Service Quality in the Education Sector
Moving towards a Holistic and Transformative Approach

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Paper type: Conceptual Paper

Abstract

Purpose: This paper attempts to examine the latest literature with respect to quality in education and determine the latest trends and development. It also aims to make a synthesis between current trends in the field of education and that of quality in education.

Design / Methodology / Approach: This paper being a conceptual paper, it comprise of an in depth review of the literature in the field of quality in education. Secondary data has therefore been collected in the form of journals, reports, newspapers and so on.

Findings: A critical analysis of the literature revealed to a great extent that there is a current move towards a holistic and transformative approach to quality in education.

Managerial Implications: At the level of school management, the findings suggest that there is a need for school leaders to adopt a more holistic approach.

Originality: Research on the concept of quality in education is itself relatively new and no attempt has been done so far to synthesize the development in the field of education with the latter.

Keywords: Quality, Education, Holistic, Transformative, Service.
Introduction

Quality has emerged during the last century as a necessity for the survival of organizations faced with increasing competition and an ever rising demand for better and better quality products and services. Nearly one decade has elapsed in this 21st century and in this present era, we are no longer only striving for the survival of organizations but for that of humanity itself. The ability to provide quality education is more than ever at a do or die stage and as stated by Gokhool (2006), there is at present a consensus “for fundamental reforms in our education sector, with emphasis on Quality”. Indeed at a time where sustainable development is being put forward as a prime objective for most governments around the world, it is recognized that education will have a critical role to play (UNESCO, 2009). Here however the end result of quality education is not about achieving high grades and mere academic excellence but the total development of the student nay the inner transformation of the student into an intelligent, compassionate and loving citizen of the global village. In that respect there is an urgent cry for a more holistic approach to education and for that matter to quality in education.

Education in the 21st century and the need for a different approach

Education has been given many different interpretations and meanings throughout history, yet its core meaning and purpose are everlasting. As pointed out by Rosado (2000) and Kumar and Ahmad (2008) the word "educate" comes from the Latin word educare, meaning "to lead out" or "to bring out". As stated by the famous scientist, Galileo Galilei “You cannot teach a man anything: You can only help him to find it within himself.” (Sidhu and Kaur, 2010)

However it is a fact that in our so called modern industrial society, education has been overshadowed by something else in the name of education. Indeed carried away by the quest for economic success and material progress, education have been reduced to a mere training for the production of quality “Human Resources” for the efficient and effective production of goods and services. This has been referred to as has the factory model by Anthony (2005), while Seshadri (2008) further advocates that today education is more about schooling in practical skills (English, information processing, arithmetic and soft skills) and enable one to be an efficient worker in a corporate economy. Reflecting deeper into the matter, Ranade (2009) assert that the cause of the problem is the present industrial mindset which perceive the school as a factory.
This alarming state of affairs in the education sector which is considered to be one of the main causes of the present chaotic state of humanity, has given rise to the need to formulate a new approach, one which places emphasis on the human being rather than on the economy. In fact this need as been felt since long and as observed by Bhatta (2007). Throughout history a large number of experts all over the globe have observed that the education of human beings must be much more than merely moulding them into future workers or citizens.

In the local context quality has been the focal point of all the latest reforms and policies of the government. The Mauritian government seem to have recognized the need for a more holistic approach to education, one which focuses on the “overall holistic development of our pupils instead of focusing only on examination achievements” (Bunwaree, 2008). This is supported by Thancanamootoo (2009) who states that the national curriculum should provide a holistic framework for the development of each child. While Bunwaree (2009) further states that the curriculum framework advocates a balanced framework, so as to enable the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of every child of the republic.

The Concept of Quality in Education

As stated by Thomas (2003), in trying to understand the concept of quality in education, the first step is to look for an appropriate definition. The most wide spread and accepted (Houston, 2008; Cartwright, 2007; Venkatraman, 2007; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2001,2004,2005,2007; Lomas, 2007,2002; Parri, 2006; UNESCO, 2006; Lagrosen et al, 2004; Harvey, 2002) definition of quality in the field of education is that proposed by Harvey and Green (1993) who devised a framework which consist of five definitions of quality, namely quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as value for money, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation.

Giertz (2000) suggest that perhaps the most widely accepted criterion of quality in higher education is probably “fitness for purpose” as stated by Ball (1985). However as he subsequently observe, that only carries the debate to one step ahead and now the question which crop up is: what is the purpose of education?

From a customer perspective, it is important to identify the needs of students as primary customers and strive to meet their needs, it is also important to recognize the needs of other customers of education (Hwarng and Teo, 2001). This is supported by Lagrosen et al (2004) who suggest that further research in this area should be valuable taking into account the view of other stakeholders. In the same vein, Rowley (1997) states that all stakeholders’
perspectives should be taken into account when attempting to measure service quality in education. In fact the all society is concerned about the quality of education as pointed out by Nagel and Kvernbekk (1997) who stated that social groups and society at large do have vested interests in education.

On the other hand, as observed by Cheng et al (2003), despite the fact that stakeholders may be satisfied with educational services if education does not cater for the future needs and challenges of the new millennium than it is still ineffective and “useless” for the new generation. The author, therefore conclude that ability for education to meet the needs of the future both at individual and societal level is one of the critical elements of quality in education.

Towards a Holistic and Transformative Approach to Quality in Education

There have been a number of studies (Angell et al, 2008; Hickie and Sawkins, 1996; Idrus, 1996; Johnson and Golomski, 1999) among others which sought to apply the concepts of quality as it is in industry to the education sector and as a competitive tool for educational institutions considered merely as profit making businesses. These attempts have been qualified has being inappropriate, unassimilated and unimaginative by Doherty (2008) who also states that applying manufacturing methodologies to universities, colleges and schools have rightly raised the ire of teachers, lecturers and researchers.

Furthermore instead of enhancing quality of education, competition as had an inverse effect. Indeed as argued by Harvey (2002) the increase in competition between educational institutions is resulting in lowering standards and quality, rather than raising them. This is supported by a study conducted by Carmichael (2001) which empirically tested the hypothesis of Lee Harvey. While as Venkatraman (2007) points out, treating students as being mere products will have as consequence the failure to cater for the learning process since as the author states “students are non-standard human beings who are embodied with a range of experiences, emotions and characteristics”

According to Harvey and Green (1993) the interpretation of quality as “transformation” of students is a meta-quality concept which subsumes the other ones. Therefore when students are transformed, it satisfies and even exceeds the requirement of the other definitions of quality, namely, quality as value for money, quality as excellence, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as consistency. This brought Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2007) to the
conclusion that it is vital to emphasize on quality as transformation when developing educationally-oriented models to quality in education.

At organisational level, it is a fact that faced with the present economic realities educational institutions are bound to compete to offer the best service quality. However as stressed by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004), it is crucial to differentiate between the quality of services offered by educational institutions and quality of education per say which is the transformation of the student. As such quality initiatives aim at the improvement of the quality of services (administrative, information technology, infrastructure…) and enable the transformation of the student. Furthermore, to achieve that, a transformation at organisational level is a prerequisite. (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007)

**Synthesis: Towards a Holistic and Transformative Approach to Education and to Quality in Education**

The definition of quality as transformation of students is in line with the definition of education as the total development of the individual as stated by Kao (2003) and therefore involves the development of the intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials of the students (k12academics, 2009). This holistic approach to education is in fact well grounded even in legislation such as the *Education Reform Act 1988* in England which states that the purpose of educational reform is to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of the students. Furthermore as observed by H.H Swami Paramananda (2007), so as to cater for the total development of the physical, emotional and intellectual and spiritual dimension, a complete transformation of the student is needed which is possible only through an inner transformation.

This approach to quality in education is gaining more and more prominence as the drawbacks of adopting industrial based quality concepts to education become more apparent. For instance as observed by Lomas (2002), present quality initiatives are not geared towards the transformation of the student, causing the dissatisfaction of the academics, one of the main stakeholders of education and as pointed out by Gosling and D’Andrea (2001), if the current quality initiatives do not help in improving or enhancing the educational experience or have a positive impact on student learning, they are a costly but vain effort.

**Conclusion**

From the light of the above discussion, it is clear that the current move is towards a more holistic and transformative approach when considering the issue of quality in education. This
change can be viewed at various levels, that is, at individual level at organisational level, at societal level and finally at global level. It is further hypothesised that further investigation into related literature will reveal that this switch in paradigm gaining more and more prominence.

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