

SERVICE QUALITY INDICATORS FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

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Introduction

Quality is critical to educational institutions success as it plays a vital role in improving school productivity in terms of results, co-curricular activities and discipline. It can be defined as 'the totality of inherent characteristics of a qualitative delivery by staff or service that bear on its ability to increase the demand for that qualitative delivery by staff or service at a fixed price' and can best be measured by capturing student or parents perceptions of the performance of those characteristics.

Customizing the SERVPERF methodology to measure service quality in education-to-knowledge context and subsequently testing it on both students, teachers in terms of sharing knowledge, mentoring and subject delivery, the research led to a number of important and valuable insights concerning the service quality construct in education-to-knowledge environment.

The higher education experience can profoundly affect a student many ways. Intellectual growth, personal and social development, value and attitude change, and cultural awareness are just a few of the many areas affected by university attendance. The concern with student growth and development in higher education is by no means new. Researchers, practitioners and policy makers have long urged universities to demonstrate their effective performance, and success in meeting their educational goals by scrutinising the quality of their provision at various levels, including the institutional, the program, as well as individual student levels.

Review of Literature

India inherited an age of old tradition of higher education system which had generated knowledge and learning right from the beginning of the Indian civilization. To take into consideration the reign of Guptas' they encouraged higher learning by patronizing centers of higher education at Nalanda, Takshila, Ujjain and Vallabhi. Each institute has its own importance in different fields like medicine, and astronomy. As a matter of fact during the Guptas' period India became a renowned center for higher studies by attracting academicians from all parts of Indian and from several foreign countries. Those educational institutions during that period were mainly financed by grants of land and liberal donations.

Such grants and donations came from kings as well as from other affluent people existing in the then society. In fact, historical data figures out a well-established system of higher education which functioned in India as early 1000 BC. In that system the construction of knowledge, the beliefs on which knowledge is based, basic concepts and the organization of learning were very different from the European tradition. The Indian system of education was validated by the fact that it is sustained Indian civilization for centuries. Indian idea of education established a symbiotic link between the learner and his/her civilized view of the world (www.muultiworld.org/m-varsity/articles/vhigh.htm).

During the pre-British rule certain important developments took place in field of higher education. In 1817, Hindu College was established in Calcutta. The Elphinstone Institution was set up in 1834 in Bombay which marked the beginning of new developments in the field of higher education. Therefore higher education frame work in ancient India was quite established in terms of quality of service as well as infrastructure. Continuing to this quality trend, development of higher education had been an important item on the agenda of both developed as well as the developing countries just after the world war II. India was influenced by the developments of British and Westron economies. Later part of 1940s significant investments have been made by Governments in higher education sector. During 1948-1949 Indian education Commission under the chairman ship of Dr. S. Radha Krishnan was set up who recommended the expansion of education from the primary level. Apex bodies like University grants commission (UGC) and All India council technical education (AICTE) were formed to ensure standards in higher and technical education.

Quality as value for money: This view perceives quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure. This view embodies efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. It focuses on how the inputs are efficiently used by the process in a manner that they produce the desired outputs. A simple instance could be an attempt to producing more graduates with less cost. This way of thinking seems to be of interest to those who fund higher education including government, administrators, parents and students.

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Quality as transformation: It refers to the classic notion that views quality in terms of change of the learner from one state to another. In educational terms, transformation refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge through the learning process. This notion of quality presupposes a fundamental purpose of higher education in terms of transforming the life experiences of students. The transformation concept, as argued by Harvey and Knight (1996), is a meta-quality concept. The other concepts are possible operationalizations of the transformative process rather than ends in themselves. Harvey (2002) suggests that in an era of mass higher education, value-added transformation ought to become the central element of any concept of quality rather than *excellence*, *fitness for purpose* or *value for money*. There is also an emerging argument in the literature on the view of *quality as culture* (see EUA, 2006; NAAC, 2007; Harvey and Stensaker, 2008). Such perspective recognizes the importance of the organizational view of quality as a process of transformation, where each entity is concerned with and acknowledges the importance of quality. This way of conceptualization is related to the intrinsic traits of higher education in which quality is valued as a driving force behind what everyone does in an organization. In connection with this, quality culture is conceived as an organizational culture that involves: (1) a psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments towards quality, and (2) a structural or managerial element with well-defined processes that enhance quality and coordinate efforts (EUA, 2006). Others perceived quality culture as organizational culture, which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for quality (Berings, *et al.*, 2010). It is concerned more with the behavior of the people involved in the organization than the operation of a quality system. As Harvey and Stensaker (2008) argued, a quality culture is not likely to be constructed irrespective of the context in which it is located.

Research Methodology

This paper deals with the methodological considerations of the study. It begins with operationalizations of the variables contained in the proposed conceptual framework of the study. The second section presents the research paradigm and the design while the third section discusses the methods, sources of data and sampling, data collection instruments and techniques of analysis. Finally, the issues of validity and reliability are discussed in the fourth section.

Operationalization

The variables under study are operationalized in this section based on the main constructs of the

conceptual framework presented in the preceding chapter. The operationalization begins with the assumption derived from the open systems' perspective that higher education institutions, like other organizations, are open systems designed to transform inputs into outputs. In this perspective, the dimensions of quality assurance depend on the task scope of an organization. The task scope refers to the functions for which an organization has primary responsibility. In the higher education context, many universities articulate the functions of education, research and community engagement in their mission statements. The focus on education can be observed in the government's priority and emphasis in enrolment and institutional expansion at both the state and central schools level. Consequently, the functions of research and community in state and central engagement are overlooked in this study as well. In the pages just to follow, proposed dependent and independent variables are listed and operationalized in order to examine empirically the educational quality assurance practices in state and central schools. A set of categorizing measures is also suggested for each variable next to the Operationalization

Independent variables

Two sets of factors comprise the independent variables of this study. These are:

Institutional either state or central school characteristics and *organizational environmental factors*, to be presented as follows.

1. Institutional Characteristics

As discussed in the preceding chapter, universities are considered as complex organizations with unique characteristics. In this regard, the core activities and processes of universities are contingent upon their specific circumstances.

Educational institutions vary in terms of their age, size, leadership, staff and student profile, and quality culture¹. Each of these variables is operationalized as follows. *Leadership and governance:* the role of central executive officers and senior executives as initiators, leaders, and as the ones supposed to engage in quality initiative is considered an important factor for the adoption and implementation of quality assurance in universities. In this study, institutional leadership is operationalized in terms of its (1) commitment for consistent quality improvement (2) capacity to establish a coherent framework of quality policy and strategies, resources and structures, (3) ability to create critical mass that values quality learning, (4) implementation of feedback from self-evaluation quality audit, (5) influence on quality culture. Internal governance is operationalized in terms of the position and responsibility of quality assurance in governance

structure of the schools, role of boards, and participation of frontline actors in the planning and implementation of quality assurance initiatives. Perceptual questions for presidents, deans, department heads and academic staff, and documentary analyses have been used in chapter 8 to evaluate the role of leadership and governance.

Results And Discussion

Adequacy of the Internal Quality Assurance Practice in schools

As depicted in the previous section, the universities are required to establish and implement internal quality enhancement processes. In this regard, adequacy of the internal quality assurance depends on the extent to which it focuses on improving quality of education. In this section, data on whether quality assurance policies, institutional arrangements and methods are put in place to improve quality education in the three public universities were analyzed.

Table Availability of Quality Assurance Policies & Structures as Perceived by Staff

	Quality assurance policy			Institution arrangement for quality assurance		
	Yes	Total	X ²	Yes	Total	X ²
kv	12	39	13.91*	8	33	20.68*
Bhavans	9	21		9	21	
St anns	30	42		32	42	
Total	51	102		49	96	

P<.001

There is a significant difference in ratings of the respondents across the three schools, which indicates that the academic staff instants are more aware than others of the newly introduced quality assurance policy and structures. These results corroborate the findings of the documentary analysis in the previous sub-section. Further analysis of interview data was conducted to substantiate these results. Interviewees from the senior management of KV hold that the legislation and standing committees such as the academic standards and curriculum review committee, college and department councils/commissions have been used as policy instruments and structures to assure quality, though there are no consolidated and separate quality assurance policies and structures at school level. , and there is also a unit at faculty level that handles staff development, oversees the development and implementation of curriculum and identifies deficiencies for improvement. The school management has also an established tradition regarding staff recruitment, conducting teaching and learning, designing courses, assurance and continuously reviewing and regulating facilities). The setraditional approaches and practices in some faculties of KV may be considered. as examples of good practice, but yet there is no documented evidence that shows the

1 Policies and institutional Arrangements for Internal Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance systems include, among other things, clearly articulated policies, strategies and institutional arrangements that delineate responsibilities and accountability for quality at all levels. Documentary data, followed by survey results, are analyzed hereunder to explore existing quality assurance policies and structures across the schools.

2 Results of Survey Data Analysis

In this section, further analysis of data was conducted to see the extent to which the academic staff members are acquainted with the institutional policies and structures for quality assurance in their respective university. The results show that the majority of the staff respondents from Bhavans are familiar with the quality assurance policy and structures introduced in their university, whereas this is not the case in KV and stanns.

central schools has a coherent policy, guidelines and established structures to assure quality of its educational provisions at all levels.

The stanns management also shared similar opinion that their university has some prior experiences in quality assurance. The senate quality assurance committee was instrumental and a number of quality related activities such as strategic planning, curriculum revision and change, and institutional self-assessment were undertaken prior to the introduction of formal quality assurance policies and structure. However, such prior practices were not supported by policy directives and structures and evidences for their operation.

Conclusion

Despite its widespread application in higher education and the range of studies conducted on it, there are many unanswered questions about the extent to which quality assurance improves the core processes of higher education that influence student learning. This study has attempted to examine quality and quality assurance in Indian schools. More specifically, the main research problem that guided the study was: 'how and under what circumstances do the public schools in India assure

quality of their education, and what contextual factors influence their current quality assurance systems and practices?’ To guide data collection and analysis, the main research problem of the study was broken down into the following specific research questions: (1) What is already known about the issues on quality and its assurance in higher education institutions? And what theories can be used to explain quality assurance implementation at universities? (2) What are the Indian schools actually doing in terms of improving quality of education? What is known about the quality of their educational input, process and output vis-à-vis student learning? How do they know that they provide quality education? What are their current quality assurance policies, structures and instruments? (3) Are there differences among the Universities regarding their quality assurance practices? What are the possible explanations for such differences? (4) What are the framework conditions and/or models that underlie the quality assurance in place at the schools? How is the situation comparable with good practices in quality assurance? (5) What are the possible factors that enable or hinder the adoption and practice of formal quality assurance system at the schools? (6) Considering the gaps between actual practices and good practices, what is needed for improvement? And how can that be implemented? The first research question was addressed based on a critical review of the quality assurance literature in chapter 2 and the organizational theories, particularly the contingency and institutional theories, in chapter 3 demonstrated that the idea of student learning is implicitly or explicitly contained in the various interpretations of quality, although there is no universally agreed meaning of the term. It is proposed that a quality assurance system becomes effective when it focuses on the conditions and core processes of higher education that affect quality of student learning. In this regard, quality assurance is conceptualized as the totality of the policies, values, procedures, structures, resources and actions devoted to ensure continuous improvement of the core educational processes. Good practices in quality assurance were drawn from the literature review to serve the purpose of

this study. Accordingly, it is argued that a formal quality assurance system leads to improvement of student learning when the universities own it (collegial or managerial) and when the external quality assurance system plays a supportive (facilitative) role. It was also explicated that an effective quality assurance model in higher education is one that focuses on quality of the core educational inputs, processes and outputs that influence student learning. In this regard, good practices in quality assurance require a focus on the core educational processes and improvement in student learning; commitment and involvement of leadership, staff and students; reasonably adequate resources; policy and structure, and accountability and transparency. The input, process and output domains were used in this study as bases for the analysis of the actual quality assurance practices in Indian schools.

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