



STUDY ON INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A TQM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper tries to bring out a clear status of higher education and emergent needs to enhance the quality of higher education. Globalization of higher educational services has become an area of key focus for many countries in post WTO scenario. In order to fuel the socio-economic development of the country, higher education is playing a more active role in our country and this requires a paradigm shift in terms of governance and service delivery. Higher education institutions must become more innovative leading to quality institutions of knowledge production and dissemination. Realizing the importance of higher education, lot of innovative experiments is being done to improve the performance of this sector. Application of TQM concepts is one of such measures, which will go a long way in revolutionizing the higher education system.

The concept of Total quality management (TQM) was introduced into higher education in late 1980s. Compared to business implementations, the impact of quality management concepts and tools in higher education institutions has not been as significant. Although TQM has been implemented with success in other service sectors, its implementation in higher education has been mostly limited to non-academic, administrative processes. Unlike manufacturing and other service sector implementations of TQM, in higher education institutions, customer-based quality definition has been problematic, limiting its spread and success. This paper attempts to theoretically conceptualize TQM in higher education and also discusses the challenges TQM implementations face in higher education and provides directions to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutes, Total Quality management, Product dimensions, Service Dimensions, Quality dimensions

1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) environments across the globe are frequently described as turbulent and dynamic. Both global and national forces are driving change within and across individual countries and their higher education institutions (HEIs). These changes have served to put the issue of quality management firmly on the agendas of national governments, institutions, academic departments and individual programmes of study. As such Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing new challenges in managing quality of education, especially in the developing countries. They not only have to fulfill the requirements of local employers regarding advanced skills, provide up to date knowledge and instill right attitude in university graduates but also to broaden the scope of the graduates globally. The university administrators are striving to improve overall quality within limited resources and pushing faculty to broaden their research competences to incorporate it in the post graduate programs.

This article explains the concept of TQM in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and highlights the importance and essence of TQM and explains how higher education institutions can improve the quality by implementing TQM principles. Finally it highlights the challenges faced by HEIs in implementing TQM and also suggest key elements for successful implementation of TQM in HEIs.

2. TQM Concept

The term Total Quality Management (TQM) was developed by Feigenbaum, in 1961, who named it firstly as Total Quality Control (TQC). TQM can be defined as “the process of integration of all activities, functions and processes within an organization in order to achieve continuous improvement in cost, quality, function and delivery of goods and services for customer satisfaction”. It refers to the application of quality principles to overall process and all the management functions in order to ensure total customer satisfaction. TQM implies the application of quality principles right from identification of customer needs to post purchase services.

According to Witcher (1990) TQM is composed of three terms:

Total: meaning that every person is involved including customer and suppliers.

Quality: implying that customer requirements are met exactly.

Management: indicating that senior executives are committed.



3. Total Quality Management in Higher Education

Quality of education is a multi-dimensional concept, with varying conceptualizations. It includes, within its ambit, the quality of inputs in the form of students, faculty, support staff and the infrastructure: the quality of processes in the form of learning and teaching activity: and the quality of outputs in the form of the enlightened students who move out of the system. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a modern term wider in scope as it takes into its fold not only ensuring productivity and efficiency but also ensuring individual satisfaction and institutional building and human well being. TQM is not merely preventive, it is pro-active.

There are three generic approaches to TQM in higher education (Harris 1994). Firstly there is a customer focus where the idea of service to students is fostered through staff training and development, which promotes student's choice and autonomy. The second approach has a staff focus and is concerned to value and enhance the contribution of all members of staff to the effectiveness of an institution's operation, to the setting of policies and priorities. This entails a flatter management structure and the acceptance of responsibility for action by defined working groups. The third approach focuses on service agreements stance and seeks to ensure conformity to specification at certain key measurable points of the educational processes. Evaluation of assignments by faculty within a specified time frame is an example.

The applicability of TQM in higher education has been the debate for many years. While Total Quality Management has been adopted by many organizations world-wide, its implementation in higher education institutions presents more challenges and difficulties than those encountered in business organizations.

4. Why Higher Education Institutions should worry about Quality

As teachers, principals, heads of the department and policy makers in education we should worry about quality of teaching, programmes, and institution because of the following factors:

- **Competition:** We are entering a new regime, where competition among educational institutions for students and funds will be highly significant. With globalization and GATS (Global Agreement on Trade in Services), the educational environment will be seized by increased competition. In order to survive in such situation, educational institutions need to worry about their quality
- **Customer satisfaction:** Students, parents or sponsoring agencies as customers of the educational institutions are now highly conscious of their rights or getting value for their money and time spent. They are now demanding good quality teaching and receiving employable skill set and thus we should constantly worry about the relevance of our courses and programmes to the needs of the market.
- **Maintaining standards:** As educational institutions, we should always concern about setting our own standard and maintaining it continuously year after year. In order to maintain the standard, we should continuously make efforts to improve quality of educational facilities
- **Accountability:** Every institution is accountable to its own stake holder in terms of the funds (public or private) used on it. Concern for quality will ensure accountability of funds utilized and inform the stake holders about taking appropriate decisions. Thus quality can be considered as a monitoring mechanism.
- **Improve employee morale and motivation:** Concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. If quality system is in place, the internal process would be systematic making every department complementing each other's service domain and helping in developing internal customer satisfaction leading to high morale and motivation.
- **Credibility, prestige and status:** If institutions are concerned about quality, continuously and not once in a while. It will bring credibility to institutions and individuals because of consistency leading to practice, status and brand value.
- **Image and visibility:** Quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stake holder support, like getting merit students from far and near, increased donation / grants from funding agencies and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates.

5. Dimensions of Quality in Higher education

Quality was originally developed in the manufacturing industry. In the area of higher education, the adoption of quality control has been superficial and diluted by the exercise of academic freedom (Largosen, et al, 2004). Further, the prevailing culture of universities is often based on individual autonomy, which is zealously guarded (Colling and Harvey, 1995). Thus, it is usually difficult to apply the features of quality to higher education considering the fact that quality requires team work (Boaden and Dale, 1992). However, the quality of higher education is very important for its stake holders. Notably, providers (funding bodies and the community at large), students, staff and employers of graduates are important (Srikanthan and



Dalrymple, 2003). The most commonly used dimensions of quality in higher education are product, software and service (Owlia and Aspinwall,1996)

Table 1 : Product dimensions of quality in higher education

Dimensions	Definition in higher education
Performance	Primary knowledge/skills required for graduates
Features	Secondary/Supplementary knowledge and skills
Reliability	The extent to which knowledge/skills learned are correct, accurate and up to date
Conformance	The degree to which an institutional programme /course meets established standards, plans and promises
Durability	The depth of learning
Serviceability	How well an institution handles customer's complaints?

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)

Table 2 : Software quality dimensions in higher education

Dimensions	Definition in higher education
Correctness	The extent to which the programme/course complies with the specified requirements
Reliability	The degree to which knowledge/skills learned is correct, accurate and up to date
Efficiency	The extent to which knowledge/skills learned is applicable to the future career of graduates
Integrity	The extent to which personal information is secure from unauthorized access
Usability	The ease of learning and communicativeness in the class room
Maintainability	How well an institution handles customer's complaints?
Testability	How fair examinations represent a subject of study?
Expandability	Flexibility
Portability	The degree to which knowledge/skills learned is applicable to other fields

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)

Table 3 : Service quality dimensions in higher education

Dimensions	Definition in higher education
Responsiveness	Willing and readiness of staff to help students
Reliability	The degree to which education is correct, accurate and up to date
Understanding customers	Understanding students and their needs
Access	The extent to which staff are available for guidance and advice
Competence	The theoretical and practical knowledge of staff and other presentation skills
Courtesy	Emotive and positive attitude towards students
Communication	How well the students and lecturers communicate in the class
Credibility	The degree of trustworthiness of institution
Security	Confidentiality of information
Tangible	State, sufficiency and availability of equipment and facilities
Performance	Primary knowledge/skills required for graduates
Completeness	Supplementary knowledge/skills, use of computer

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)

6. Higher Education Institutions' Challenges to develop TQM in their operations

The main challenge to adapt the principles of TQM in Higher Education is the need to deal with the intangibility of educational processes. TQM need to accommodate the intangible aspects of student learning which have direct effects in teaching and learning quality in higher education. Moreover, in the age of increasing competitive pressure and finite individual and institutional resources the educational institutions have started to feel the pressure to change and reform . Other critical issues in implementing TQM in higher education include leadership, customer identification, cultural and organizational transformation. Unlike business organizations, chancellors and heads of higher educational institution do not enjoy ultimate authority in hiring and firing of personnel and allocating resources. Lack of necessary authority makes it difficult to deploy their values and goals through layers of higher education institutions. Deep rooted traditions dating back to centuries, a rigid departmental model, inter departmental competition for resources, lack of market focus are the cultural and organizational reasons that makes it difficult to tune in with TQM transformation. Ambiguity in customer identification also creates hurdles in TQM implementation. Without a well-defined customer and a customer focus, quality efforts may be easily



diffused. The effectiveness of leadership is adversely affected by individualism among academic staff and due to absence of team working. Impact of TQM in higher education is small due to organizational inertia to change, failure to focus on being a continuous improvement ascertained by customers' contentment with the services they receive.

7. Suggestions for successful implementation of TQM in HEIs.

TQM can be applied to higher education, but it must be modified to fully recognize some unique aspects of education viz education is a service industry with no visible, tangible "product". The development of higher education requires increase funds and even more for its maintenance. The World Bank document (1994) states, "The development of higher education is correlated with the economic development. Further to implement TQM successfully an HEIs must concentrate on the following key elements:

- **Top Management Commitment:** Working with TQM and keeping up the quality improvements demands total commitment of the management. The management must initiate planning for implementation and participate in the work including evaluation of processes and results.
- **Focus on Customers:** A central core value in TQM is that all products, service and processes should always have a customer focus. Quality should be valued by the customers and should always be put in relation to their needs and expectations.
- **Base Decisions on Facts:** An important core value in TQM is to make decisions based on facts that are well founded and to not allow random factors to be of decisive importance.
- **Continuous Improvement:** It is not enough for an organization to do better than it did previously. The external demands an organization faces are continuously increasing. Consequently, an organization needs to continually try to improve the quality of its product, service and processes. The continuous improvement of the process leads to customer satisfaction, which results in an external quality improvement. The continuous improvement of the process also leads to fewer defects, which results in an internal quality improvement.
- **Everybody's Commitment:** If the organization's quality strategy should be successful, all of the organization's employees should be engaged in the work of satisfying the customer with a continuously improved quality. Everybody's commitment means that continuous improvement should be practiced everywhere in the processes and that the involvement of all employees at every level should be facilitated.
- **Requirement of human resource excellence in training, communication, cooperation, feedback and reward sharing.**
- **Requirement of continuous measurement of client satisfaction.**

8. Positive effects / Benefits of TQM in HEIs

TQM is very effective in higher education since it keeps a track of the entire system and constant up-gradation keeps the quality high. This effort convinces the students that they will be prepared for the market place. Whereas using bottom-up approach to coordinate with the team members creates a healthy internal environment. Thus communication and coordination could enhance the overall production in the institution and give a greater outcome. Other Benefits of TQM include heightened employee morale, better teamwork among departments, bridging faculty-staff functions, increased quality from customer viewpoint and continuous development of everyone who is part of higher education institution.

9. Negative Effects of TQM in HEIs

However the TQM could also have negative effects on the higher education. The most prominent effect of implementation of the TQM is that the institution has to take a risk of changing the entire system, leaving their traditional procedure and spend unlimited amount of time and resources on the new system. Even the faculty gets offend as their level of authority and their methods of instructions changes leading to low morale. Even the lack of focus on the new system could lead to worst outcomes.

10. Conclusion

Higher education institutions have been facing challenges for some time and are expected to face more in the future. In the new environment that higher education has entered, quality plays an increasingly important role. Quality education is all about systems that lead to good academic culture, excellent academic result, progressive and adaptive management, clear and transparent administration, prominent profile of outgoing students, and, above all, review and modification of inputs. All stakeholders have a prominent role to play. TQM in educational institutions is the need of the hour. TQM is seen by many as having enormous potential to respond to the challenges. It must also be implemented for institutional image-building. TQM will help achieve excellence, which only can guarantee the survival of institutions in a highly competitive world. Finally, having reviewed the study and concept of TQM implementation in higher education institutions, there appears to be no apparent reason for rejecting the applicability of TQM in Higher Education Institutions.



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