RESEARCH ARTICLE

STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE: QUALITY EDUCATION THROUGH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

Quality in any deliverable is non-negotiable. To ensure quality, institutions seek accreditation. The definition of quality is varied and highly contextualized. Efforts should be invested in acquiring the definition of the term quality particularly from the various perspectives of the stakeholders of the higher learning institutions. Stakeholders' valuable input can contribute to improved quality assurance framework. This study determined the definition of quality from the stakeholders of accredited Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs). The stakeholders' definition of quality was determined through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The participants, selected by purposive sampling, were composed of administrators, teachers and students from eight (8) institutions accredited by PACUCOA, PAASCU and AACCUP. The participants were presented with Total Quality Management (TQM) and CHED definition of quality. Using Kendall's W, the concordance of stakeholders' definition of quality was determined. There was no perfect concordance on the six definitions of quality but all the categories of stakeholders (administrators, teachers and students) are in complete agreement at rank 1 that quality is defined as continuous involvement. Satisfaction of the stakeholders of the continuous improvement efforts is the ultimate measure of the quality of any deliverable. Being exposed to the accreditation process, stakeholders in accredited institutions have observed and have accepted that continuous improvement is a consequence of accreditation. Therefore, quality education is achieved through continuous improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Sensitivity to the changes is necessary and their implications need to be anticipated. The Philippines has to keep up with these changes in the tertiary educational system. The dynamic nature of the educational system is parallel to the rapidly changing societal demands. These demands can be translated as the changing needs and quality expectations of the stakeholders. Thus, an analysis of the stakeholders' perspective of quality is a necessary step towards a more responsive and comprehensive quality education. Basic precept in TQM (Total Quality Management) is that the responsibility for quality is not restricted to the organization's quality assurance department, but instead a guiding philosophy shared by everyone in an organization (Travers, 2007). With this in mind, it is of great importance that the perspectives of the stakeholders from different educational institutions accredited by major accrediting bodies be considered when determining academic quality.

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Literature Review

The concept of quality assurance originated in the manufacturing sector (OED, 2006). Experts of quality like William Deming developed quality models and ideas such as Total Quality Management (Hoyer, 2001). TQM emphasized customer satisfaction, employee involvement and continuous improvement as mechanisms of quality assurance. The principles of quality are consequently applied in the educational institutions. CHED (Commission on Higher Education) defined quality as "alignment and consistency of the learning environment with the institution's vision, mission, and goals demonstrated by exceptional learning and service outcomes and the development of a culture of quality". There are variations in the definition of quality. Dew (2009) defined quality as endurance, quality as luxury and prestige; quality as conformance to requirements; quality as continuous improvement; quality as value-added. ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 9001 defined quality as "the appropriateness of the service or product according to the requirements of the customer" (Savga, 2013). While Trompeta (2004) suggested that for quality to be achieved, it involves continuous improvement.

Table 1. Degree of Concordance on the Perception of Quality

	PACUCOA P=29		PAASCU P=30		AACCUP P=47		All stakeholders P=106		
Definition of Quality	Ave	rank	ave	rank	Ave	rank	Ave	rank	Interpretation
continuous improvement	2.29	1	3.2	1	1.19	1	2.64	1	Complete agreement
satisfaction of stakeholders	3.57	2	3.38	2	2.13	4	3.42	2	Incomplete agreement
culture of excellence	3.62	3	3.97	5	1.83	2	3.62	3	Disagreement
involvement of employees	4.0	4	3.87	4	1.85	3	3.67	4	Incomplete agreement
fitness of purpose	4.03	5	3.67	3	2.17	5	3.93	5	Incomplete agreement
quality as exceptional	4.10	6	4.32	6	2.23	6	4.23	6	Complete agreement

W= 0.797
Chi-square= 11.95
df=5
p value= 0.035

Scale of Agreement:
3 out of 3 groups of stakeholders have the same rank = complete agreement
2 out of 3 groups of stakeholders have the same rank= incomplete agreement
All 3 groups of stakeholders have different ranks = disagreement

Table 2. Degree of Concordance on The Perception of Quality

	Administrators P=34		Teachers P=32		Students P=40		All Stakeholders P= 106		Interpretation
Definition of Quality	Ave	rank	Ave	rank	ave	rank	Ave	rank	
continuous improvement	2.85	1	2.56	1	2.6	1	2.64	1	Complete agreement
satisfaction of stakeholders	3.71	4	3.63	3	3.1	2	3.42	2	Disagreement
culture of excellence	3.36	2	3.55	2	3.99	5	3.62	3	Incomplete agreement
involvement of employees	3.5	3	3.94	5	3.7	3	3.67	4	Incomplete agreement
fitness of purpose	4.14	5	3.89	4	3.9	4	3.93	5	Incomplete agreement
quality as exceptional	4.44	6	4	6	4.34	6	4.23	6	Complete agreement

W= 0.784126984
chi= 11.76190476
df=5 degrees of freedom
p= 0.038199967 probability value

Scale of Agreement:
3 out of 3 groups of stakeholders have the same rank = complete agreement
2 out of 3 groups of stakeholders have the same rank= incomplete agreement
All 3 groups of stakeholders have different ranks = complete disagreement

Another definition suggests that the stakeholders' needs and expectations determine the stakeholders' perspectives of quality. Berry (2015) suggested that the need for quality in higher education is created by societal expectations of employers, students, and internal constituents. Customer satisfaction largely depends on the degree to which an organization meets or surpasses customer expectations. The definition of quality is based on the satisfaction of the stakeholders' expectation (Anis, A. *et al*, 2014). Thus, the actual influence of stakeholders can be further optimized in higher education institutions (Westerheijden, 2013). In these varied perspectives of quality, the most important consideration is the perspective of the stakeholder. This is emphasized by Cheng (2001) in her Satisfaction Model. This model assumes that the satisfaction of strategic constituencies of an education institution is critical to its survival in the community. According to Cheng, education quality mainly refers to the extent to which the performance of an education institution can satisfy the needs and expectations of its powerful stakeholders. Therefore, satisfaction of powerful stakeholders is often used as the critical element to assess quality in education institution.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher utilized the mixed method. To substantiate the data, the FGD (Focus Group Discussion) was conducted in eight colleges/universities which are accredited by the three major accrediting bodies in the Philippines, namely: PACUCOA, PAASCU, AACCUP. The researcher utilized an interview guide. Choice of institutions were based on accreditation status, LET performance, prestige and surge of enrollment. The participants were composed of 34 administrators, 32 teachers and 40 students. Participant (P) number 1 to 29 come from. Schools accredited by accrediting body 1. Participant (P) number 30 to 59 come from schools accredited by accrediting body 2.

Participant (P) number 60 to 106 come from schools accredited by accrediting body 3. The ranks assigned by each participant for each definition of quality were tabulated and averaged. To determine the degree of concordance of stakeholders' perception or definition of academic quality the data were statistically analyzed using Kendall of concordance. The SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) was used to determine the Kendall of concordance. There were two categories of concordance that were analyzed: The first category was the degree of concordance of the perception of quality of the research participants or stakeholders from the institutions accredited by the three accrediting bodies; the second category was the degree of concordance of the perception of quality of the three groups of stakeholders: the students, teachers and administrators. Perception of quality refers to the research participants' definition of quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quality assurance needs conformance to requirements. However, the institution might have quality expectations that may be out of date (Dew, 2009). Thus, continuous improvement is necessary. Tables 1 and 2 show six definitions of Quality based on the TQM and CHED definition of quality. The average of the ranks given by all stakeholders for each definition of quality are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Definition of Quality by Accrediting Body

Presented in Table 1 are the ranking of the stakeholders categorized according to the accrediting body of their institution. Based on the over-all ranking, the institutions consider continuous improvement, satisfaction of stakeholders and the culture of excellence as the definition of quality. Furthermore, results show that the institutions accredited by the three major accrediting bodies have intermediate level of concordance W= 0.787 at p value 0.035 in their definition of

quality. All the institutions are in concordance that quality can be defined as continuous improvement. The three groups of accredited institutions rank continuous improvement as the number one (1) definition of quality. This implies that the institutions understand that quality can only be achieved through continuous improvement. Furthermore, this means continuous improvement is expected in any institution. This could also mean an unsatisfied expectation of continuous improvement of the stakeholders. Continuous improvement is a journey and not a destination. The journey to achieving quality involves doing small, incremental changes all the time. Thus, being exposed to the accreditation process, stakeholders in academic institutions have observed and have accepted the fact that incremental change and continuous improvement is inevitable in order to achieve and maintain quality. For quality to be achieved, it involves continuous improvement (Trompeta, 2004). This explains why quality is defined by the stakeholders as continuous improvement. Institutions that have imbibed the culture of excellence have imbibed the culture of continuous improvement. So, quality means achieving the fastest means of innovation and improvement in all aspects of an institution (Dew, 2009). Simply put, quality is defined as continuous improvement. This implies a dynamic quality assurance mechanisms for accredited schools where change is expected. Standards of quality will keep levelling up and continuous improvement efforts will never cease.

The stakeholders from institutions have incomplete agreement that quality can be defined as satisfaction of stakeholders, involvement of employees/stakeholders and fitness of purpose. Satisfaction of stakeholders and the involvement of employees / stakeholders are two of the pillars of Total Quality Management (TQM). Satisfaction of stakeholders was rank two (2) in both while it was rank 4 in accrediting body 1 and 2 accrediting body 3 accredited schools. Furthermore, the involvement of employees /stakeholders was rank four (4) in both accrediting body 1 and 2 while it was rank three (3) in accrediting body 3. Institutions accredited by accrediting body 1 and 2 have similarities in their perspectives on quality. These similarities may be attributed to the nature of these institutions being private institutions. Different institutions agree on their assigned rank to definition of quality as exceptional at rank six (6). Although the stakeholders concord on the definition that quality means being exceptional, it is the least considered definition. This means, the stakeholders are more concerned of seeing continuous improvements (rank 1) and satisfying the stakeholders (rank 2) in the institution rather than surpassing the minimum standard or being considered the best. Disagreement was seen in the definition of quality as the culture of excellence. However, the culture of excellence was the 3rd in the over-all ranking. This implies that the culture of excellence is expected and practiced in the institutions. Whereas, with accredited by accrediting body 2 institutions, perhaps the culture of excellence is best exemplified in the continuous improvement and satisfaction of the stakeholders since these are rated as 1st and 2nd rank, respectively.

Definition of Quality by the Stakeholders

Presented in Table 2 are the ranking of the stakeholders categorized according to the kind of stakeholders. Based on the over-all ranking, the stakeholders consider continuous improvement, satisfaction of stakeholders and the culture of excellence as the top three (3) definitions of quality. Kendal's

W= 0.784 at p value = 0.038 determined that there is an intermediate degree of concordance on the definition of quality. Two groups of stakeholders out of three agree that quality refers to involvement of employees, fitness of purpose and culture of excellence. The three stakeholders disagree on their assigned rank to "satisfaction of stakeholders" as a definition of quality. The three groups of stakeholders agree on their assigned rank to definition of quality as "continuous improvement (rank 1) and quality as exceptional (rank 6). The top three ranks for the administrators are quality as continuous involvement, culture of excellence, involvement of employees, respectively. The top three definitions of quality for the teachers are continuous improvement, culture of excellence and satisfaction of stakeholders, respectively. For the students, quality is associated with continuous involvement, satisfaction of stakeholders and involvement of employees. Thus, there is no perfect concordance on the six definitions of quality but all the stakeholders are in complete agreement (at rank 1) that quality can be defined as continuous improvement. This means that, the stakeholders expect a quality institution to have very evident efforts for continuous improvement. Quality is defined as the satisfaction of fixed set of specifications and satisfaction of customer expectations (Hoyer, 2001). This suggests that either the stakeholders' expectations of continuous improvement are already satisfied or their expectations are yet to be fulfilled by the institutions.

Presented below is the transcript of the FGD that was conducted

It is never static (P99) or stagnant(P13,23). It is dynamic(P66). The world is changing(P18,19,28,48,84,99). We need to upgrade (P1,99), update (P1, 18,81), keep abreast and adapt(P19,35) to the changes of the students, the educational system (P76,104) and the environment (P28). There are so many changes in the 21st century (P18,104). We need to level up (P60), move up (P18), ascend, aspire to greater heights (P16). To achieve quality, we must be able to answer the needs of the client (P43,71), to the needs of the time (P19,99) must be relevant to the context of society and must respond to trends (P76,104). There are changes, there must be improvement (P84)

You will be obsolete if you do not improve (P69). Quality should be based on international standards (P69) to produce globally competitive graduates. The school has to be supportive. It is not only about the students and teachers, it is about the administrators (P18). It involves all the stakeholders (P5,77). They need to work together (P32).

It targets globally competitive graduates (P32). Quality is maintained for a long time. It is the basis of future improvement (P96). If there is quality improvement, it means the VM is achieved. (P88). If you are lagging behind in improvement, you will have less enrollees and low rating (P105)

Seventy (70) of the 106 FGD participants (P) defined quality as continuous improvement. Their responses can be summarized as follows: Quality involves continuous improvement or upgrading. Maintaining quality in a system is dynamic, responsive and adaptable to the changing needs of the clients and the changing trends of time. It must be relevant to the changing context of society and international standards.

Furthermore, to achieve continuous improvement, all stakeholders must be involved. Change is happening in great pace and magnitude. The corpus of knowledge is growing exponentially (Schwab,2017). This greatly affects the educational system. The educational system must therefore be continually improving. Stakeholders or research participants see this reality. It is no surprise that they concord that continuous improvement is the primary definition of quality. According to Anis and Abdullah (2014), the definition of the term quality education has been highly contested, considerably vague and highly contextualized. Efforts should be invested in acquiring the definition of the term particularly from the various perspectives of the stakeholders of the higher learning institutions. As shown in the statistical analysis and the FGD transcript, the perspectives of the stakeholders on the definition of quality are highly contextualized. This means, the stakeholders define quality based on the context of the institution and the stakeholders. This explains why there is no perfect concordance on the six definitions of quality. However, a vey striking result is that there is perfect/complete agreement among the stakeholders that quality is synonymous to continuous improvement. The next top rank definition of quality, which is satisfaction of the stakeholders relates to the definition of quality as continuous improvement. The needs and expectations of the stakeholders change through time. Consequently, continuous improvement is necessary to keep up with these changes. Stakeholders expect continuous improvement from quality institutions. Thus, stakeholders are satisfied when there is continuous improvement. In addition, the involvement of employees who have imbibed the culture of excellence will insure continuous improvement in the institution or college. With these elements present, the institution can be considered of quality. The stakeholders' perception of the definition of quality is aligned with the Total Management (TQM) theory and Stakeholders' Satisfaction Theory. The result support the researcher's claim on two points. First: based on the Stakeholders' Satisfaction Theory, stakeholders can give valuable feedback towards improvement of the quality. Second: that the principles of TQM which was originally applied in industry are very much evident in academic institutions. As shown in the result, the definitions of quality with high level of concordance are from the definitions of TQM. This means that, for an academic institution to ensure and sustain quality, it must continually seek improvement with the involvement of the employees to satisfy the stakeholders. Being exposed to the accreditation process, stakeholders in accredited institutions have observed and have accepted that continuous improvement is a consequence of accreditation.

Conclusion

The stakeholders' perception of the definition of quality is aligned with the Total Management (TQM) theory and Stakeholders' Satisfaction Theory. Satisfaction of the stakeholders' needs and expectations is the ultimate measure of the quality of any deliverable. Continuous improvement is the stakeholders' measure of quality and quality education is achieved through continuous improvement.

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