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TQM in Higher Education: Understanding Customers' Needs

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Abstract:

Due to the innumerable problems faced by Higher Education Institutions such as student absenteeism, deteriorating student performances, increasing unemployability etc, the institutions providing higher education are in tremendous pressure. To rectify these problems many institutions have started adopting Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM has been defined as a method of continuous improvement in quality keeping in mind the satisfaction of customers. The customers of higher education are students, teachers, society, parents, government, industry and administration. As each of the categories of customers is specific and different, their demands from the education system vary. The paper discusses the need of application of TQM in higher education institutions, the customers and their needs.

Keywords: TQM, Customers, needs

1. Introduction

The higher education institutions are increasingly finding themselves in an environment that is focused on understanding the role and importance of service quality. Relentless global, social, cultural and economic change is being translated by educational institutions into a continuous stream of complex reforms based on quality. Not oblivious to the need for adaptation to serve the interests of its customers, in terms of greater responsiveness, responsibility, accountability and increased expectations, the higher education institutions are being pressurized to shift their focus from quantitative expansion, to an emphasis on quality. To enhance quality it is necessary to understand the level of satisfaction of the customers of the service function. Prior to this identifying the customers and their needs is required.

2. Need of Implementation of TQM

Service quality has become a key concern in higher education. Quality is one parameter that sets one institute apart from the rest and forms the basis of their survival (Aly and Akpovi, 2001). Defining a way to measure quality in higher education is a complex issue (Parri, 2006). As services offered by education are intangible and difficult to measure, there is no specific definition of quality for management education sector (Michael, 1998). Hence a dire need of implementing TQM is felt. To implement TQM it is necessary to understand the customers of Higher education and their needs from the institutions.

3. Customers of Higher Education

Some researchers described students as the primary stakeholders whereas some others believed that industry, faculty, administrators, society and even parents were the stakeholders of higher education. Hill, (1995) mentioned that students are the primary customers of Higher Education Organizations (HEOs) and hence these organizations should gather information on students' expectations at their time of entry in the university as well as at different instances to manage their expectations and align the expectations closely to what can be delivered by way of service quality. Voss et al, (2007) also considered students as the primary stakeholders. Owlia and Aspinwall (1996), stated that students are the primary customers whereas alumni, parents, employers, employees, government, industry and society may be considered as secondary customers. Hwang and Teo (2001) identified the government, private companies, industries, local communities, citizens, alumni groups, etc. as the customer groups. Employers (Coll et al, 2000; Chua, 2004) parents, students, faculty members (Chua, 2004) have been considered the customers of higher education. Sahney et al, (2004) suggested that "Delighting the customer", is the core message of total quality management (TQM) and, hence, there is a need to identify and apply the relevant concepts of TQM to each and every aspect of academic life in Higher Education system i.e. to the teaching, learning and administrative activities. Stukalina, (2012) brought to surface that Higher education institutions need strategic initiative and long-term action plan for regular educational environment evaluation and measuring student's satisfaction. Ali and Zairi, (2005) stated that to understand fundamental concepts on the nature of service quality in Higher Education, it would be useful to develop and strengthen a theoretical framework of research within the relevant context.

4. Understanding Needs of Customers

There are numerous customers delineated in the literature but the students have been considered as the primary stakeholders by majority of them. Hence, the present study focuses on the requirements of the students from the Higher Education Institutions. A forced choice questionnaire consisting of 20 parameters was administered to 200 students from 20 different institutions. The students were asked to rate each parameter on the Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1-not at all important, 2-Somewhat Important, 3- Important, 4-Very Important and 5-Extremely Important. The questions focused on the following parameters:

- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Faculty
- Infrastructure
- Library
- Placement
- International tie ups
- Extracurricular activities
- Student driven activities
- Media and Press coverage
- Food
- Lodging
- Transport
- Industry Involvement
- Projects
- Summer Internships
- Funding for participation in events
- Scholarships and Awards
- Medical Facility
- Loan Facility

The method of Simple random sampling was adopted to select the sample for the study. Ten students from each college participated in the study. This was done to enhance the validity of the data.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

On taking the mean of values for each parameter, the following values were obtained (Refer Table 1)

Sr. No	Parameter	Mean score	Rank
1	Curriculum	4.2	6
2	Pedagogy	4.8	2
3	Faculty	4.5	3
4	Infrastructure	4.1	7
5	Library	3.8	10
6	Placement	4.9	1
7	International tie ups	3.6	12
8	Extracurricular activities	2.9	14
9	Student driven activities	4.3	5
10	Media and Press coverage	2.7	16
11	Food	3.9	9
12	Lodging	3.4	13
13	Transport	2.8	15
14	Industry Involvement	4.2	6
15	Projects	4.4	4
16	Summer Internships	4.3	5
17	Funding for participation in events	4	8
18	Scholarships and Awards	4	8
19	Medical Facility	3.8	10
20	Loan Facility	3.7	11

Table 1: Ranking of Parameters

The percentage of mean scores is calculated and the cumulative percentage of the same is obtained. The parameters up to cumulative percentage of 50% are considered as those needs which are important to the students. The top ranking needs of students from the Higher education Institutions as per the values obtained in Table 1 are shown in Table 2 below:

Rank	Parameter	Mean Score	% Mean Score	Cumulative %
1	Placement	4.9	6.26	6.26
2	Pedagogy	4.8	6.13	12.39
3	Faculty	4.5	5.75	18.14
4	Projects	4.4	5.62	23.75
5	Student driven activities	4.3	5.49	29.25
5	Summer Internships	4.3	5.49	34.74
6	Curriculum	4.2	5.36	40.10
6	Industry Involvement	4.2	5.36	45.47
7	Infrastructure	4.1	5.24	50.70
8	Funding for participation in events	4.0	5.11	55.81
8	Scholarships and Awards	4.0	5.11	60.92
9	Food	3.9	4.98	65.90
10	Library	3.8	4.85	70.75
10	Medical Facility	3.8	4.85	75.61
11	Loan Facility	3.7	4.73	80.33
12	International tie ups	3.6	4.60	84.93
13	Lodging	3.4	4.34	89.27
14	Extracurricular activities	2.9	3.70	92.98
15	Transport	2.8	3.58	96.55
16	Media and Press coverage	2.7	3.45	100.00
		78.3		

Table 2: Top ranking needs of Students from Higher education institutions

6. Conclusion

If the Higher Education Institutions implement TQM so that the needs of students such as Placement, Pedagogy, Faculty, Projects, Student driven activities, Summer Internships, Curriculum, Industry involvement and Infrastructure are satisfied, the higher education institutions will scale high on their quality. Thus TQM can be applied to these parameters in Higher Education Institutions and continuous improvement in their quality should be done so as to satisfy the customers (here students) of Higher Education Institutions.

7. Limitations and Scope for Further Research

The paper has studied only students as the customers whereas there are various other customers such as Faculty, Parents, Society, Industry, Administration, Government etc. All these customers and their needs need to be understood for successful implementation of TQM.

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