvement to the way a programme is implemented (Genesis Analytics, 2017, Fleischer & Christie, 2009, Peck & Gorzalski, 2009, & Sandison, 2007). During the interviews, the respondents cited many examples of when their conceptual understanding of the programmes that they were involved in changed as a result of participating in an evaluation. Respondents said that activities such as inception meetings, the theory of change workshops, clarification workshops and feedback sessions added to the improved understanding and a new way of thinking about the programmes that they were involved in evaluating. In some cases this improved understanding resulted in changes in points of view, while in other cases it led to changes in ways of doing things.

**Enlightenment use** moves beyond those that have participated in the evaluation and describes a situation where the findings from an evaluation add knowledge to the field and thus may be used by anyone (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, Peck & Gorzalski, 2009, and Sandison, 2007). This means that even the people who were not part of the evaluation process, use the findings of the evaluation to influence their own programmes and processes. There are several cases, even from the interviews, where work done in one evaluation is seen to be influencing the sector and work done in other programmes.

**Symbolic, persuasive or legitimising use** is arguably the least legitimate type of use. This occurs when evaluations are used to justify a position that has already been taken. In this case, an evaluation legitimises, substantiates or corroborates a decision or position that the organisation already holds by providing an independent and objective reference that may be used to communicate or justify subsequent actions (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, Peck & Gorzalski, 2009, and Sandison, 2007).

Based on these different types of use, it is clear that assessing use requires a lot of critical reflection and requires people to move away from the narrow understanding of use towards a broader definition. If evaluators and commissioners understand the different types of use then they may realise that there may be cases where results were not used but the benefits derived from participating in the process and the improved understanding of individuals can justify resources spent to undertake an evaluation.

Considering stakeholders' understanding of use was key to this study. The respondents were asked questions relating to the different types of use so as to get a sense of what are the common types of use and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process.

## 2.4 Determinants of evaluation use

As far back as 1986, there was already general consensus that evaluation use is a multidimensional phenomenon best described by the interaction of the different types of use. In an effort to enhance evaluation use several scholars have offered their views on what the factors that influence use could be (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). In the earlier section, I described the challenge that exists in that not all evaluations result in use. Research on the use of evaluations has therefore attempted to understand why this is the case and to understand what factors influence the extent to which evaluation can be used (Fleischer & Christie, 2009).

The most recent developments in the study of the factors that influence evaluation use can be found in the works of King & Alkin 2016–2019. They cited contributions by previous scholars which discussed the factors that influence the extent to which evaluations can be used. In their summary of factors that increase evaluation use, King & Alkin discussed that there are four main factors that influence evaluation use, namely ***user*** factors, ***evaluator*** factors, ***evaluation*** factors and ***organisational*** factors.

User factors are a determinant of evaluations use. This implies that a user's attitude to the evaluation at hand and to evaluations in general, is a determinant of evaluation use. When users engage in evaluations, they bring with them their own lived experiences whether positive or negative. These predispositions about evaluations influence their attitudes and ultimately their commitment to using evaluations. In the discussion about evaluator factors, evaluators are seen as key to facilitating the process for use to take

place. Some refer to factors such as the evaluator's interpersonal skills, that is, an evaluator's ability to bring other stakeholders on board the evaluation process, to be sensitive of the context and maintain effective communication. All these factors improve the credibility of evaluators and ultimately, increase use. The third aspect is the evaluation factor and this refers to actual evaluation procedures including how useful and relevant the evaluation information is, the effectiveness of the communication strategies and the reporting. The evaluation must be seen to apply rigorous methods and produce information that is useful to the client. Lastly, organisational factors refer to the nature of the organisation in which the evaluation finds itself in. These include factors related to the actual organisation and the culture within it and characteristics related to the programme being evaluated (Alkin & King, 2016–2019).

While the discussion above is a useful framing for evaluation use, for the purpose of this research study, a framework that is slightly older was chosen. It was deemed the most suitable after an extensive review of both past and recent literature. According to (Bayley, 2008) the factors that influence evaluation use can be broadly categorised into two groups:

1. characteristics related to the actual evaluation, that is, the way in which the evaluation is conducted; and
2. characteristics that are related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used, that is, factors within the organisation in which the evaluation is conducted.

The literature by other authors, as explained below, also seems to suggest characteristics that can fall in these categories and this research has used the same categorisation. This simple categorisation served as the most useful framework when exploring determinants of evaluation use with stakeholders. It was helpful in understanding whether respondents are aware that use is influenced by factors related to the evaluator and the organisation, and whether there are any systems in place to ensure use. This framework was also useful in exploring what different stakeholders feel is in their control and whether they have implemented procedures to ensure use.

There are six factors that relate to the characteristics of the evaluation according to the literature. Four of the factors relate to the evaluation itself, that is, the relevance of the

evaluation approach as it related to the evaluation purpose, the credibility of the research as well as the quality of the findings. The other two factors related to the evaluator's communication practices and the timeliness of reporting. There are six characteristics related to the organisational setting. These are, commitment to the evaluation process, alignment of the evaluation to the information needs of the organisation, the extent to which competing information sources are managed, personal characteristics, the decision making, political and financial climate (Bayley, 2008).

### *2.4.1 Other frameworks on factors that influence evaluation use*

Initial work by Cousins and Leithwood seemed to suggest that evaluation use is encouraged by a user-focused evaluation approach. The characteristics of user-focused evaluation approaches included the application of a sound methodology that was deemed to be appropriate by programme stakeholders and findings that resonated with the previously held views and expectations of the stakeholders. This classification seems to also suggest a combination of factors related to the evaluation and factors related to the organisation. Based on this classification, the onus is on the evaluator to create an environment where an evaluation can be used by designing a quality evaluation and bringing the stakeholders on board.

According to (Sandison, 2007), the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) Framework, the factors that influence evaluation use, can be categorised into four dimensions: the quality of the evaluation information, the political context, the links between the evaluators, policy makers and other networks, and the influence of the external environment.

This classification introduces the external environment as another factor that influences the use of evaluation. The "factors affecting utilisation" framework, also offers evaluators some external factors that they can leverage in order to maximise the potential for implementation of their evaluation work. These factors were originally developed by Alkin (1985), namely the human element, the context of the evaluation, and the characteristics of the evaluation itself.

Later on, Preskill, Zuckerman, and Matthews (2003) offered their views on factors that appear to affect process use. They identified these factors as facilitation of evaluation

processes, support by management, the existence of an advisory group to support the evaluation process, frequency, methods, quality of communications, and organisation characteristics. These factors also relate both to the evaluation itself and the organisational context.

(Shulha & Cousins, 1997) suggested that the quality, sophistication, and intensity of the evaluation methodology seemed to always top the list. Other predictors have been factors such as the relevance and credibility of an evaluation, the extent to which stakeholders are involved, the effectiveness of communication among the different stakeholders, potential for information processing, anticipated degree of programme change, the perceived value of evaluation as a management tool, quality of evaluation implementation, and contextual characteristics of the decision or policy setting.

After reviewing the different frameworks for factors that influence evaluation use, the conclusion is that it is possible to categorise many of the frameworks according to factors related to the evaluation and factors related to the organisation. Some features could fall in both categories because they are both a function of the evaluator and organisational characteristics. This includes features such as timeliness of reporting, the links between the policy makers and other networks, and the influence of the external environment. The soundness of the methodology, effective communication and stakeholder involvement feature strongly in most of the frameworks.

*Table 2: Summary of factors that influence use*

| **Author** | **(Bayley, 2008)** | **Cousins and Leithwood** | **RAPID** | **Preskill, Zuckerman, and Matthews (2003)** | (Shulha & Cousins, 1997) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Characteristics related to the actual evaluation** | • Relevance<br>• Actual findings.<br>• Credibility<br>• Evaluator's communication practices<br>• Quality<br>• Timelines of reporting | • Findings that resonated with views and expectations of stakeholders.<br>• Sound methodology<br>• Stakeholder involvement | • Links between the evaluators, policy makers and other networks<br>• Quality of evaluation information | • Facilitation of evaluation processes<br>• frequency, methods, and quality of communications<br>• Existence of an advisory group | • Quality of evaluation methodology<br>• Relevance and credibility of evaluations<br>• Stakeholders' involvement<br>• Effectiveness of communication |
| **Characteristics related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used** | • Commitment<br>• Competing information<br>• Information needs<br>• Personal characteristics<br>• Decision-making climate<br>• Financial climate<br>• Political climate | • Interest in the evaluation | • The political context,<br>• The links between the evaluators policy makers and other networks and,<br>• The influence of the external environment | • Support by Management<br>• The existence of an advisory group<br>• Organisation characteristics | • Potential for information processing<br>• Anticipated degree of programme change;<br>• Perceived value of evaluation as a management tool;<br>• Contextual characteristics of decision or policy setting |

## 2.5 Evaluation use in the South African context

In the South African context, most of the documented evidence on evaluation use can be found in government. There is an acknowledgement that, when designed well, evaluations can provide information on the performance and impact of government interventions. This is however true for all programmes, even those outside of government.

The history of evaluation use in government can be traced to before the establishment of the National Evaluation System (NES), where government departments were commissioning and using evaluations. Before the existence of the NES, there was evidence of use but it was in a less structured manner.

In the South African government context, the results of evaluations are typically used to explore how programmes were implemented, the factors that affected implementation, and how effectively and efficiently programmes were delivered. Evaluations are also used to measure the impact of programmes that account for huge government expenditure.

On the use of evaluation results: the results of evaluations are typically used in four ways to: (a) assess programme implementation, (b) inform programme and policy redesign, (c) measure the impact of government interventions, and (d) promote compliance with legislative provisions.

## 2.6 Gaps in the literature review

While this literature review provides a basis for understanding evaluation use, its evolution, the different theories and key debates be strengthened further. There are gaps and hence a need for comprehensive literature on evaluation use in the South African context and in the education sector specifically.

# 3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter contains details of the research approach that I adopted for this research report, details on how successful it was and the extent to which it differed or was similar to what I initially pitched in the proposal to undertake this research.

The first step of the data collection process was the literature review. Relevant literature was read and then synthesised into themes and topics that were relevant to answer the question regarding evaluation use and what its determinants are. The literature review helped identify important gaps in the literature itself, and for deciding how to frame the study. Consequently, the questions and themes for the interviews were influenced by the literature review. Questions posed were around the themes of defining evaluation use, exploring what motivates organisations and individuals to undertake evaluations, the different types of evaluation use and then finally, the determinants of evaluation use. The literature review was not only used to prepare and conduct the entire study but it formed part of the findings and analysis. Once the interviews had been completed, the findings were compared to those of the literature review and the study looked at similarities and differences between the two.

The next step of the data collection method was a review of completed evaluation reports. The evaluation reports were an important piece of the data collection because they supplemented the information that was to come out of the interviews. The evaluation reports were assessed using a tool which had predetermined criteria. The tool was developed based on literature that was reviewed on the key determinants of evaluation use. These criteria included components such as the use of a sound methodology, stakeholder involvement, quality of the report, accessibility of findings and commitment to decision making.

Interviews were then conducted with participants that had been involved in the evaluations. The participants were asked a set of questions that were based on evaluations more broadly and also based specifically on the evaluations that they had preselected. Once all the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and allocated to themes.

The rest of this chapter will present what transpired during the research process with a particular focus on the research methodology and data collection. These will be discussed in terms of what was planned and the extent to which the choices were correctly made for the study.

## 3.1 Research paradigm

This was primarily a qualitative research study. A qualitative study was deemed appropriate for this research project following the review of literature that explains what qualitative research is and when it is most suitable. This study aimed to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people who have been involved in evaluations; qualitative research was the most suitable in terms of how to best address the questions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is a multifaceted research method involving an interpretative approach to a particular issue. By embarking on qualitative research, it was possible to develop a holistic picture of the people's understanding of evaluation use and its determinants.

Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and this enables readers to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning attached to their experiences as well as the distinct nature and impact of the problem (Meyer, 2001). Through this qualitative study, it was possible to understand what people's experiences have been with regards to evaluation use and what has influenced that. The respondents were able to reflect on their personal and professional experiences and how those have shaped their thinking.

## 3.2 Data and data gathering

The first stage of the data collection method was a review of secondary documents in the form of evaluation reports of previously completed evaluations. The evaluation reports were requested from the Department of Basic Education, the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services, prior to the interviews. Reports were used primarily as a means to prepare for the interviews, to verify the information and triangulate data with other information sources. Reading and assessing the report in advance was a critical step because the reports contained important information such as the unit of analysis for the evaluation, the role of the participant being interviewed, where the evaluation was in terms of completion, who the various stakeholders were and the

different products that came out of the evaluation. Knowing this in advance was helpful because it drove the discussion and allowed the interview to be more structured and tailored for each context.

Because all the questions were based on the evaluation reports, the reports were used as preparation to ask questions worth probing and which questions were not relevant. There was a question in the interview guide about whether there were any changes to the programme as a result of the evaluations. At least two of the evaluations were pilots and not actual programmes and so the question had to be modified. There was also a question that asked participants to reflect on how the people benefited from participating in the evaluation. It was important to know who the different stakeholders were so that they could be mentioned during the discussion.

Because some evaluations dated as far back as 2017, it was important for me to know as much as possible about the evaluation so that there could be an opportunity to probe. Reports also showed some evaluation processes such as workshops and contained information about how long the evaluation took. This allowed me to probe about the relevance of various processes and the timelines of reporting.

The scoring of the reports was used to see if the respondent's reflection on the evaluation was consistent with the researcher's assessment of the evaluation research. Indeed, doing this preparatory work allowed the interviews to be more focused and the discussions to be richer. It saved time that would have otherwise been spent asking the respondents to provide a summary of the evaluation and then having to remove other relevant questions due to time constraints. The respondents were therefore at ease and could see that the researcher was prepared and that the research process was credible.

The initial proposal was that I would suggest evaluations that participants should respond to but in the end, the respondents were given an option to choose the reports because they had to allocate them based on the extent to which they could respond to questions relating to them and whether they had permission to speak to those reports. This method proved to be more effective because it meant that the respondents were more comfortable speaking to the evaluation reports and they selected them based on their involvement.

In the case of Zenex Foundation and Department of Basic Education, the evaluations had to be selected on the basis that: (a) they were initiated, commissioned and managed by them, (b) the evaluation staff or Programme Manager that managed the evaluation is still employed by either the Zenex Foundation or the Department of Basic Education, and (c) these evaluations should not be older than three years and they should be completed and not currently underway.

In the case of JET Education Services, the evaluations should have been conducted by them based on a proposal which they submitted. The lead evaluator or any senior member of the evaluation team should still be employed by JET and the evaluations should be no older than three years and they should be completed and not currently underway.

The intention was to get six evaluation reports, two from each organisation. In the end, there were two reports from the DBE, two from the Zenex Foundation and one from JET Education Services. The reason for having one in the case of JET was that the evaluator proposed to respond to an evaluation report that had already been chosen by DBE and there was an overlap. This overlap did not significantly impact the study, but in fact meant that there was richer data from both the evaluator and the commissioner. It was expected that there may be duplication because these are two organisations in the education sector that have collaborated on several evaluations. Some very useful information was obtained and this is discussed further in the analysis section.

Once all the reports had been downloaded, they were assessed using a tool which had predetermined criteria. The tool was developed based on literature that was reviewed on the key determinants of evaluation use. These criteria included components such as the use of a sound methodology, stakeholder involvement, quality of the report, accessibility of findings and commitment to decision making. A table containing the full assessment can be found in the annexure section.

All evaluations were assessed using a rating scale of one to five where 1 was bad and 5 was extremely good. They were then allocated a total score which reflects its quality based on the assessment. In the end, the evaluation reports were assessed based on data from the interviews and also based on my own assessment using the

evaluation reports. It must be noted that the assessments are my own analysis and that if reviewed by someone else, the reports may get a different score.

### 3.2.1 Data gathering using interviews as a primary data source

Data for this research study was also gathered using interviews as one of the methods of data collection. According to Porter (1996), interviewers serve as a very useful tool for collecting data in qualitative research. Not only does this method allow interaction with participants but it also provides an opportunity to observe non-verbal cues while conducting the interviews. This is precisely what happened during the interviews. There was an opportunity to have a deep engagement, ask questions of clarity and observe body language as the interview progressed.

Interviews enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's constructions through dialogue by paying attention to the language when they describe their experiences. During the interviews, the researcher was able to probe and seek clarity if there was anything that was not completely understood. The respondents were also able to ask questions of clarity and in some cases alert the researcher when they were not comfortable about answering certain questions.

According to (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012) some of the advantages of using interviews as a method of data collection include the fact that interviews afford the researcher an opportunity to control who responds. This was the case in this research study through the application of purposive sampling. For this study, it was important to control who the respondents were because certain criteria had to be met. Not only were respondents expected to have advanced knowledge of evaluations, but they had to have been involved in managing or undertaking evaluations within the three selected organisations. Another advantage of conducting interviews is that during the process, there is room to clarify answers that may be vague or ambiguous and to probe and this is in fact what happened. There are huge benefits to speaking to people face-to-face. The last benefit is that people are generally more responsive to invitations to be interviewed rather than the option of filling out a survey and so the response rate tends to be higher. All the respondents agreed to be interviewed but the timing was not always ideal and so the fieldwork took longer than anticipated because times were not aligning. Two of the interviews had to happen telephonically due to respondents being based in

different cities. While face-to-face interviews would have been preferable, the telephonic interviews still provided useful information.

The disadvantages of conducting interviews is that they take a lot of time: preparation for the interview, travelling to meet the different respondents, actually conducting the interview and transcribing contents from the discussion thereafter. This was exactly the case. There was no anonymity because there is personal contact and the responses could be influenced by me, thereby introducing a bias.

## 3.3 Semi-structured interviews

The respondents were selected based on their involvement in the pre-selected evaluations. The interview questions were focused on the evaluation reports. When the key informants responded to questions, they were asked to respond with particular reference to the evaluations at hand and not a general discussion on evaluations. This strategy presented the best opportunity for rich and focused data. It was effective because it was a true reflection of what had happened based on an evaluation that had been completed. All the respondents still reflected more generally but the focused framing using an actual example of an evaluation was helpful.

The interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide that contained a set of topics to be covered. This method allowed the interviewer to direct the interview more closely using questions that are predetermined but still having sufficient flexibility to shape the flow of information. The topics for discussion were formulated based on the literature review and they were mainly based on evaluation reports that the participants had been involved in. The interviews aimed to ascertain what evaluators and managers of evaluations expected to gain from undertaking evaluations and whether these expectations were generally met, to find out what respondents understood by evaluation use and whether based on their understanding if they have they seen any evidence of use. The last part of the discussion during the interview was around the determinants of use and what the role of different stakeholders are.

## 3.4 Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling method. This sampling method is best used when the researcher wants to select respondents from which most can be learned in order to gain an understanding of the subject matter. This is precisely what was needed in this study. There was a purposive sampling of organisations, in this case the Department of Basic Education, the Zenex Foundation and Jet Education Services selected based on the following criteria: (a) their primary focus in education, (b) they have evidence of a track record for implementing evaluation, (c) the organisations are either a commissioner or implementer of evaluations, or both, and (d) they present evidence of dedicated capacity and formal systems for implementing evaluations.

The respondents were selected based on the fact that they have a deep understanding of evaluation through their experience, positions and involvement in evaluation projects. The selection process ensured that all the respondents had extensive evaluation experience in their respective roles having managed or led evaluations for their respective organisations. Due to the experience of the respondents, there was no need to explain basic evaluation terminology or concepts. They were all well versed with the subject matter and were ready to speak to different topics. They were all also very closely involved with the evaluation process for the evaluations that they had selected. This meant that they could confidently answer questions about the purpose of the evaluation, methods used, stakeholders involved and the extent to which the evaluations had been used.

The selected evaluations were the key determinant of who got selected for the interviews. Only people who participated in the implementation of the evaluation were interviewed. For each evaluation report, I interviewed the lead evaluator or someone senior in the evaluation team and the evaluation manager from the Department of Basic Education and the Zenex Foundation.

The Programme Manager interviews focused on characteristics related to the organisational setting, that is, factors within the organisation in which the evaluation was conducted. They were asked about how committed they were to use the findings, what information needs they had for conducting the evaluation, what other evidence sources competed with the evaluation and any internal/political factors that influenced evaluation use.

The interview with the evaluation team focused on characteristics related to the actual evaluation and the manner in which the evaluation was conducted, including questions about the strategies they employed to ensure relevance, credibility and quality of findings. Evaluators were asked to elaborate on their communication practices.

*Table 3: Evaluation Reports and Interview Respondents*

| **Evaluation** | Implementation evaluation of the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme, commissioned by the DBE and underatken by JET Education Services | Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS), led by the DBE in collaboration with academics at various universities and international donor organisations | Evaluating the effectiveness of the Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment Campaign Supplements, comissioned by Nal'ibali and undertaken by JET Education Services | Evaluation of the Zenex Foundation Post School Bridging Programmes, commissioned Zenex, undertaken by Hobden Research & Evaluation Associates and Benita Williams Evaluation Associates | Evaluation of the Zenex Literacy ( Zenlit) Project. Comissioned by the Zenex Foundation and undertaken by the Evalution and Research Agency ( ERA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Participants/ Respondents** | One lead evaluator and one evaluation manager interviewed for this evaluation | One lead evaluator and one evaluation manager interviewed for this evaluation | One lead evaluator interviewed for this evaluation | One lead evaluator and one evaluation manager interviewed for this evaluation | One lead evaluator and one evaluation manager interviewed for this evaluation |
| **Total** | **2** | **2** | **1** | **2** | **2** |

## 3.5 Data analysis

Data for this study was analysed using four dominant themes that emanated from the research process. These four themes unsurprisingly were aligned with the themes that were highlighted by the literature review. The processes of compiling a literature review and doing the interviews led to a greater understanding and familiarity with the subject matter and the key issues. This in turn led to effective analysis of data. The first step of analysing the data involved revisiting the evaluations reports and then reading all the notes from the interviews. The notes from the interviews showed words, phrases and sections that were relevant to the research questions. As these come up, I highlighted them. This process of labelling became the first step to coding themes. During this step, I was looking for information that is repeated, surprising, contrary or similar to themes in the literature review and linked closely to the research questions.

I ended up with a long list of codes which were derived from interesting or salient text from the transcripts, I then began a process of narrowing down. This second step of data analysis involved looking at all the codes and then grouping them together to form a group of codes which became themes/categories.

The third looked at how the themes interrelate and which themes lend themselves to subthemes. There was definitely a hierarchy within the themes, and themes that were more important than others. Stirling's (2001) framework of thematic networks was used in this step for grouping themes into basic, organising and global themes. The data was, therefore, analysed and written up once these three steps were completed.

## 3.6 Preliminary information gathered in the interview process

Once the literature review and the assessment of the evaluation reports were completed, the interviews commenced. As part of this research study, lead evaluators and commissioners of evaluations were interviewed. The respondents were selected based on their professional experience as well as their involvement in the evaluations that they had selected. All interviews began with introductory questions. The purpose of the introductory questions was to understand the respondent's level of experience and their involvement in the evaluation reports that they were responding to. These questions were important because the study had made several assumptions. The assumptions included that the participants were experts that possessed advanced

knowledge in monitoring and evaluation and/or education. Because the study assumed that they spoke from an expert position, there was no need to explain basic M&E concepts. The interviews, therefore, focused on the respondents' understanding of the determinants of evaluation use drawing from their extensive experience.

Respondents were first asked to state their role within their organisations with particular reference to their role as it pertains to evaluation. The study found that all the evaluators that were interviewed hold senior evaluation positions within their organisations. The evaluators also hold advanced academic qualifications, two hold Masters Degrees in the field of M&E, one is a Doctor that has specialised in M&E and two of them are education Professors with extensive evaluation experience. It was interesting to note that many of the evaluators and commissioners possess a unique combination of evaluation expertise and knowledge. This was important because the study specifically set out to understand what evaluation use and its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people who have evaluation experience. The commissioners were also very experienced and they too had significant evaluation roles as part of their job profiles.

Respondents were also asked about their involvement in the evaluations that they were being interviewed about. This question was important because only people who were deeply involved in the evaluations could respond to them. The study required people who not only had the authority to speak about the selected evaluations but permission as well. The interviews found that all the evaluators were part of leading the evaluation process within the evaluations that they were involved in. Those evaluators who had to respond to a terms of reference before undertaking the evaluation were involved in the drafting of the proposal and conceptualisation of the evaluation, overseeing the entire evaluation process, communicating with the commissioning organisation and other key stakeholders, designing the data collection instruments, writing up reports, right up until the dissemination of findings:

> "So on this evaluation, my role was as a researcher. So I was involved in all of the activities, including the overall project management, developing the tools, assisting the teams with conducting the fieldwork and doing quality assurance of at the fieldwork done by other field workers. And then also obviously involved in analysis, presenting the findings to the various groups of audiences

> or the client, as well as necessary." (Respondent 4, personal communication, December 8, 2019).

And:

> "We had an evaluation team of fieldworkers and so I was quality-assuring their work after having done the instrument design. Also being involved in the writing of reports, and overseeing the process of the evaluation from the beginning to the end." (Respondent 8, personal communication, January 8, 2020).

The two respondents above were evaluators and they, just like all the evaluators that were interviewed, were senior members of the evaluation team who had been involved in the processes prior, during and post evaluation. They managed critical evaluation processes and this meant that they not only had experience of the evaluation that they were speaking to but they had general evaluation experience. This was precisely what the study required. It was important for the respondents to be knowledgeable about the specific evaluation and evaluations in general.

All the respondents from the commissioners' interviews reported that they were part of initiating the evaluations, drafting concept notes, managing the evaluation teams, involving relevant stakeholders, arranging meetings and presenting to various audiences.

> "So with evaluations, we are seen as the evaluation expertise. And so we took the lead from that side so I was part of the people who wrote the concept to initiate the evaluation and provided technical support. I was the project a project manager of the service provider and I would review deliverables, quality assurance of reports and dissemination after the evaluation was completed." (Respondent 2, personal communication, 28 November, 2019).

Based on these findings, there is enough confidence that the respondents were the right people chosen for the interviews. The respondents were part of the whole evaluation process and they could speak from a position of being informed. This increased the integrity of the respondents and was helpful for ensuring that the people who were interviewed were strategically placed to assist in responding to the research purpose and questions.

### 3.6.1 This study made the following assumptions:

**Respondents were knowledgeable:** the study assumed that all the respondents were abreast with evaluation terminology, that they understood the programmes that were evaluated and had an in-depth understanding of determinants of evaluation use based on their own professional experiences.

**Respondents had access to and permission to use the evaluation reports**: all the respondents were requested to nominate evaluation reports to respond to. The assumption was that the respondents were involved in those evaluations and they had access and permission to use them.

**Respondents answered truthfully**: given that the interviews accounted for a large portion of the data collection, it was assumed that participants would answer truthfully and accurately to the interview questions based on their personal experience and that participants will respond honestly and to the best of their individual abilities.

## 3.7 Accessing the field.

The participants that formed part of the sample of respondents to be interviewed could be categorised into three groups and the strategy for accessing these three categories of participants differed. The first category of respondents consisted of people that I know personally and have worked with in the past. These were respondents that I did not have to formally introduce myself to. My approach for accessing this group was an initial phone call to tell them about the research and to ask them to participate. A phone call was always followed up with a letter containing further details. The formal process of agreeing on a date and time was done via email. This approach proved to be very effective for this group. The initial phone call to explain the purpose of the study opened up an opportunity for the participants to ask questions and to get a deeper understanding of the study. The email that followed was important because it contained all of the details and both of us had a record of what the study was about and what to expect from the interview. Once we had agreed on a time, I sent a formal meeting request and then met the respondents at a location of their choice. The respondents that I knew personally not only agreed to meet with me but they suggested a day where they would both be able to meet me. They both considered that I would be driving from Johannesburg to Pretoria and wanted to have the interviews on the same day, one after the other. In the days leading up to the interview, both respondents

asked if I would require any additional material/reports to support my research and I sent a list. The reports were emailed to me and I used them as preparation for the interviews. Conducting research with peers in some cases could compromise the credibility of the research but in my case, the opposite was true. The research process was enhanced by working with people that I knew. One of the biggest factors that contributed to this was that both the respondents are senior researchers, one is already an academic doctor (PhD) and the other is currently pursuing a PhD. They both understand research, respect the process and have an appreciation of how difficult it can be to access the field and data. They were the first people that I interviewed because I wanted to start the fieldwork with people that I trust enough to make a few mistakes. I respect both of them as specialists in education and academic research. These two interviews were a learning curve and the lessons from those first interviews were helpful for the rest of the fieldwork process. I used these interviews to practice what to say in the introduction, how to probe as well as how to close off the interviews. By the time I moved to the next two groups, I was already comfortable with asking questions as per the interview guide, the process of conducting research and the flow of the discussion as well as key issues to highlight.

The second category of respondents consisted of people that are known by someone that I know. These were people who either know of me or have never heard of me before. For me to complete the fieldwork in the time that I had allocated, it was important to devise effective strategies to gain access to the field and this meant, leveraging on my networks to do the initial introduction. In an ideal world, I would have the luxury of time and spend time introducing myself, going through the channels of contacting respondents personal assistants (PA) and write multiple letters and emails in the process. Because of time constraints and for efficiency, for this group, I used a common colleague who knew both the respondent and myself personally. I wrote an email to the person who was responsible for making the connection explaining the purpose of the research and asking them to connect me with the respondent. They then forwarded that email to the respondent saying “please see the email below from my colleague, Thabisile. She is currently doing her research for a Master’s degree and would love to interview you.” This email ended with a suggestion for us to continue the interview together. I was fortunate that this group too consisted of people who are committed to supporting research and they were more than willing

to take part. This group agreed to take part but had time constraints and were not available in the proposed time and only did the interviews outside the proposed times. Two of the respondents in this group are based outside Johannesburg and my initial recommendation was for them to let me know when they were coming to Johannesburg and I would meet them there. One of them told me that she comes every two weeks and that she would be happy to meet me during her next visit and we did exactly that. The other respondent asked for a telephonic interview and I agreed to that. The other interviews were in person at a location chosen by the respondent. All the interviews for this category of respondent started with introductions. I introduced myself, the work that I do and the relevance of the study both for my degree but also the education sector more generally.

The last category of respondents consisted of people that I know personally, work with and see often. My initial idea was to start with this category but after careful consideration, I opted to end the fieldwork with them. I did not foresee any challenges with gaining access to this group and I wanted to use the interviews with them to cover any additional issues that may have arisen from other interviews. I knew that they would be willing and able to participate in the study and were flexible enough to do longer interviews or several follow up interviews if needed. My approach was to have an initial in-person discussion explaining the purpose of the research and their proposed role in it, followed by a letter detailing everything. I suggested dates towards the end of the fieldwork period in their offices and they agreed. The interviews were generally longer, more detailed and paused to read sections of reports. This enhanced the research process considerably and I consider myself fortunate to have gotten such rich data from all the respondents.

## 3.8 Reflecting on Reflexivity

In this section, I reflect on my reflexivity, paying particular attention to how I think the values, opinions and experiences that I came into the research process with impacted the direction of the interviews or the outcomes of the study. To achieve this, I will focus on my preconceptions and my emotional state going into the interview and how these were dealt with.

**Preconceived ideas about what my respondents know:** going into the interviews, I had done a substantial amount of research about who the respondents are, what they

do, what areas they had focused on in their careers and by the time I interviewed them, I already had my ideas about what I expected them to know. One of the opening questions was asking respondents to define evaluations in their own words. While some people gave me a detailed definition of evaluation, incorporating the different types of uses and other elements that can be found in literature, others gave a very simplistic definition. I expected people's definitions of evaluation to display a deeper understanding and when I did not get the detailed answer that I was expecting, I often found myself probing quite aggressively, almost reminding the respondents that they know this. My preconceived ideas about what respondents should know came into play here. This may have affected the research process and outcome in that right from the onset, I gave the impression that I was expecting detailed answers where people were not only reflecting on their professional experience but also bring in what they had learnt in their academic careers.

**Preconceived ideas about what evaluation stakeholders expect out of evaluations:** my own experience, affirmed also by findings of the literature review, is that when evaluation stakeholders conduct evaluations, they expect that the findings will result in changes to the programmes or projects being evaluated. I was surprised when people hinted that it is enough for them to merely undertake the process and that they do not expect results to lead to any programme changes. I do not know to what extent I was able to conceal my shock but I probed to be sure that I was understanding them correctly. There were several surprising discoveries during the research process and by the third interview, I was better at reacting to the surprising elements and being respectful of the divergent views.

**Preconceived ideas about who owns the evaluations:** having worked for evaluation commissioners twice in my career, I was interested in getting the views of my respondents about the contested issue of intellectual property. I asked the evaluators and commissioners who, in their view, owns the final evaluation. Both groups said without hesitation that the evaluation belongs to the commissioner as the funder. The evaluators went as far as saying that at the end of an evaluation, they gladly hand over all final reports and datasets to the commissioning organisation who then take on the responsibility of wider dissemination. This was an unexpected finding and again, the approach was to probe and note for later during the data analysis process. The

unexpected elements proved to enhance the research process because they were memorable and important for data analysis.

In reflecting on my reflexivity, I also consider my emotional state and how that may have impacted the research process.

**Intimidated by "big" people:** the research participants that formed part of this study were senior professionals in their fields. Not only were they all specialists in education, evaluation or both but they had impressive academic accomplishments. I was intimidated by my respondents and in the interview, I wanted to sound like I had done my research on them. I remember sometimes feeling like I was caught off guard when they mentioned something about their role, the research or their evaluations that I should have known about. In those cases, I had to either improvise or allow them to explain to me or to just be honest that I did not know what they were talking about. This affected the process by making me look unprepared and also made the research longer because we had to spend more time explaining the history behind what they were telling me about. In the end, however, all the respondents were welcoming, understanding and patient enough to walk me through the interview. The discussions were rich and insightful and this was helpful for the analysis.

The last thing that will **reflect on is the time factor**. The time that was allocated for the fieldwork was short and I was determined to finish all the interviews in the period that I had set out. I had also promised participants that the interviews would not take more than an hour, especially because I understood the time pressures during the period of the interviews. After a few interviews, I realised that it was difficult to stick to the allocated one hour because I was expecting people to reflect on evaluation processes for evaluations that they had undertaken up to three years ago. People needed time to reflect and remember what transpired, why they made certain choices and what the outcomes were. I found myself wanting to rush them to think fast and even tempted to probe leading questions so that they could arrive at the answer faster. Fortunately, I was aware that I was putting pressure on myself and on the respondents to speak faster and that had a potential of compromising the responses and then I made a decision to be patient and to allow the interview to evolve organically. In the end, all the interviews were successful, they were done on time and all of the themes were covered. The

participants were kind and generous with their knowledge and were not in a hurry to end the interviews.

## 3.9 Validity and reliability

Several strategies can be employed to ensure internal validity in qualitative research. This study adopted guidance by Creswell and Miller (2000) where internal validity can be established through the researcher, the participants and reviewers external to the study.

The first method to ensure validity was **triangulation**. During the interviews, there were multiple sources of data, in this case, multiple participants responding to the same topics. The perspectives from the different participants were helpful to see if evaluators and commissioners share the same sentiments and where the variants are between and among the different participants. In the end, this method of having a variety of participants proved to be effective because during the data analysis phase it became evident that respondents' views on what evaluation use is, their motivation for conducting evaluation and their views on what the determinants of evaluation use is, differed depending on whether the person was a commissioner or an evaluator, and also differed depending on the type of organisation the respondent was from.

**The study also made use of multiple methods of data collection**. This research used literature, interviews and evaluation reports. During the interviews, the respondents also recommended additional reading resources and they too were used to add to the research. The literature review was used to understand what past and current research says about the theory of evaluation use, some key themes in the subject matter and what the gaps in research are. This was then used to develop a conceptual framework and to come up with questions for the interviews. The evaluation reports were used to prepare for the interviews and to verify whether the information that was coming out from the interviews resonated with information contained in the literature review.. The interviews were an important source of data collection because they brought together all the other data sources.

**This research also made use of peer examination** where the researcher sought guidance from informed colleagues and experts to understand the concepts, the theories and to share ideas about what the data is revealing and their views on how

they would approach the research. **This was done with particular consideration of researcher reflexivity**. I remained aware of my own biases as a researcher and found ways to not let my own biases influence the participants, my analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. This involved doing more listening than talking and allowing the respondent's voice to dominate the discussion without imposing my views.

### 3.9.1 Strategies to enhance reliability

This study employed data triangulation and an audit trail to strengthen internal reliability. The use of multiple methods of data collection and documenting the entire research process, including planning, implementation, the justification for choices and that the findings should assist with achieving internal reliability. All the reports, research instruments, letters requesting interviews, consent forms signed by respondents, draft documents, ethics clearance form, audios for the interviews, interview notes and emails have been retained. These were used for data triangulation and an audit trail to strengthen internal validity.

## 3.10 Limitations

The limitations of this qualitative research study are the same as those expressed by Ochieng Pamela Atieno, (2009), that is, the inability to make statistical calculations, ambiguities and inability to make generalisations. The quality assessment of the evaluation report was an attempt to have a small quantitative component to be used as an additional source for data triangulation. The descriptive nature of qualitative research meant that the research did not lend itself to any statistical data. The strategies employed to strengthen reliability and validity aimed to resolve some of these limitations.

With the use of interviews as a method of data collection, there was always the likelihood of ambiguities that are inherent in the use of language. Some words may mean one thing to me as the researcher but another thing to the respondents. There was however an opportunity to probe when there were obvious words with multiple meaning. The nature of the study is such that unlike quantitative research, the results cannot be easily generalisable in other contexts and populations. In chapter 4, the analysis section, there has been a great effort made to make the study as rich as possible such that readers may be able to draw from it what could be useful to their context.

Another limitation was time and cost associated with undertaking the research. This was resolved by making interviews in the same location on the same day. In terms of the DBE respondents, arranging telephonic interviews where respondents were in cities outside of Gauteng and having the remainder of the interviews at the Education Hub building where both Zenex Foundation and JET are located. In the end, this strategy saved time and travel costs and proved to be extremely effective. The last limitation is my own bias as a researcher and this was resolved by the researcher being aware and cognisant of own bias and making an effort to not make it jeopardise the integrity of the research.

The study included a component to review the evaluation reports. There are Zenex evaluations that have not been made public and one of the biggest limitations is the extent to which the information in these reports can be used. To mitigate this limitation, none of the evaluation results are shared but instead, the study has made judgments on the types of uses that have come from each evaluation report and used the reports as an additional preparation method.

The other risk associated with the use of reports was that they contained information that could not be made public or that the respondents did not have permission to share them. As part of the research, request letters were sent to individuals that had the permission and authority to make the reports available and they were given the option to select the reports that they wanted to respond to. Almost all the reports that were allocated are on a public domain in the websites of the organisations that either commissioned or undertook the evaluations.

The limitation related to the interviewed respondents is that some of them may have been far removed from the evaluation because of time lapsed. To mitigate this, I requested that all respondents should select evaluations that are no older than 2017 and that only evaluation team members that are still in the same evaluation firm and Zenex and DBE staff that are still employed there could be respondents. The purpose of this approach was to get the maximum value out of the interviews and to get people to reflect on recent experiences.

## 3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethics are very important when it comes to research projects. In order to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical way, all the respondents received a letter from the university notifying them about the study and that it forms part of the requirements for completing my degree. The interviews were conducted after a written consent signed by the respondents had been completed. The consent form stated that the respondents were aware of the implications for participating and they were asked for permission to be recorded during the interview which they all agreed to. All interviews began with an introduction and purpose of the study, a reminder of the expected duration, the potential risks, and an explanation of confidentiality and anonymity (Wagner, Kawulich and Garner, 2012).

Interviewees were reminded if they felt uncomfortable or unable to continue at any point during the interview, then the interview would be discontinued immediately. The respondents were comfortable with this process and they exercised their right to request that the interview be paused if they were sharing information that they considered to be confidential. There were several occasions where respondents mentioned that what they were sharing was off the record and that it could not form part of the final analysis and final report.

All the information from the interviews as well as the evaluations has been managed responsibly. The data is stored in a computer that only I have access to and will be stored safely in a workspace that cannot be accessed without my consent. The data is stored for my personal use for future research in this area after the project has been completed. All respondents will receive a final report after it has been marked by the university and external examiner. No respondent will receive individualised feedback on their interviews but they will all get a consolidated report with all the findings. After undertaking the entire research process, there were no noted organisational risks or professional/reputational risks. Some of the data that was gathered is available publicly. The type of data that was gathered does not pose any threat to the researcher or the sampled organisations and the detail of the analysis has been focused mainly on the implications of the evaluation process and not the content of the evaluation reports.

The relationship I have with the three organisations is based on my previous experience working in government conducting evaluations in the education sector and

now working for a donor organisation that partners with government and NGOs to deliver programmes. At no point did I personally hold positions that were senior to my respondents or allocated funding to the organisations. There are no power dynamics from my own personal position that may have compromised this research project.

I am aware of my own positionality and that the organisation that I work for holds a position of power as a commissioner of evaluations and as a donor. The organisation prides itself about being a responsible donor and there is an open and honest relationship with partners. My position or the position of my organisation did not pose serious ethical risks. This is a professional environment where the respondents have a vested interest to improve and strengthen M&E in the education sector.

Given the nature of the research, it is unlikely to be able to guarantee participants that they won't be identified. Some of the findings relate to the specific details of the evaluation. I, as a researcher, had to find a fine balance between reporting truthfully and responsibly at the same time. The information that is shared is therefore not damaging but it has been shared with the intention to make an important point. In the cases where specific details were shared, it was because it was in the best interest of the research findings, and an assessment was made that it would not compromise the respondents in any way. There are no page numbers in the quotes from the interviews due to the nature of the confidentiality that precluded me from attaching names to the respondents. The purpose of this research is not to expose people but rather to present general challenges and make recommendations that can be used by the sector at large. I have applied a developmental approach to the study that is both in the best interests of the field of evaluation and my interests. Objectively and honesty always remains a top priority.

# 4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Chapter four presents the findings and some initial analysis of the study based on what has come out from the different sources of data. While the study has drawn heavily on the interviews, there has been extensive triangulation with other data sources including the sampled evaluation reports, the literature and observations made during the data collection process. This chapter presents the key themes that came out of the research process and the main findings in each theme. Each theme contains a discussion of how it links to the literature review and what was revealed by the interviews, including common trends and any dilemmas remaining. There will be some analysis and a chapter conclusion.

After completing the entire research process, there were four very dominant themes. These themes unsurprisingly were aligned with the themes that were highlighted by the literature review. The way in which the research framework was designed resulted in what the final themes were. These themes are linked together and they help to answer the research questions. Below is a discussion of the four themes that came out of the research process.

## 4.1 Theme 1: Factors that motivate individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations

Any attempt to answer the question of what the determinants of evaluation use are, requires an enquiry into what motivates people and organisations to do evaluations in the first place. In order for evaluations to be used, they have to be intentional and those that undertake them must be clear about their expectations. This is arguably the first step to ensuring use. While the literature review highlighted that both evaluators and commissioners have expectations when they undertake evaluations, it was important to explore whether this finding is true and what people expect from undertaking evaluations (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009).

The literature review highlighted that inherently evaluations are motivated by the possibility that the processes and evidence generated from them will be used. Evaluators who undertake evaluations expect to see their work featuring in policy, the design or implementation of programmes, or some form of change. Commissioners,

on the other hand, are often under pressure to account for funds used and to learn whether they are making the best use of resources (El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996).

This research study, through the interviews, set out to understand what commissioners and evaluators expect when they undertake evaluations. This question was important in order to understand what motivates individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations. The reason that this was deemed an important theme is because the research needed to verify whether it is true that people who undertake evaluations are motivated by some expectation that evaluations will lead to some form of change. If this was in fact true, then the research needed to explore what those expectations are and how the various expectations influence the extent to which evaluations are used. The interviews revealed some findings that were expected and some findings that were not expected. The discussion below contains findings of the interview process during an inquiry on what motivated evaluators and commissioners to undertake evaluations.

### 4.1.1 Evaluations as a learning tool

Seven out of the nine participants said that they undertake evaluations expecting to learn something and according to them, learning takes different forms. These respondents saw evaluations an opportunity to learn. They hold the view that both the process of undertaking an evaluation and the findings in the final report, present an opportunity for learning. They did not see evaluations as a compliance exercise but rather as a real learning opportunity. When asked to elaborate on this point, respondents said that they were interested in learning what models work to achieve education change, in what context and under what conditions. In one evaluation for example, the commissioner had a particular interest in learning whether the programmes that they were funding were resulting in improved marks in key subjects and which components of the programmes were yielding the best results. The success of this particular programme was measured according to the extent to which the programme was able to provide support to high school learners to improve their marks in gateway subjects such as mathematics and science and whether the learners then access university and whether it is in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) fields. The commissioner said that she wanted to learn if the programme was meeting its objectives. She remarked that if the evaluation could answer that question, then it would have met her expectations:

> "We wanted to know if learners are improving their marks in STEM subjects and by what percentage. So were we meeting our overall objective of increasing the number of learners who take up STEM fields at tertiary level or do they even go to tertiary?" (Respondent 5, Personal communication, December 6, 2019).

The evaluator in the same programme was interested in what makes students successful in their studies and whether those characteristics are inherent in individuals or if they can be built into the programmes. His expectation was that the evaluation would study students that were successful in mathematics and science, both in high school and in university and then understand what the common characteristics that the students possess are. He had a hunch that a student's motivation and attitude played a role in their success but needed to verify or dispel this by using research from an evaluation process:

> "I'm interested in the skills that students need to succeed in university and my hunch was that a lot of it has to do with attitude and motivation. If they like what they are doing, they know it, then they do well." (Respondent 7, personal communication, December 23, 2019).

In this particular programme that was designed to provide academic support to high school learners with the intention to improve their marks in gateway subjects and to improve their access in post school opportunities. At the end of this evaluation, both the commissioner and the evaluator had more information about what makes students successful in key subjects: what conditions must be in place, what components a successful project should have, and which activities were least effective. The evaluation brought new and useful information to light and verified or dispelled previously held positions.

Another key finding related to this was that the evaluator's expectation was different from that of the commissioner. The commissioner was interested in whether the initiatives that were being funded were making the best use of the funder's resources, whereas the evaluator was more interested in the programmatic element of what makes such programmes successful. This was an interesting finding because it revealed that the expectations of the stakeholders do at times differ depending on what their interests

are. This finding confirms what the literature suggested, which is that both the evaluators and the commissioners have different expectations when they undertake evaluations:

> "We learnt that the best gains were from the learners that were between 45% and 55%." (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

In another evaluation, the evaluators' and commissioners' starting point was that there is a challenge with children learning to read in South Africa but there isn't much evidence about what initiative or set of initiatives could assist, especially considering that reading skills is a highly strategic issue to address in the education sector. At the end of this evaluation too, the participants that were interviewed said they had a better idea about what works and what does not work in order to address the reading challenges in South African schools. In this evaluation, both the evaluator and the commissioner had the same goals from the evaluation. While the reason for this was not explored further during the interview process, the alignment in expectations could be because of the initial process during the evaluation planning. All the evaluations that were assessed confirmed that they went through a planning phase to make sure that all the stakeholders had a common understanding about the purpose of the evaluation as well as the process that would be followed. This too was a key finding because it showed that while the literature correctly states that the expectations can differ, the interviews revealed that the expectations could also be aligned if the initial engagements lead to a common understanding of the evaluation purpose:

> "We have a big challenge with reading in SA and there isn't much evidence. Reading is a strategic issue to get right in the sector. The motivation was having some evidence about what we could do and what it would cost in order to try and improve reading in the country." (Respondent 1, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

Others expect to learn more about the implementation and impact of their programmes with the view to influence programme implementation or future programme design, to share with other players in the sector, and to make informed choices. In the case where evaluations were of pilot programmes, the participants expected to test new models with the view to scale up:

> "We wanted to see the impact of the different interventions and then make choices based on the impact of each." (Respondent 1, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

These findings were particularly interesting and useful for this study because they not only collaborated the literature review findings that people who undertake evaluations do so with certain expectations but it revealed what those expectations were. A finding that people who undertake evaluations are expecting to learn is positive is because it speaks to people attitudes towards evaluation. In a world where evaluations can be done as a compliance exercise, it is encouraging to see that there are people who hold evaluations in high regard as an information source.

### *4.1.2 Undertaking evaluations with no predetermined expectations*

A different perspective that came out of the interview process is that while seven respondents had clear expectations, two of the respondents said that they never go into evaluations with a general expectation and that what they expect to get from an evaluation depends on the nature of the evaluation:

> "But I think as evaluators we're actually not hoping for any results. We're not hoping for anything to come out. But for the verifiable results to come out, you know, we, what we hope for is that we're able to give strong, recommendations that come from evidence." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

This participant, who is also an evaluator, made the point that expecting results can be a dangerous position and that ideally, evaluators should be concerned with producing quality evaluations that are well designed, respond to clients' information needs, come out with recommendations that can be used and have a strong evidence base. These, according to this evaluator, should be the priority of evaluators when undertaking evaluations and not to have predetermined expectations. What this respondent may have been implying is that if one comes into an evaluation with expectations, then they may be inclined to drive the evaluation in a particular direction and they may struggle to allow the evaluation process to unfold because of their own predisposition. This would in turn compromise the credibility of the evaluation process and may be potentially detrimental. This was a profound point because as was already highlighted

in the literature review, there are evaluator factors that can impact the extent to which an evaluation can be used. Evaluators must be seen by the evaluation stakeholders as independent and credible. Part of this campaign includes the ability to not explicitly or implicitly seem to have predetermined positions.

The sentiments of this respondent are those shared by almost all the evaluators. Evaluators expect that they will produce quality evaluations that have adequately responded to the information needs of the client. They expect that evaluation reports provide enough information such that the client is empowered to make informed choices. Evaluators, therefore, go through processes to ensure that they are clear about what the client wants and they design evaluations that respond to the evaluation questions. The initial stages of evaluations are useful for clarifying expectations from all stakeholders and for talking openly and honestly about what is possible and feasible, given each unique context.

Another evaluator that seemed to support this view remarked that it is difficult to have a general expectation because evaluations are different:

> "There is never a general expectation because evaluations are quite different. It depends on the evaluation." (Respondent 8, personal communication, January 8, 2020).

The point that was made by this particular evaluator was that evaluations are different as they are commissioned and designed for different purposes and to have a general expectation for all of them could be difficult. When an evaluation is designed to answer a particular question, then the expectation is that the evaluation will provide insights that will empower decision makers to take actions. When an evaluation is meant to verify a position that is known, then the expectation is that it will provide an independent report that confirms the views held by the stakeholders. Another evaluator remarked that they only expect to have policy influence if the nature of the organisation is such that they have the capacity to influence policy:

> "When you do an evaluation for government, there is a possibility that your evaluation could inform policy if it's a large programme." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

This is an important point because the nature of organisations is different. Not all organisations are large enough or influential enough to influence policy. Some organisations are just small NGOs that are addressing small-scale problems that are far from having any policy implications. Large government programmes, on the other hand, have the footprint, mandate and authority to influence policy. The point that these respondents were making was that the expectation is largely dependent on the nature and purpose of the evaluation and so where the purpose is to learn, the expectation is to learn.

### *4.1.3 Summary of theme 1*

This theme provided very useful insights that to a large degree confirmed what the literature suggested but also provided new and interesting insights based on the participants that were interviewed. Suffice to say that having an expectation for what value an evaluation should bring is an important step to achieving evaluation use

## 4.2 Theme 2: Definition of evaluation use

| **Direct link to the research questions** |
| --- |
| **What is the evaluation use?**<br>○ How do different individuals define use?<br>○ Is the understanding of evaluation use common or different across different stakeholders and what are the implications? |

This study is about evaluation use and without a definition of evaluation use, it would have been impossible to frame the study and create parameters and conclusions. A theme on the definition of evaluation use was therefore imperative. Based on the literature reviewed and the interviews conducted, it is evident that there are many ways to define use. The definition of evaluation use is highly debated and contested. Scholars are divided over what evaluation use is and how it is measured. Some define it as something that pertains to changes that emanates from the evaluation findings, while others define evaluation use as any change either directly or indirectly as a result of the evaluation (King & Alkin, 2019). In the interviews, another thing that became evident was that when respondents defined use, they tend to focus on different aspects depending on the organisations that they represent. This research study also explored what the different stakeholders understand by evaluation use and whether based on their understanding, they have seen any evidence of use in the evaluations previously

undertaken. The interviews were used to explore whether participants' understanding resonates with that defined in the literature review. The findings from these discussions follows:

When responding to the question that required participants to define use, many of the participants made reference to evaluation use as the application of results or findings from evaluations to make decisions. These participants saw a direct link between the findings and recommendations of an evaluation and decision making. (Kelly & Kelly, 2017, El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996, Sandison, 2007, King & Alkin, 2019, Alkin & King, 2017). The literature review also highlighted that theorists and people, in general, tend to use this narrow definition as the standard definition of use This narrow definition is also linked to instrumental use:

> "Evaluation use is improving decision making and answering questions like should we continue or discontinue doing something, should we reconsider the design etcetera." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5 2019).

Government respondents tended to have a big picture focus which links evaluation use to the extent to which evaluations can influence policy or the broader education sector. This is because of the nature of government. Not only does government have the authority to influence policies but it has a responsibility to change policies if there is evidence that programmes are not yielding the desired outcomes for learners and tax payers alike. Evaluators on the other hand tended to focus on evaluation with a bigger emphasis on the quality of the evaluation and how that serves as an enabler. Evaluators viewed use as something that they play a role in and they spoke to the importance of designing evaluations that were responsive to a client's needs while applying rigorous research methods to answer questions making sure to maintain an open line of communication with the stakeholders at all times.

> "Look, I think evaluation use for me, isn't a standard thing, it's about, were we able to provide the client with information that was useful to them and were they able to take that information, whatever it was, were they able to take it forward and use it in the way that they wanted." (Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

In the case of funders, the idea was that they would read an evaluation and then use the recommendations to influence future programming and/or to make decisions about where to allocate resources. Funders may choose to continue or discontinue programmes using evidence from evaluations. In the case of implementers, this type of use would be in cases where they read an evaluation and they are then motivated to do things differently or even to continue doing the things that they were doing. The bottom line is that findings from an evaluation highlight new information that is known or new, and then decisions are made:

> "The second perspective is that the evaluation is for a funder where funders read the evaluation and then they incorporate the suggestions that are made and then ask for those things to be in future evaluations that they fund." (Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

The interviews also revealed that, apart from defining evaluation use as the extent to which evaluation results are used to make decisions; evaluation use can also be defined as the extent to which evaluations are used as a reflection tool and as a communication tool. This use applies when evaluation results are positive and organisations use it to prove their credibility and to source new funding:

> "It can also be something as simple as using the evaluation as a communication tool. Often for smaller organisations when they have an evaluation with positive results, it can help them to be more credible or attract more funding. That's also a form of use." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Small organisations that depend on external funding to implement their programmes have to be responsive to demands from potential funders about their effectiveness. Evaluations can help these types of organisations with credible evidence from an independent entity. These types of organisations can use evaluations to not only to show that they are evidence-based but also to show that they are not afraid to put themselves under scrutiny in order to become more effective. Funders like to work with organisations that uphold processes such as regular monitoring and evaluation.

Another way that an evaluation can be used as a communication tool is when the commissioner disseminates the results more widely in order that other organisations

doing similar work can learn. If the results are applicable to other contexts then funders and implementers can use the evaluation evidence from other evaluations to influence their own programming:

> "Evaluation use for me would be a case where after the evaluation findings and after disseminating the evaluation for example, if we went to other donors and other NGOs and shared what we had learnt." (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Others defined evaluation use as the extent to which the process of being involved in an evaluation results in changes in thinking, actions, designs and implementation not just for the people involved in the evaluation but also for the sector. This is exactly how process use of evaluation use is defined. This level of understanding shows an advanced understanding of evaluation use that moves beyond findings use but incorporates process use:

> "Evaluation use the extent to which both the process of being involved in an evaluation and the result of the evaluation contribute to changed thinking, actions, programme designs, implementation throughout the sector." ( Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Other interview respondents defined evaluation use as changes to the way that people think. This definition implies that use is not just limited to changes in programmes. This distinction is important for the sake of seeing value in the work because sometimes recommendations are not implemented and so it's important to see other perspectives of use. Many respondents remarked that the narrow view of evaluation use as something that pertains only to the use of results is limiting, because it neglects the benefits that are derived from the process of undertaking an evaluation. This definition of evaluations is in line with the definition of process use of evaluations which was discussed in the literature review.

Other participants offered another perspective of looking at use which describes changes that go beyond the immediate sphere of influence. Evaluation use occurs when findings from one evaluation are influencing the design of new programmes. New programmes draw on evidence from other similar programmes in their sector in order

to see what has worked and what has not worked and apply those lessons to their own programmes:

> "Evaluation use can also go beyond the programme. When new programmes are designed it helps to look at what has worked in that area of programming and why. That's a broader type of use." (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

While many evaluations are done with the view to discover something new, some evaluations are done to affirm a position that the implementers have a strong hunch about. This type of use occurs when organisations are confident about the success of their programmes but still want an independent evaluation to verify whether their premonition is true. When evaluations are used in this way, organisations can then confidently continue with programmes knowing that they are on the right track:

> "Affirming something and continuing to do what you have always done is also evaluation use." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Seeing that respondents' defined use based on what they were responsible for in the evaluation process was positive and highlighted that, indeed, use is now embedded in evaluation practices and the way that people think about evaluations and their purpose. Other perspectives of use were dependent on the nature, mandate and size of the organisation. Smaller NGOs who depend on funding see evaluation use as the extent to which evaluations can be used as a tool to motivate for more funding and showcase successes and credibility. This was not surprising considering that fact that it is known that small NGOs have to be accountable to funders. Many use evaluations as a credible source of evidence from an independent party. It is also viewed by the funding organisations as good practice for smaller NGOs to apply evaluative thinking to their practices. Unfortunately not all NGOs have the financial and human capacity to understand what, at times, tends to be a costly and technical exercise. Where possible, however, evaluations have been a useful tool. Organisations that control funding see evaluation use as a tool to make decisions on what to prioritise and fund, using evidence from evaluations. The reality is that resources are scarce and funders are accountable to their boards too. This means that funders always have to provide

evidence that they are prioritising the correct initiatives and that funds are being used in the most efficient way. Evaluations are one way in which funders can ascertain this.

## 4.3 Theme 3: Types of evaluation use

| Direct link to the research questions |
| --- |
| **What are the different types of evaluation use?**<br>○ Which types of evaluation use are the most and least popular, based on the evaluations that have been assessed and the respondents that have been interviewed?<br>○ What makes this type of use popular?<br>○ Does the type of evaluation use differ depending on the type of organisation, the evaluator or type of evaluation? |

After attempting to define evaluation use, it became clear that evaluation use can be better explained by means of the different types of evaluation use. The next theme that came out of this research process was the different types of evaluation use. According to the literature review, there are five types of evaluation use, namely, instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, enlightenment and process use (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Based on these different types of use, it became evident that assessing use requires a lot of critical reflection because of its broad nature. The literature associated instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic use with that of results-based use, while process and enlightenment use are associated with process use (Acree & Chouinard, 2019). Categorising use according to the different types was important because most of the literature on the use of evaluation and in fact most people who define use, tend to focus on usage once the evaluations have been completed, yet literature also demonstrates that use can be derived throughout the evaluation process (Genesis Analytics, 2017). Understanding stakeholders understanding of use was key to this study. The respondents were asked questions relating to the different types of use so as to get a sense of what the common types of use are and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process.

### 4.3.1 Evidence of the instrumental evaluation use

In order to understand whether the evaluations that respondents were involved in resulted in instrumental evaluation use, all respondents were asked whether there were any changes to the programmes that they were evaluating as a result of the findings from the evaluation. The question was framed like this so that respondents could critically reflect on what transpired in their evaluations without being led to a particular answer. Six of out of the nine respondents reported that there were changes made to their programmes and these changes were made as a result of findings and recommendations from the evaluations. Those who responded yes to this question were then asked to give examples.

The respondents who attributed decisions that were made to the outcomes of the evaluations mentioned that some programmes saw changes in financial decisions, including allocation of additional budgets, the continuation of funding or the choice to discontinue funding:

> "We were very concerned about whether the funding should continue. So the fact that the funding has continued is definitely something that has come out of the evaluation. And so I think it was a very well used evaluation to inform the decisions going forward as to funding the programme whether they shut down the funding all of that, it definitely changes from the evaluation." ( Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Other changes were related to staff allocation where there was a programme that had additional staff approved as a result of a finding that the programme needed to recruit additional staff:

> "It also actually part of the recommendations and something that was approved was getting staff, additional staff that will grant funds." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

There were also changes made to the way in which programmes were implemented, including frequency of activities such as training, content, dosages, the way in which certain programmes were delivered as well as tailoring the same programme for different contexts, as was the case in two of the evaluations:

> "Yes, so there were changes around recruitment as well is contracting so the contract duration between finishing the qualification and getting placed was changed." (Respondent 2, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

The examples cited above are evidence that if evaluations are conducted and they produce relevant information in a context where there is a willingness to change, then they can influence decision making. The first step therefore of the process is a credible evaluation, followed by the willingness and ability to make changes. Making changes to the way programmes are run can make programmes more effective and ensure that there is a better use of organisational resources.

In the evaluations where the respondents reported there were no changes to the programmes, the reasons included timing, that is, the results and evidence from the evaluation came at a time where there was no opportunity to make any changes to the programme. In one of the evaluations, the question of changes to the programme does not apply because the unit of analysis was not a programme. In this case, the respondents remarked that while there were no changes to the programme, there was still evidence that the evaluation is influencing the sector:

> "Not with this evaluation. It was a one- year project that continued for three years but we never had an opportunity to change things. The timing did not allow for changes to be implemented. There was no opportunity because reports were not coming out in time, timing of the study of the evaluation." (Respondent 5, Personal communication, December 6, 2019).

This is also an important finding with regard to factors that influence evaluation use. The point highlighted above is that, even with the best evaluations and the best intentions, if an evaluation is not delivered on time, then it becomes a wasted exercise. This is a useful insight for those that undertake evaluations. Without a clear plan about how and when evaluation results are intended to be used, there could be a missed opportunity.

The evidence of instrumental use of evaluations shows that evaluations are taken seriously and that evidence from evaluations is changing the way that organisations design and implement their programmes. This was an encouraging finding, but it highlights that for there to be instrumental use a programme must exist, there must be

scope for changes to be made and the evaluation commissioners must be willing to make changes based on the findings from the evaluation.

### 4.3.2 Evidence of the conceptual and enlightenment evaluation use

The research study then explored whether participants had observed any changes in people's knowledge and understanding of the programmes in which they were involved in. These questions intended to explore whether there was any evidence of conceptual and enlightenment use which was defined in the literature review.

The participants were asked whether people's knowledge or understanding of the programmes that they were part of evaluating changed as a result of participating in the evaluation. All the respondents said yes. Respondents were then asked to give examples from the evaluations that they were involved in. In an evaluation that involved government stakeholders, one evaluator remarked that he thought that the knowledge of government stakeholders grew immensely. According to this respondent, the government officials displayed a deep understanding and a sophisticated grasp of the issues surrounding the programme being evaluated. The respondent reflected that when he compared their level of knowledge when they started the evaluation process to what they know now, enormous growth was seen. This improvement in growth has benefited the individuals and the next step of the process would be for these government officials to use this knowledge to influence other levels of government, particularly the provinces because it is the provinces that will need to use the information.

All respondents remarked that participating in the feedback workshops and the workshops to develop a theory of change was helpful. The theory of change workshops involved multiple stakeholders and helped people to understand the rationale behind their programmes, how they were designed to be implemented and what success would look like. The people who had a narrow view of the programmes they were implementing got an opportunity to interact with other partners and this helped to get a more holistic picture of how the different parts fit together:

> "Yeah, and the theory of change workshop was a big thing. There were 70 to 80 stakeholders and it was a really big workshop. It was a two day workshop where we had all stakeholders from the financial capacity team, university

> administrators, the various departments that are involved in programme, financial officers and so on. So I feel like everyone really walked away with a better understanding of the programme." (Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

People's knowledge of the significance and importance of evaluation changed. Almost all of the evaluations included an activity to take stakeholders through what the evaluation was about and why it was important.

There were also notable gains in people's knowledge of the sector which was seen through a greater awareness of education challenges by the stakeholders, research that is being prioritised by academics, interventions being designed and funded and even issues that feature in speeches by the President:

> "Yes, in the sector as a whole, there's a lot more awareness of the challenges around reading in the country and this evaluation was a huge part of that. There have been other interventions too and other research showing the problem like 2016 and 2011 PIRLS." (Respondent 1, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

and:

> "A hundred per cent agree. For us and for the implementers. The implementers have lots of blind spots and the evaluation helps them to gather more information that they would not otherwise know." (Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

The above cited examples present important findings because they show that it is possible to design evaluations where learning can take place. Implementing activities such as workshops is clearly beneficial and it is an easy way to not only get buy-in from stakeholders but also to foster learning. These findings also show that learning and the transfer of knowledge can happen both organically and by design.

### *4.3.3 Evidence of process use of evaluations*

In order to ascertain whether there was any evidence of process use, participants were asked what, in their view, were the benefits, if any, of participating in the evaluation process. In the literature review section, process use is defined as use where

participants of an evaluation benefit from an evaluation by merely taking part in the process. Process use was introduced by Patton in his work on Utilization-Focused Evaluation (1997).

The biggest benefit cited was that there was knowledge transfer. In the evaluations that involved multiple stakeholders, there was evidence of a transfer of knowledge. People were able to not only share insights but to also learn from others:

> "There was definitely knowledge transfer. This was expected because the evaluation involved so many different stakeholders." (Respondent 9, personal communication, January 10, 2020).

When the participants reflected on how people benefited, they noted that the process of having multiple stakeholders participating in an evaluation created fertile ground for there to be cross-learning and a transfer of knowledge. The people who participated in the evaluation process brought with them their own knowledge and experiences and were able to share this with everyone involved. At the end of the evaluation process, people not only had an appreciation for their own programmes but were able to learn from what others do. The transfer of knowledge not only helped people to understand the broader context better but it helped people to think about ways in which they could do things differently in order to improve what they were doing.

This was an important finding because it confirms the idea that evaluations are categorised according to findings and process use and this is one such example where, even in the absence of the use of findings, the participants of one evaluation derived benefits of knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer should not be taken lightly because it is this improved knowledge that can lead people to changing their behaviours and doing things better in order to improve their programmes. Knowledge transfer that occurs during the evaluation process can also result in changes in behaviour even before an evaluation is completed and so the benefits of participating in an evaluation can occur even prior to the completion of an evaluation report.

This finding of the benefit of knowledge transfer is linked to another benefit that was noted, which is building partnerships. Participating in the evaluation process helped people to build broader networks and stronger partnerships. This cross-sectoral engagement was helpful to those involved. The benefit of building stronger

partnerships is that the organisations involved can collaborate on similar interests, they can leverage on each other's resources in order to be more impactful and they can be aware of what others are doing in order to avoid duplications. Participants reported that taking part in the evaluation processes helped collaborate with like-minded organisations and they were able to influence each other on projects. Government and NGOs for example, saw that academics and researchers were prioritising research in areas that were being discussed on their platforms, while researchers were seeing that government and NGOs were using evidence form research to design and implement projects. This mutually beneficial relationship is an encouraging example of how powerful evaluation processes can be and the benefits that can be derived from them. This is important because it demonstrates how limiting a narrow understanding of evaluation use can be, and how, if one does not look at the evaluation process, one can neglect such profound benefits:

> "One of the good secondary benefits was partnerships and the network of the different organisations. There was a lot of value in bringing together government, academics, NGOs and service providers. There were a lot of learning's and network strengthening of the provinces, other academics in the sector, the big literacy NGOs, that we are doing work." (Respondent 1, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

The last benefit cited was exposure to new job prospects. There were several cases where people used the experience, exposure, networks and knowledge gained from participating in an evaluation to access other career opportunities. People moved from small NGOs to large corporates, some even started their own ventures and others got senior positions either in their organisations or other organisations.

This finding was interesting because an improvement of job prospects for the individual who has gained experience, means a loss for the programme. Nonetheless, there was evidence that as people were learning more and gaining exposure and knowledge, they were exposed to new job opportunities and growing in the careers. Taking part in an evaluation was exposing participants to the field of M&E and to the field that the evaluation was on. People could therefore pursue a path in M&E or a path to specialise in an area in education:

> "Afterwards after maybe a year or two of someone who participated in the evaluation went on to join a university to lecture, and she, she called at the time that she was leaving and she said, being in this evaluation was eye opening for her had helped her develop an interest in M&E, and in that we steered her towards a different career path than what she was doing here, which I thought was insightful and interesting and unintended benefit." ( Respondent 1, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

### *4.3.4 Evidence of symbolic use of evaluations*

Symbolic, persuasive or legitimising use is when evaluations are used to justify a position that has already been taken. In this case, an evaluation legitimises, substantiates or corroborates a decision or position that the organisation already holds by providing an independent and objective reference that may be used to communicate or justify subsequent actions (Fleischer & Christie, 2009, Peck & Gorzalski, 2009, & Sandison, 2007). From the interviews that were conducted, none of the evaluations were conducted with the purpose to confirm an already known fact. All the evaluations had unanswered questions and were conducted with the view to discover something new. This was a positive finding and shows an advanced understanding of the purpose of evaluations.

**Summary of theme 2**

Based on the findings on the different types of use, it is evident that there were examples of every type of evaluation except for symbolic use. Another point that came out strongly is that the type of evaluation use can occur by design (mostly instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use) or it can occur organically (mostly process and enlightenment).

## 4.4 Theme 4: Determinants of evaluation use

| Direct link to the research questions |
| --- |
| **What are the key determinants of evaluation use in the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services?**<br>o What factors make it difficult or easy to use evaluations?<br>o Is evaluation use a product/function of the organisation or the evaluation? |

This study was primarily about exploring the determinants of evaluation use from the perspectives of the people who had been involved in evaluations. It was therefore important to find out who in the participants' view was responsible for ensuring use and what the role of the different stakeholders' are to ensure use. The literature review had already highlighted the factors that influence evaluation use can be broadly categorised into two groups, that is, characteristics related to the actual evaluation, and characteristics that are related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used. We also learnt from the literature that factors that influence evaluation use can be classified according to user, evaluator, evaluation and organisational factors. It was, therefore, important to find out whether the classification of evaluator and organisational characteristics resonated with the participants (Bayley, 2008).

All of the respondents agreed that while there may be multiple stakeholders in an evaluation, the responsibility to ensure use lies heavily with the commissioner and the evaluators. Other stakeholders who are involved in the evaluation also have a responsibility to disseminate learning's within their various spheres of influence. An example is that academics would be responsible for sharing new knowledge gained from participating in the evaluation with other academics. Below are some of the roles that the commissioner can play in ensuring that evaluations are used.

### *4.4.1 The role of evaluation commissioners in influencing evaluation use*

According to many of the respondents, the evaluation commissioners are responsible for developing clear terms of reference with a clear purpose and evaluation questions. This can be refined with the evaluator during the inceptions phase. This is said to be the most important task and likely the first step to ensuring that evaluations produce relevant information and that they are ultimately used. The process of developing a clear terms of reference and evaluation purpose is a technical one and in some cases,

the evaluation commissioner many require support from an external party in order to undertake this task. In the categorisation mentioned above, this speaks to the organisational setting because it has to do with the conditions in the organisation in which the evaluation is being conducted:

> "For commissioners, the main onus for developing the TORs should be on them unless they are willing to pay the service provider to do this if you do not have the expertise in house." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Another factor that increases the likelihood of use is that the evaluation commissioners should ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved. These include internal senior management team who makes decisions, programme participants and other key players. The commissioner is of evaluation has a convening role. They have the authority and responsibility to ensure that all the stakeholders who need to be involved are involved. The evaluation manager responsible is the contact person between the evaluators, internal senior managers, programme implementers, beneficiaries and any other stakeholder that may be involved, According to the findings of the interviews, they should drive the communication and make the initial introductions in order for evaluators to access the other stakeholders in the case of interviews:

> "The organisations should be the link between different stakeholders, be accessible and give letters before fieldwork, pave the way with gate keepers and assist the evaluation team to access to data." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Participants who are commissioners of evaluation also reported that they believe that they should lead communication and wider dissemination of results. When asked the question of who is responsible for sharing evaluation findings, all commissioner participants said it was their role. They believed that the products that emanate from evaluations are the intellectual property of the commission organisation who then leads how the findings get actioned and how they get disseminated. There were cases where the evaluator could disseminate the evaluation widely but in most cases, the view was that, they would need to request permission to do so. Such cases included additional products such as journal articles, presentation in conferences and other public products. While there were no reported cases where the evaluator was denied

permission to use evaluation results, they were required to make the commissioning originations aware:

> "It is the commissioner. Particularly dissemination and tracking. It's me who has to say to the evaluator, let move forward this way. The evaluator is responsible for conducting good quality research bit it is the responsibility of the commissioner to take the findings forward. The information belongs to us." (Respondent 5, personal communication, December 6, 2019).

### 4.4.2 The role of evaluators in influencing evaluation use

The participants were also asked to reflect on what they believed were the role of the evaluator in ensuring evaluation use and below are some of the findings from those discussions.

All the evaluators agreed that in order for evaluations to be used, they have a responsibility to design and conduct good quality research that respondents to the needs of the commissioning department and be honest about what is realistic. The main idea is that an evaluation should produce information that is relevant to the client while being grounded in sound research methodology. The evaluator must also bring in their technical expertise and be honest with the client about what is realistic given the evaluation purpose, available data and budget:

> "The evaluator is responsible for having an ongoing relationship with the client and understanding their needs. Thinking through what would be best for this situation. Letting the client know what is possible and what is not possible, for examples, the type of evaluation that can be done. Solutions can be found when working together." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Another finding is that the evaluator must maintain an ongoing relationship with the client and other stakeholders. The evaluation process is one that must be seen by the stakeholders as credible and people who are not involved in the research processes must be taken through how the evaluator has arrived at certain conclusions and what is the justification for choices made during the evaluation process. Evaluators should also be responsive at all times making sure to take the client and stakeholders along the journey. The last and most important findings was that evaluators must present

findings in an accessible way and in time for results to be used. This was important because it highlights the fact that good reports are pointless if they are not produced on time:

> "The evaluator must be open and responsive to feedback, presenting results in a digestible way, use appropriate language, data and presentations. If there are critical times for information is needed that it is available." ( Respondent 4, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

### 4.4.3 Strategies for ensuring evaluation use

After asking the respondents about who was responsible for use, they were asked what systems or processes they have in place to ensure use. Many of the participants reported they include several activities in the initial phase of the evaluation to understand the context and to get everybody on board. These include workshops such as the theory of change workshops, interviews with various stakeholders to understand the programmes better and the literature review. Below are some of the responses:

> "We start by understanding the context of the organisation and the programme, doing exploratory interviews and a literature review as well. We workshop findings and we get a lot out of these sessions." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Evaluation teams also include subject matter experts as part of the evaluation team. There seemed to be an acknowledgement that education sector evaluations require a combination of evaluation expertise and subject matter expertise. While evaluators are able to do an acceptable job on their own, involving a subject matter expert is helpful for understanding the context. In all the evaluations that we reviewed, teams comprised of a combination of these skills:

> "We ensure that there are education experts in the team. We had a literacy and language specialists at (organisation X) that we can draw." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Another strategy that is employed by evaluators is that evaluators also maintain regular feedback with the client to report on progress, highlight pressure points and to request comments on key deliverables such as the evaluation approach, the instruments and the various reports. This is vital because all stakeholders must buy into the process.

The client must be comfortable that the evaluators are asking the right questions and that they are producing relevant information even before the final report is out. This regular feedback loop avoids situations where both the client and the evaluator get to the end of the evaluation and they realise that there was a misalignment between what the client asked for and what the evaluator has produced. Over and above this regular feedback, evaluators must produce different types of reports that are tailored to different audiences. There are several reports prior to the final report and the final report may have other smaller reports of infographics. The type of reports that are required and the format that they must be in has to be negotiated during the course of the evaluation. Failure to this may result in the correct information being packaged in the incorrect format:

> "It's important to communicate at critical junctures and raise issues as they arise. Client should always be in the loop." (Respondent 3, personal communication, December 5, 2019).

Commissioners reported that they understand that evaluations can be intimidating and that they do a lot of advocacy work around the value and importance of evaluations. This is not surprising. Evaluations are a judgement and it is uncomfortable to be judged. This makes the advocacy task critically important because it gives stakeholders an opportunity to understand the value of evaluations. Evaluations are not only a tool to critique but they present an opportunity to learn and to understand where improvements can be made. Without this reflection process, programme stakeholders could miss an opportunity to be more effective and to spend resources more efficiently. Without evaluations, people also miss an opportunity to derive benefits by merely participating in an evaluation process:

> "So, I mean we make made a big effort to have advocacy and communication. So changing people's perception of evaluations as a bad thing, but as an enabling thing. Evaluation is something that people should be proud of regardless of what the findings." (Respondent 2, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

The evaluation managers within the commissioning organisation also take on the responsibility of involving their senior managers either from the beginning of the evaluation or at key points during the evaluation process. While the senior managers

do not need to form part of steering committees or know every detail of the evaluation, they do need to be aware of certain important things. Senior managers must be aware of and in most cases approve the undertaking of an evaluation. They then need to be made aware of interim findings and anything that is unfolding from the evaluation process and most importantly, they need to be made aware of the final results and their implications:

> "In (Organisation Y), we do present evaluation reports to our board. That's a good platform because of the feedback that we use." (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

Commissioners also reported that they have a dedicated unit that is responsible for disseminating the evaluation widely once it is completed. The tasks of writing an evaluation report and disseminating broadly requires two different sets of skills. The team responsible for disseminating takes the responsibility of identifying dissemination platforms, crafting massages and tailoring products for each:

> "Yes, the involvement of the communication team who looks for opportunities to dissemination. We have a special unit internally that looks at ways to share findings widely." (Respondent 6, personal communication, December 9, 2019).

The last strategy that is employed by the commissioner to ensure use is the development and regular monitoring of a follow-up plan. In order for evaluations to be used, it is important that a formal deliberate effort is made about how the report will be taken forward.

### Summary of Findings the Quality assessment of evaluation reports

Reports were used primarily as a means to prepare for the interviews, to verify information and triangulate data with other information sources. The findings from the assessment of evaluation reports were that they were all of a good quality. All of them have a sound methodology, they involved all primary stakeholders and in some cases even more stakeholder groups. The reports were easy to read as they were written in an accessible way and they all had different products, including summaries, infographics and longer reports.

# 5. CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people that have been involved either in undertaking evaluations or those who have managed or commissioned evaluation projects. In order to answer this research question, this study looked at a number of evaluations conducted by three organisations, that is, Department of Basic Education, the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services. The study sampled and reviewed completed evaluation reports and then used this information as the basis for the interviews with participants. The purpose of the interviews was to understand what the participants understand by evaluation use and its determinants; what they believe is their responsibility towards ensuring use as well as what processes they have put in place to ensure evaluation use.

This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on evaluation use and its key determinants, a discussion on connections to this study and evaluation use theories as discussed in the literature review, and lastly the chapter concludes with proposed areas for future research, and a summary.

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions, "***What are the determinants of evaluation use in the basic education sector in South Africa?"*** The sub-questions include:

- What is evaluation use?
    - How do different individuals define use?
    - Is the understanding of evaluation use common or different across different stakeholders and what are the implications?
- Which types of evaluation use are the most and least popular based on the evaluations that have been assessed and the respondents that have been interviewed?
    - What makes this type of use popular?
    - Does the type of evaluation use differ depending on the type of organisation, the evaluator or type of evaluation?

- What are the key determinants of evaluation use in the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services?
    - What factors make it difficult or easy to use evaluations?
    - Is evaluation use a product/function of the organisation or the evaluation?

The analysis chapter detailed the findings that were drawn heavily from the interviews, with triangulation with other data sources including the sampled evaluation reports, the literature review and observations made during the data collection process. The analysis chapter introduced the themes that came out of the research process. This chapter begins with a recap of the themes that were introduced in chapter 4 and the evaluation questions that each theme responded to. It then proceeds with a more detailed discussion on the findings of each theme as well as their implications. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations.

## 5.1 Recapping the themes discussed in chapter four

After undertaking the entire research process, it became clear that the themes that were coming out of the interviews were aligned to the themes that were identified in the literature review. This came as no surprise because the study and the research questions were designed to explore the themes that were coming out of the literature. In the end, there were four themes, namely: (a) factors that motivate individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations, (b) definition of evaluation use, (c), types of evaluation use, and (d) determinants of evaluation use.

### Theme 1: Factors that motivate individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations

This research was interested in exploring the determinants of evaluation use based on the perspectives of individuals from organisations that had undertaken evaluations. It was, therefore fitting to explore some of the factors that motivate individuals and organisations to undertake evaluations. This formed part of the interview questions because the literature review had highlighted that those who undertake evaluations have certain expectations.

The literature review highlighted that inherently evaluations are motivated by the possibility that the processes and evidence generated from them will be used.

Evaluators who undertake evaluations expect to see their work featured in policy, the design or implementation of programmes or some form of change. Commissioners, on the other hand, are often under pressure to account for funds used and to learn whether they are making the best use of resources (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009). In reality, this expectation is not always met (El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996). Evaluations are still judged based on the benefits that they produce for their users and that makes evaluation use an important topic (Genesis Analytics, 2017).

The findings from the interview process confirmed that both evaluators and commissioners undertake evaluations with certain expectations. The majority (seven out of nine) of respondents undertook evaluations intending to learn. People who undertake evaluations see them as a learning opportunity where they can derive useful information about the effectiveness and efficiency of their programmes, key success factors and the best alternatives given the resources that they have. Indeed, there was evidence from the respondents that evaluations had played a key role in helping them to learn and understand what works, what does not work and under what conditions. Respondents also highlighted that the process of taking part in an evaluation and the findings, both offered opportunities to learn. When reflecting on the entire research process, the fact that the literature review and the findings from the interviews highlight the importance of both the process and the outcomes of an evaluation is an important finding. This is helpful for practitioners when thinking evaluation use because it takes us away from the narrow understanding if use as it pertains to the use of findings. Respondents also disproved the conception that evaluations are done as a compliance exercise, all the people who took part in this study are from organisations that understand the value of evaluations and see them as a real learning opportunity. This research study focused on the education sector and the respondents seemed to care about the state of education and were genuinely interested in using evaluation evidence to find solutions to education challenges and understand how change takes place in the contexts that they work in. Although most respondents reported that they expected to learn from evaluations, it was interesting to note that the expectations of the evaluators differed from those of the commissioners. The commissioner tended to be concerned about value for money and whether or not the programmes funded offered the best value for money, whereas the evaluators were more interested in the programmatic element of what makes such programmes successful. This was another

important finding that when exploring what motivates stakeholders to undertake evaluations, it is important also to understand from whos perspective.

The second finding relating to this theme was that other people do not go into evaluations with expectations but their expectations are based on the nature of the evaluation. The reasons cited for these findings were that the nature of evaluations differs. Evaluations are designed for different purposes and to have generic expectations could be detrimental to the evaluation process. The advice that most evaluators gave was that the preoccupation should be with designing and implementing a quality evaluation and not to have preconceived expectations. Going into an evaluation without preconceived ideas or expectations also enhances the credibility of evaluations. The process has to unfold organically without any biases. Understanding this is important for both the evaluators and the commissioners because evaluations must be completely independent in order to be credible. Evaluators, therefore, have a role to play to understand the clients needs and the best approach to deliver on that mandate and to be honest with the client about what is possible given the purpose of the evaluation as well as the available resources.

The last insight from the interviews was that people expect that evaluations to help them to generate credible and independent evidence that can be used. This insight applied mostly to those organisations that have pressure to prove their credibility to external stakeholders. Such organisations include NGOs that depend on funders or even government who are accountable to taxpayers.

The three perspectives confirmed that people and organisations, particularly the ones that were interviewed, undertake evaluations and expect to see them being used. It also confirmed that evaluations are seen as a tool for learning new things, and sometimes relearning or validating things that are already known. It was positive to see that the majority of respondents expect to learn from evaluations. The respondents who reported that their expectations depend on the nature of the evaluation displayed an advanced understanding of evaluations and much can be learnt from their approach to evaluations. If more people approach evaluations in this way, then, evaluators and commissioners could avoid being disappointed when evaluators are not used in the way in which they expect. The final perspective of expecting evaluations to provide credible evidence shows that evaluations are regarded highly as an evidence source.

This is an important insight when thinking about determinants of use because the fact that people are intentional about evaluations and they view evaluations as an important information source means that there is a higher likelihood for use. The organisations that were sampled were in education and there is some indication that amongst the organisations that were sampled, evaluations are taken seriously.

There is a strong sense that evaluations are seen as a tool for learning about what works in educational interventions. In the sampled organisations, people expect to apply lessons from one evaluation to other programmes and for the benefit of the sector. There is also a strong sense that the sampled organisations want to learn about the implementation and the impact of their programmes. The concern with implementation is an indication that people want to be sure that they are doing the right things and addressing the correct problems while making the best use of both human and financial resources. The concern with impact shows that the organisations want their beneficiaries to derive value from their interventions and for their contributions to have long-term effects on society. An interesting perspective is that of going into evaluations without any expectation. The idea is that going into an evaluation without expectations can improve objectivity. It allows the process to unfold organically. The key thing is to focus on a quality product.

### Theme 2: Definition of use

The second theme that the research was interested in exploring was the definition of use. The main research question linked to defining evaluation use was intended to answer what is the evaluation use, how different individuals define use, and whether the understanding of evaluation use is common or different across different stakeholders. This question was prompted by findings from the literature reviewed which highlighted that there are many ways to define use because evaluation scholars are divided over what evaluation use is exactly.

The findings from the literature highlighted that evaluation use is best defined by commenting on the components of what counts as use instead of offering a precise definition. Some define use as the extent to which evaluation processes, products, or findings of evaluations are incorporated into decisions about programmes (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). Others see evaluation as a direct application of evaluation findings to change how a programme is implemented or the viewpoints within an organisation

(El-Husseiny & Earl, 1996). For others, such as King & Alkin (2019) evaluation use is where evaluation contributes to stakeholders' learning. Evaluation use is therefore defined with particular reference to the process or the findings of evaluations, who uses evaluations and how.

The findings from the interviews, just as with the literature review, is that many respondents defined evaluation use as the way in which findings and recommendations from an evaluation result in changes and decision making. It was not surprising to hear this definition featuring prominently. Participants cited many examples where the results from evaluations prompted changes in resources allocation, recruitment procedures and even programme implementation. This means that the definition of evaluation use stems from the participant's personal experiences. All of the participants, at some point in their evaluation experience, had witnessed changes to programmes or organisational processes that could be directly attributed to findings or recommendation from evaluations. Evidence from the literature suggested that evaluators aspire to see the findings from their evaluations resulting in changes and decision making.

Another perspective that was offered was that evaluation use is when evaluations are used as a communication tool and disseminated widely. Evaluations that produce positive results help organisations to appear more credible. This improved image helps some organisations to sources more funding, others to build new partnerships, and for others to be viewed as an authority in a particular area of specialisation. According to this definition, evaluation use is when the findings from evaluations are so positive that they influence the way a programme or an organisation is perceived. The credibility of programmes is enhanced and that results in more funding or other non-monetary benefits such as improved status and recognition. This was profound and formed part of the list of findings that were unexpected but useful.

The last perspective is that evaluation use is when an evaluation affirms an already existing position. There are cases where stakeholders involved in implementing programmes experience or observe success and then undertake an evaluation to confirm if the observed successes or even failures are true or merely perceived. While there were no cases where the participants had undertaken these types of evaluation, it is another way to view use.

These different definitions merely confirm the fact that there is more than one way of looking at evaluation use. The five types of uses are reflected in all the definitions held by the respondents. While some respondents only had a narrow view, many showed that they understand that evaluation use includes more than just the application of evaluation results. The first view which links evaluation use to decision making shows an understanding of instrumental use. In the end, it is clear that while people may not have cited the technical terms of how use is defined in the literature, there is a sophisticated understanding of what use is. The findings reveal that people have a fair understanding of what evaluation use is. When asked where this understanding comes from, many reported that it was from their experience and exposure to evaluations as well as formal training that they had undergone

**Theme 3: Types of evaluation use**

The literature review identified five common types of evaluation use. The most common categories of use are instrumental, conceptual, and persuasive or symbolic use (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009). As the field of M&E grew, the other two which are enlightenment and process also became commonly referred to (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Appreciating stakeholders' understanding of the different types of use was key to this study because it is linked to the determinants of evaluation use. Understanding the different types of use is useful when thinking about determinants because if people are clear about what type of use they hope to achieve, then they would focus on the correct determinants. In the interviews, the respondents were asked questions relating to the different types of use to get a sense of what the common types of use are, and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process. The research question explored which types of evaluation use are the most and least popular. This was based on the evaluations that had been assessed and the respondents that had been interviewed. It was important to understand what makes certain types of use popular.

The research from the interviews found that most of the respondents reported that there was instrumental use in the programmes that they were involved in evaluating. Instrumental use came in the form of evidence of changes that were made through the findings of the evaluations. People cited examples such as securing additional financial and human resources and changes made in the way that programmes were designed or

implemented. Where there was no instrumental use, it was because the timing was not aligned or there was no programme at that time.

Participants also noted that there was evidence of conceptual and enlightenment use of evaluations that they were involved in. People had achieved gains in knowledge and better understood the programmes that they were evaluating. Activities such as clarification workshops, the theory of change workshops, and feedback sessions, helped people to achieve these types of evaluation use. Process use which implies benefits from participating in the evaluation was also a key type of use. People gave examples such as the benefits from knowledge transfer, exposure to new career opportunities and building new networks and strengthening partnerships. This is probably the one type of use that can occur organically as it is difficult to plan for. During the interviews, there was no evidence of symbolic use from the participants that were interviewed.

Based on the different types of use it is clear that the types of uses that were most prevalent were the instrumental, process and conceptual use. In almost all cases, the evaluation processes and activities were planned in such a way that there could be some use derived from the evaluations. There were no cases where the learning or the use of results happened organically but in all the cases, the teams cited examples of activities that led to the use.

### Theme 4: Determinants of evaluation use

The last theme and arguably the most important was the one on the determinants of evaluation use. The findings regarding this theme confirmed that categorising the determinants of evaluation use according to the roles of the different stakeholders is a useful framing. Many of the respondents said that while there may be multiple stakeholders in an evaluation, the responsibility to ensure use lies mostly with the commissioners and the evaluators. Each of these key stakeholders has specific responsibilities that create a conducive environment for evaluations to be used. Commissioners, for example, need to develop clear terms of reference and they need to lead the communication between the various stakeholders. Evaluators, on the other hand, carry the responsibility of ensuring that the research is of good quality and that responds to the information needs of the client organisation.

Both the evaluator and the commissioner have a role to play at critical points during the evaluation. In the beginning, the commissioner is responsible for clearly articulating the purpose of the evaluation and the questions that need to be answered. The evaluator must then respond to this by designing an evaluation that responds to the commissioner's needs while being honest about what is feasible and possible given factors such as resources, data, and context. This process is best done collaboratively with each party bringing their expertise and unique set of skills to the table. Concerning stakeholder involvement, commissioners must identify, nominate, and be the link between all the stakeholders. The evaluators are then responsible for providing regular feedback and communication with the stakeholders at key points during the evaluation. Once the evaluation has been completed, commissioners must take the lead in communicating the results and making sure that the findings are acted upon. For this process to be effective, the evaluator would need to produce reports that are accessible and tailored for various audiences.

Indeed, the factors that influence evaluation use can be broadly categorised into two groups:

1. characteristics related to the actual evaluation, that is, how the evaluation is conducted; and
2. characteristics that are related to the organisational setting where findings are expected to be used, that is, factors within the organisation in which the evaluation is conducted.

Both the literature and the interviews confirmed that the factors that relate to the characteristics of the evaluation include: the relevance of the evaluation approach and the extent to which it responds to the evaluation purpose, the credibility of the research findings and the soundness of the evaluation approach, the quality of the findings, evaluator’s communication practices and, the timeliness of reporting.

The characteristics related to the organisational setting include the commitment to the evaluation process, alignment of the evaluation to the information needs of the organisation, the extent to which competing information sources are managed, personal characteristics, decision making, and both the political and financial climate.

Some of these can be achieved through activities such as the theory of change workshops, interviews with various stakeholders to understand the programmes better, the inclusion of subject matter experts as part of the evaluation team, regular feedback on the progress of the evaluation process, highlighting pressure points and requesting comments on key deliverables, and evaluators also produce different types of reports that are tailored to different audiences.

Other suggestions are, commissioners doing advocacy work about the value and importance of evaluations. The evaluation managers can take on the responsibility of involving their senior managers either from the beginning of the evaluation or at key points during the evaluation process. Commissioners can develop and monitor a follow-up plan.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Chapter two discussed several frameworks for thinking about the determinants of evaluations use. These models included;

1. The user-focused evaluation approach by Cousins and Leithwood. The key determinants of evaluation use according to the user-focused evaluation approaches included the application of a methodology that programme stakeholders perceive as comprehensive and findings that resonate with previously held views and expectations of the stakeholders.
2. According to the (Research and Policy in Development) RAPID Framework, the factors that influence evaluation use can be categorised according to the quality of the evaluation information, political context, links between the evaluators, policymakers and other networks, and the influence of the external environment (Sandison, 2007).
3. The framework by Preskill, Zuckerman & Matthews (2003) identified the facilitation of evaluation processes, supported by management, the existence of an advisory group to support the evaluation process, frequency, methods, and quality of communications; and organisation characteristics as factors that influence use.
4. (Shulha & Cousins, 1997) suggested that factors that influence evaluation use include the quality, sophistication, and intensity of the evaluation methodology, relevance and credibility of evaluations, the extent to which

stakeholders are involved, the effectiveness of communication among the different stakeholders, the potential for information processing, anticipated degree of programme change, the perceived value of evaluation as a management tool, quality of evaluation implementation; and contextual characteristics of the decision or policy setting.

5. The most recent developments in the study of the factors that influence evaluation use can be found in the works of King & Alkin 2016–2019 who consolidated contributions by several scholars. They discussed the four main factors that influence evaluation use are, user factors, evaluator factors, evaluation factors and organisational factors.

After reviewing all of the frameworks above, the conclusion was that the framework that captured characteristics from all the available frameworks and offered this research the best conceptual framework and opportunity for answering the research question at hand was the one offered by Bayley (2008) who discussed that the factors that influence evaluation use can be broadly categorised into two groups, that is, characteristics related to the actual evaluation and characteristics that are related to the organisational setting. The discussion below is based on a consideration of the literature review as well as the interview process.

### *5.2.1 Characteristics related to the actual evaluation*

Six factors relate to the characteristics of the evaluation according to the literature. Four of the factors relate to the evaluation itself, that is, the relevance of the evaluation approach as it related to the evaluation purpose, the credibility of the research as well as the quality of the findings. The other two of the factors related to the evaluator's communication practices and, the timeliness of reporting.

a) **Regarding the evaluation approach and the evaluation purpose**. This area came out as one of the key determinants of evaluation use. While the literature review implied that this is within the evaluator's responsibility, this research, through interviews, highlighted that both the evaluator and the commissioner play a critical role in ensuring that this is achieved. The commissioner's responsibility in this regard is seen as ensuring that they produce a concept note or terms of reference provides clear direction to the evaluator on what the purpose of the evaluation is. The evaluator can then use their evaluation

expertise to come up with the most suitable evaluation approach. The extent to which an evaluation can be used depends on this critical step. It depends on a clear evaluation that is well crafted and produces information that is purpose drive and useful to the commissioning organisation. If for any reason, the evaluator is unable to do what is expected, then they should be able to communicate this at the initial stage. Clearly articulating the evaluation purpose and applying the relevant approach is, therefore, a determinant of evaluation use and the findings are conclusive that the clearer the purpose of an evaluation is, the better the chances of the evaluation being used.

b) **Regarding the credibility of the research**, the research must be credible. From the side of the evaluators, they must conduct an evaluation that is credible and deemed credible by the stakeholders. Credible means that it must apply rigorous research methods, the results must be derived from the data and the stakeholders must be able to understand the reasons behind all the choices made during the research process. This is probably one of the most important elements as far as evaluations are concerned. Evaluations may reveal surprising or undesirable findings but it is the role of the evaluator to deliver results that emanate from the data and communicate it in a way that there are clear recommendations for how organisations can move forward.

c) **Quality of the findings** is another important determinant of evaluation use. Findings must be derived from the evidence and they must be packaged and communicated in a way that they are clear and easy to understand. In the literature review discussion on the evaluation use, it was evident that the evaluation use can be defined based on findings use or process use. This means that findings are a key determinant of evaluation use. People who have an interest in the evaluation report want to read the findings sections with the view to use the information. Good evaluators are often measured based on their ability to write the evaluation findings section by not only summarising the process of undertaking the evaluation but how they arrive at certain findings and recommendations.

d) The last two of the factors related evaluation characteristics are the evaluator's **communication practices and, the timeliness of reporting**. In both the literature review and the interviews, it was evident that the evaluator's communication practices are a determinant of evaluation use. The interviews

highlighted the critical role that the evaluators must play in ensuring that all the stakeholders are on board with the evaluation and that they receive regular feedback on the progress of the evaluation at critical points. The last thing that evaluators must do is to adhere to the timelines for reporting. During the interview process, it became clear that there are instances where evaluations were not completed in time. In some cases, untimely reports had no negative impacts on the evaluation and the extent to which it could be used, whereas in some cases, the evaluation could not be used because it was delivered at the wrong time.

**Characteristics that are related to the organisational**

There are six characteristics related to the organisational setting. These are, commitment to the evaluation process, alignment of the evaluation to the information needs of the organisation, the extent to which competing information sources are managed, personal characteristics, the decision-making, political and financial climate (Bayley, 2008).

a) **Commitment to the evaluation process:** the organisation that is commissioning the evaluation must not only be seen to be committed to the evaluation process but they must undertake proactive steps to show this commitment. In the interview process, some of the ways in which organisations can show commitment to the evaluation process include initiating an evaluation, being involved throughout the process, involving senior managers, having a clear plan for how evaluation findings are going to be used and ensuring that even the other stakeholders are involved. Some even refer to this as having a culture of evaluation. Commissioners are often the funders but their role should not end with funding an evaluation. They must support the process and work hand in hand with the evaluators and other stakeholders to make sure that evaluations are used.
b) **Alignment of the evaluation to the information needs of the organisation**: this links also to the first point about a clear evaluation purpose. The evaluation must be aligned to the information needs of the client. For this to happen, the client must be clear about the questions that they need to be answered and how those answers will be used. The evaluator must then either design an evaluation

that responds to those needs or communicate the limitations upfront. This point is so critical because the evaluations that are conducted without a clear purpose and those that do not respond to specific organisational needs cannot be used.

c) The **extent to which competing information sources are managed**: as was already mentioned in the literature review, it is rare to find that an evaluation is the only input in a decision making process. Organisations often consider many information sources to arrive at decisions. This is not necessarily a bad thing but it simply means that competing information sources must be managed. An organisation can do this by understanding the strengths and limitations of all information sources and then making sure that there is a clear pathway for how each information source will be used.

d) The **decision-making, political and financial climate** are the last factor in the discussion on determinants of use. In the evidence eco-system, not all credible evidence is used. Why? Because there are other factors at play. The reality is that the decision making context and political and financial climate plays an important role as a determinant of evaluation use.

## 5.3 Ideas for future research and Recommendations

While this research project has provided valuable insights about the determinants of evaluation use based on a small sample of evaluations and people from the basic education sector, future research could focus on other sectors and a larger sample. The sample could even be expanded to other evaluation stakeholders such as beneficiaries and programme implementers. The study has also briefly explained four themes that arose from the research process. Each of those themes could form a research study. The last idea for future research is the possibility of exploring each determinant of use and its relative importance or value to the other determinants.

Below are some recommendations

Individuals and organisations undertaking evaluations should **approach evaluations as a learning opportunity** and keep an open mind that when evaluations are done correctly, they can offer valuable insights for the sector about what works, what does not work and under which conditions. This approach may require formalised systems or activities to create awareness about the value of evaluations, particularly in organisations that are new to the field.

**Focus on generating credible research without expecting any outcome**. While it may be good to have expectations, sometimes the most important thing to do is to focus on producing a good quality evaluation that is characterised by a clear purpose, stakeholder involvement, rigorous research, buy-in from relevant senior managers and produce quality findings.

If it is important for organisations to have staff that understands evaluation then the organisation or business should **dedicate resources to expose staff to evaluation processes and formal training** either in the form of workshops or longer-term training. It is only through exposure that people can understand the technical terms associated with the field of evaluation.

**Be deliberate about use**. It is instrumental that evaluations be designed and are carried out timeously such that they answer questions whereby decisions can be implemented as intended.. For conceptual use, effort must be made for people to learn and gain new insights through participating in evaluations. This may require inception meetings, theory of change workshops, regular feedback meetings and other activities where participants are engaging with the process and content of the evaluation. These things should not be left to chance but rather planned and included in the evaluation project plan.

### Summary

This is a contribution to the study of what evaluation use is. The hope is that it serves as a useful reference document for those that undertake documents. The lessons learnt through this research process could be applied to many evaluation undertakings to strengthen the field of M&E and the likely use of evaluations.

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# 6. Annexures

## 6.1 Annexure 1: Assessment of evaluation reports

| Evaluation | Implementation Evaluation of the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme Commissioned by: Department of Basic Education and underatken by JET Education Services | Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS). led by the South African Department of Basic Education in collaboration with academics at various universities and international donor organisations | Evaluating the effectiveness of the Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment Campaign Supplements. Comissioned by Nal'ibali and undertaken by JET Education Services | Evaluation Of The Zenex Foundation Post School Bridging Programmes. Commissioned by the Zenex Foundation and undertaken by Hobden Research & Evaluation Associates and Benita Williams Evaluation Associates | Evaluation of the Zenex Literacy ( Zenlit) Project. Comissioned by Zenex Foundation and undertaken by Evalution and Research Agency ( ERA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year completed and link to evaluation report | 2017,<br><br>https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/evaluations/514 | 2017<br><br>https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/EarlyGradeReadingStudy.aspx | 2018<br><br>https://www.jet.org.za/work/project-showcase/evaluating-the-effectiveness- | 2018 | 2018<br><br>https://www.zenexfoundation.org.za/images/resources/Executive_Summary_Ov |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | of-the-nal2019ibali-reading-for-enjoyment-campaign-supplements | | erview_Report_Zen Lit_Evaluation_2019.pdf |
| Sound methodology (Evaluation explicitly states a logic model or the theory of change. The chosen methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked. The sampling was appropriate to the purpose of evaluation) | 5<br>( comment: Theory of change developed collaboratively, use of DAC criteria linked to questions and evaluation purpose) | 5 ( evaluation used a formal impact evaluation methodology called a randomised control trial as this was deemed by the researchers as the method that would enable an accurate estimation of the impact of the different intervention models) | 5 (Explicit theory of change and mixed methods design was utilised with thematic areas linked ti the evaluattion questions) | 5 (The prgramme framworks for the 3 bridging programmes clearly stated. Employed a utilization focused approach with a mixed methods design. Link between TOR questions and evaluation components) | 5 There is an explicity theory of change and logic model. The evaluation approach is aligned to the purpose of the evaluation.) |
| Stakeholder involvement<br>( Evidence of involvement of key stakeholders | 5 ( comment: evaluation included a large number of stakeholders from DBE, provicial | 5 ( for this evaluation, DBE collaborated with academics, Wits university, HSRC, | 5 (The relevant stakeholders were invloved at critical times during the evaluation including | 4 ( although not many stakeholders, the report were presented to the three schools and | 5 ( evaluation included funder, evaluators, schools, coaches, service providers) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement) | departments, universities, DPME, and additional resources to support the evaluation team) | NGOs, Georgetown university, | during workshops and via email) | there was an open line of communication between the commissioning organisation and the evaluation team) | |
| Quality evaluation report<br>(The final evaluation report contained sections of a quality report including an introduction, context of the development programme and the evaluation; evaluation purpose, questions and scope; methodology; findings and analysis; conclusions and Recommendations) | 5 ( Comment: all sections included in the report and they are presented in a clear manner that is easy to follow) | 5 ( report contains all the sections and they are presented in a clear coherent manner) | 5 ( Comment: all sections included in the report and they are presented in a clear manner that is easy to follow. Report even includes an executive summary) | 5 ( report contains all the sections and they are presented in a clear coherent manner) | 5 ( report contains all the sections and they are presented in a clear coherent manner) |

## 6.2 Annexure 2: Request for Interviews

To: Potential Interview Participant
From: Thabisile Zuma

Subject: Request for an Interview to participate in the Study on determinants of evaluation use within the education sector

Suggested Interview Dates: Any day between 19 November to 30 November 2019 (30 minutes to one hour)

Dear: _____

My name is Thabisile Zuma and I am a student at the University of Witwatersrand, studying towards a Master of Public and Development Management (MM) in the Field of Monitoring and Evaluation. As part of the requirements to complete this qualification, I am currently undertaking research which focuses on the determinants of evaluation use within the education sector using a sample of organisations including, the national Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Zenex Foundation (Zenex) and JET Education Services.

As part of the research, I have proposed to interview people who have been involved either in undertaking evaluations as evaluators or those who have managed commissioned evaluation projects. This study will look at a number of evaluations conducted by the selected organisations and then speak to relevant people in order to understand what is understood by evaluation use and its determinants.

I would like to request an interview with you. You will be expected to respond to interview questions with specific reference to valuations that you were involved in. The interview will be used to gain insights on from your experience/s with regards to evaluation usage.

This research will hopefully add to the knowledge that currently exists within the realm of evaluation use in the context of South Africa. It will form part of an effort to strengthen South Africa's evaluations conducted by both the NGO, private and public sector.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview.

Sincerely, Thabisile Zuma

## 6.3 Annexure 3: Consent Form

**Title: Determinants of evaluation use within the education sector**

Name of researcher: Thabisile Zuma
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research on Determinants of evaluation use within the education sector. Please note that interview is strictly for academic research purposes. The purpose of this research is to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people that have been involved either in undertaking evaluations or those that have managed commissioned evaluation projects. You have been chosen because of your M&E expertise and your involvement in M&E projects within your organisation. Kindly note that there will be no payment for participation in this study. When I have made use of the information for the purpose of data analysis and writing, I will store the data in a safe place for future research. Your participation is voluntary and you are welcome to ask questions and raise matters for clarification.

This consent implies that you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should you not wish to answer any particular question or questions, you are free to decline.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. In order to protect your identity, I will not include any identifiers in the final report. I will be limiting access to identifiable information, securely storing data documents within a locked location and assigning security codes to computerised records.

This interview may be tape-recorded with your permission. The audio recording of this interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of the recording without your written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.
You agree that my anonymised data will be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of this study.

Any complaints arising from the study can be addressed to the Ethics Committee at Wits University. Please contact Shaun Schoeman, Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za 011 717 1408 or Charmaine.khumalo@wits.ac.za 011 717 1788 for queries.

I agree to take part in this interview.

_____ _____ _____

Name of participant Date Signature

_____ _____

Researcher Date Signature

## 6.4 Annexure 4: Interview Guide for research on determinants of use in the education sector: Zenex Foundation and the DBE.

### Introduction

My name is Thabisile Zuma and I am a Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand, in the Wits Schools of Governance. I am currently undertaking a research project to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people who have been involved either in undertaking evaluations or those who have managed commissioned evaluation projects. This study will look at a number of evaluations conducted by the Department of Basic Education, the Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services and then speak to people who have been involved in those evaluations to understand what use the evaluations had and what, in their view, influenced that use.

The interview is completely voluntary and can be stopped at any point. All information will be treated with respect and the respondents will get the final report upon request

I have a consent form here for you to sign. This form indicates that you agree to participate. With your permission, I request to record this interview for the purpose of transcribing and analysis.

**Questions according to themes and purpose**

| Theme/concept | Purpose of questions | Questions for Department of Education and the Zenex Foundation |
|---|---|---|
| **Introduction questions** | Understand the respondents M&E experience and their involvement in the said evaluation. | 1. Please state you name and role within Zenex, with particular reference to your involvement in evaluation?<br>2. What was your involvement in the evaluation at hand? |
| **Understanding use** | Explore what commissioners and evaluators expect when they undertake an evaluation. | 3. When you undertook this evaluation, what were you hoping to achieve in the end?<br>Please reflect on your own personal expectations and those of the organisations |
| | | 4. To what extent were your expectations met or not met? |
| **Defining use** | Explore what the different evaluation staff members understand by evaluation use and whether based on their understanding, they have seen any evidence of use in the evaluations previously undertaken.<br><br>Does their understanding resonate with that defined in the literature review? | 5. In your own words, how would you define evaluation use?<br>Sub questions can be:<br>6. Where does this understanding stem from? |
| | | 7. In what ways is your definition similar or different form the way some of the stakeholders you collaborate with define use? |
| **Types of evaluation use** | The purpose is to get a sense of what are the common types of use | 8. Were there any changes to the programme as a result of the findings from the evaluation? |

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| | and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process. | 9. If yes/no, please give a reason for your answer. |
| | | 10. Would you say that peoples knowledge or understanding of the project changed as a result of participating in the evaluation |
| | | 11. What, in your view, were the benefits, if any, of participating in the evaluation process, to those individuals involved in the evaluation? |
| | | 12. What were your information needs when you conducted the evaluation? When the department set out to do the evaluation, was the evaluation done to discover something new was it verify/confirm an already existing position? |
| | | 13. What internal systems are in place to ensure that evaluations are used?<br>14. What did you or your organisation do to ensure that the evaluation was used? |
| **Determinants of evaluation** | The purpose is to get a sense of what are the determinants of evaluation use and whether these are common or different according to the types of organisations. | 15. Who, in your view is responsible for ensuring that the evaluation is used and why do you hold that view? |
| | | 16. In this particular evaluation, what role did Zenex play in ensuring that the evaluation is used?<br>17. Once the evaluation was completed, did the evaluation |

| | | |
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| | | findings respond to your information needs? What were the implications?<br>18. How were the evaluation findings considered among the<br>- competing information sources<br>- decision-making climate<br>- the political and financial climate? |
| | | 19. What was the evaluator's communication strategy during this evaluation?<br>- [probe to find out who led/ drove communication and was this effective.] |
| | | 20. Were the reports delivered in time for it to be used? Implications? |
| | | 21. Was the Zenex Foundation committed to the evaluation process?<br>- Stakeholder involvement<br>- Commitment of decision makers |

**Closing questions**

Thank you for the interview. Thank you for your time and your valuable insights. Is there anything that you would like to add or questions that you would like to ask at this point.

## 6.5 Annexure 4: Interview Guide for research on determinants of use in the education sector: Jet Education Services

### Introduction

My name is Thabisile Zuma and I am a Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand, in the Wits Schools of Governance. I am currently undertaking a research project to understand what evaluation use is and what its determinants are, based on the perspectives of people that have been involved either in undertaking evaluations or those that have managed commissioned evaluation projects. This study will look at a number of evaluations conducted by the Department of Basic Education, Zenex Foundation and JET Education Services and then speak to people that have been involved in those evaluations to understand what use the evaluations had and what, in their view, influenced that use.

The interview is completely voluntary and can be stopped at any point. All information will be treated with respect and the respondents will get the final report upon request.

I have a consent form here for you to sign. This form indicates that you agree to participate. With your permission, I request to record this interview for the purpose of transcribing and analysis.

**Questions**

| Theme/concept | Purpose of questions | Questions for JET Education Services |
|---|---|---|
| **Introduction questions** | Understand the respondents' M&E experience and their involvement in the said evaluation. | 1. Please state your name and role within Wits, with particular reference to your involvement in evaluation?<br>2. What was your involvement in EGRS?<br>3. Please tell me more about the programme that you were evaluating and some background on the evaluation? |
| **Understanding use** | Explore what commissioners and evaluators expect when they undertake an evaluation and what are some of the consequences of unmet expectations. | 4. When you undertook this evaluation, did you respond to terms of reference or did you approach the commissioning organisation?<br>5. As an evaluator, what were you hoping to achieve in the end?<br>- How had you hoped that the evaluation would be used? |
| | | 6. To what extent were your expectations met or not met? Reasons? |
| **Defining use** | Explore what the different stakeholders understand by evaluation use and whether based on their understanding, they have seen any evidence of use in the evaluations previously undertaken.<br><br>Does their understanding | 7. In your own words, how would you define evaluation use? |
| | | 8. In what ways is your definition similar or different form the way some of the stakeholders you collaborate with define use? |

| | | |
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| | resonate with that defined in the literature review? | |
| **Types of evaluation use** | The purpose is to get a sense of what are the common types of use and do these occur organically or as part of a planned process. | 9. Were there any changes to the programme as a result of the findings from the evaluation? |
| | | 10. Would you say that people's knowledge or understanding of issues around early grade reading literacy changed as a result of participating in the evaluation/study?<br>- People refer to evaluation stakeholders, steering committees, beneficiaries, implementers and anyone that was involved in the evaluation. |
| | | 11. What, in your view, were the benefits, if any, of participating in the evaluation process to individuals involved in the evaluation? |
| | | 12. What, in your view, were the commissioners' information needs when they commissioned the evaluation?<br>- Was the evaluation done to discover something new was it done to verify/confirm and already existing position? |
| | | 13. In your view, what role should the different stakeholders play in ensuring that the evaluation was used? |
| | | 14. What did you or your organisation do to ensure that the evaluation was used? |

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| | | - What was within your mandate? |
| **Determinants of evaluation** | | 15. In what ways do you play a role in ensuring that the evaluation is:<br>- Relevant to the needs of the commissioners and other stakeholders involved<br>- Credible<br>- Comes up with quality and actual findings. |
| | | 16. Were the reports delivered in time for it to be used? Reasons? |
| | | 17. Did you get a sense that the commissioner was committed to the evaluation process?<br>- Stakeholder involvement<br>- Commitment of decision makers |

**Closing questions**

Thank you for the interview. Thank you for your time and your valuable insights. Is there anything that you would like to add or questions that you would like to ask at this point?