Quality in Education - Approaches and Frameworks

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Abstract

Having an essential role in attaining a country's economic development, education is one of the core services delivered by the government. However, the extension of the educational services delivered does not enhance the anticipated outcomes unless a certain quality norm is sustained. That is why it is vital to follow the enhancement of quality in all spheres of education. The notion of quality in education is not new, being a multidimensional concept.

The paper analyzes existing approaches and frameworks in the area of quality in education, proposing an integrated model. This model is built on two levels (the quality of the educational system and the quality of educational institutions), it uses the management by objectives method and as the integrating factor the stages of the PDCA cycle.

Key words: quality, educational system, educational institution, quality in education
J.E.L. classification: I21, L15

1. Introduction

Quality education is the foundation for the development of any country. Education is a fundamental and primordial condition for the transfer of knowledge, skills and abilities, but also for the establishment of a civic consciousness that contributes to the full development of individuals. Quality education is the most important tool that can induce changes across society.

The notion of quality in education has no specific definition, with different researchers interpreting the concept differently. Differences can be found not only in the nature of the definition of this concept, but also in the manner of measuring quality. Although research initiatives have been undertaken worldwide to identify quality indicators in education, the measurement of educational outcomes, at present, there is no uniform and generally accepted vision.

UNESCO (2009) defines education as a set of processes and results that are characterized qualitatively. Increasing access to schools should not be an important objective, but increasing access to quality education services should be the fundamental objective of any educational system. The major objectives of the education systems should be cognitive development and encouraging the creative and emotional development of students. These objectives are addressed in different ways in different education systems. (UNESCO 2009).

UNESCO (2005) highlights the importance of the quality of education offered in schools, showing that quality in education will later provide the beneficiary with higher incomes and increased professional satisfaction. The higher quality of educational institutions improves students' cognitive skills that directly influence future earnings, labor productivity and overall economic growth. Currently, educational institutions also play an essential role in developing non-cognitive characteristics among students, such as honesty, responsibility, determination, empathy, etc. Educational institutions play an instrumental role, being a means by which individuals achieve their

own socio-economic and cultural objectives contributing to the development of society (UNESCO, 2005).

With the acceleration of globalization, national education authorities have become more and more preoccupied of the quality and competitiveness of their systems. Increased labor mobility (particularly large within the European Union) has raised concerns about the compatibility of cognitive skills and transferability in terms of qualifications. This phenomenon has led to an expansion of the monitoring and regulation of educational systems and the development of national and transnational learning assessment bodies using comparative criteria. Critics have shown that the standardization of cognitive abilities does not take cultural differences into account, the quality of educational services being affected by the propensity to standardization. It is necessary to ensure a balance between ensuring the relevance of education and the socio-cultural characteristics of pupils.

The paper is structured in five sections. In the first section, we made an introduction to the research theme, and in the second section we present theoretical background. Section three emphasizes research methodology, and section four highlights the results of research proposing an integrated quality model in education. Section five presents the conclusions and outlined future research directions.

2. Theoretical background

As public services provided by governments to citizens (education, health, safety, etc.) have expanded and captured much of the country's budgets, the government and communities have begun to call for an improvement in the quality of these services to show citizens the added value created through these services. In this way, quality issues have crossed the border between the business world and the public sector. Quality concepts of service have adapted to the environment of public institutions to respond to the specific environments of educational institutions (Linston, 1999).

Jain and Prasad (2018) show that there are two aspects of quality in education: "the quality of the educational system as a whole" (including aspects of central and local education, schools, teaching and learning environments, educational strategies and policies, etc.).) and the "quality of educational services" (including the quality of the teaching and learning process, the modernization and continuous improvement of the curriculum, the quality of educational resources, etc.).
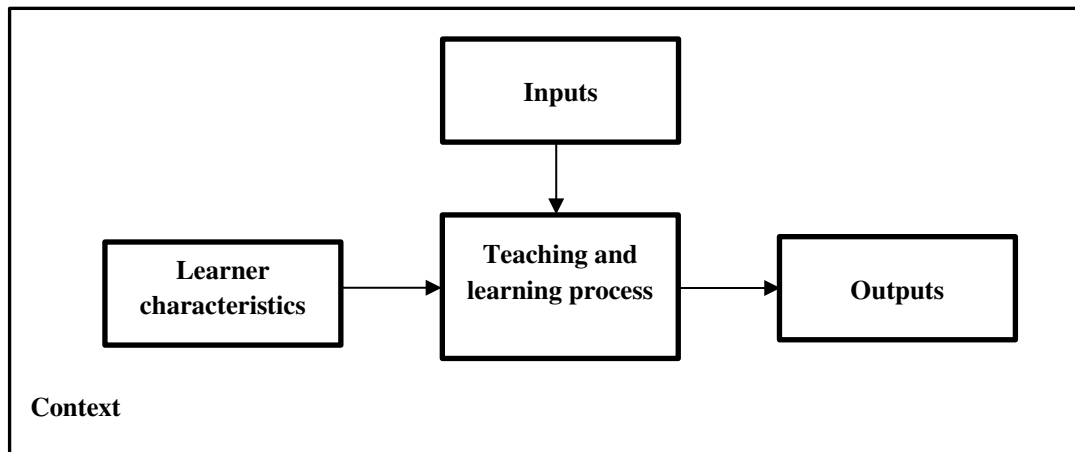
Education is a service and not a product, its quality can not be measured solely by the outputs. Its quality should also be reflected in the service delivery process. The quality of educational services should take into consideration determinants such as:

- ensuring human resources (talented and well motivated teachers),
- providing material resources (well-equipped buildings, manuals, modern teaching materials, specific equipment, classical and digital libraries),
- providing of information resources (modern curriculum and continuously adapted to the educational and labor market trends, modern didactic processes that take into account the characteristics of the individuals to whom they are addressed).
- provision of financial resources (which allows the operational functioning of educational institutions and the provision of other categories of resources).

Grisay and Mahlck (1991) show that the quality of educational services has a three-dimensional approach, including inputs (financial, human and material resources), processes (information resources) and outputs (the results of educational services). UNICEF defines five dimensions of the quality of educational services: "students, environment, content, processes and outcomes" (UNICEF, 2000). These dimensions should encourage innovation and diversity (UNESCO, 2009).

UNESCO (2005) defined a "framework for understanding, monitoring and improving the quality in education". This framework comprises five components: learners characteristics, inputs (including human, financial, material, and informational resources), teaching and learning process, outputs, context (figure 1).

Figure no. 1. Framework for understanding, monitoring and improving the quality in education

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│                        ┌──────────────┐                       │
│                        │    Inputs    │                       │
│                        └──────┬───────┘                       │
│                               │                               │
│                               ▼                               │
│  ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐ │
│  │   Learner    │      │ Teaching and │      │   Outputs    │ │
│  │characteristics│─────▶│learning process│────▶│              │ │
│  └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘ │
│                                                               │
│  Context                                                      │
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Source: (Adapted from UNESCO, 2005, 36)

Characteristics of learners are determined by their capabilities and experience. These may be socio-economic conditions, health, residence, the cultural and religious environment and the quantity and nature of previous learning. The context refers to all outside conditions that are not related to learners. The relations between education system and society as whole are strong and each influences the other. The inputs are those that ensure the smooth running of educational processes. The teaching and learning process is the key component for human development and change. This component is influenced by learner characteristics, system and context entries. The results of education should be evaluated in the context of the established objectives. A distinction must be made between the results expressed by academic performance and the development of values, attitudes and behavior. This framework offers an opportunity to understand the different variables of the quality of educational services.

In examining the basic framework of educational services, Scheerens et al. (2011) listed six ways of defining the quality of education that emphasizes certain components, issues or relationships within the core framework: productivity view, perspective view, adaptation perspective, efficiency perspective, disjointed view. The adoption of one or other of these visions influences how the educational process is approached and the focus of the evaluation of the quality of the educational process.

To improve students performance, educational institutions need a strong and ambitious strategy to improve educational services. Developing a strategic approach to human resource management starts with understanding and accepting the need to intensely increase organizational performance, particularly with respect to student achievements (Odden and Kelly, 2008).

A strategy to improve education is the key to improving student performance. There are many elements of a strategy to improve education. A strategy could include improved training materials, curricular alignment, increased use of technologies, new school structures (such as the radical reduction of multiple layers of bureaucracy found in most educational institutions), extensive professional development, multiple complementary strategies, such as teacher guidance and summer schools, or involving more parents. A strategy for improving education could also include new approaches to governance and management (Henman and Milanowski, 2004).

3. Methodology

In order to identify the approaches and frameworks that are used in the education system in terms of quality, we conducted an exploratory research of the specialized literature on quality in the education sector. The research method used is of a qualitative nature, the techniques used to collect information being analyze, interpretation, synthesis, induction and deduction. In the construction of the model we propose, we will use the integration techniques.

4. Findings

The quality of education depends on the quality of teaching staff, on the governance of educational institutions, on the capacity and willingness of students to learn, and on the quality assurance of educational services.

Teachers are essential resources for effective implementation and delivery of educational policies and classroom objectives. Maintaining and enhancing educational standards is only possible through teachers. The lack of mismanagement of human resources within the education system reduces the performance of the system no matter how much it is invested in other resources.

A good leadership in school is absolutely necessary for quality education. Good leaders are the ones who have an essential role in improving the work of subordinate individuals and the organization as a whole. The quality of leadership can ensure a differentiation of the educational institution, allowing for good results and quality education processes (Sitnikov, 2011). Any educational institution needs effective proactive leadership that puts value in the quality of human resources and creates a synergic effect in the delivery of educational services.

Also, availability and learning ability can improve the quality of students. Students' learning abilities can be enhanced by two tools: focusing learning process on student and lifelong learning (Chalkey, 1994). Parental participation is essential to provide children with high quality education. Quality education requires a strong relationship between parents and school, which to be strengthened by stakeholders (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Another important part of quality education is quality assurance. Quality assurance is usually done in accordance with each country's government policy that offers educational opportunities to individuals according to national priorities and strategies (Hendel and Lewis, 2005). The educational service will be of high quality if there are specific departments at each level of education provision that conceive and ensure the sustainability of educational quality. Byrne et al. (2013) show that quality assurance is built around of notions as accountability and continuous improvement of quality.

China, R. (2014) distinguishes between two categories of quality approaches in education: quality of the national education system and quality of the educational institutions. Building on these approaches and the UNESCO "framework for understanding, monitoring and improving the quality of education", we believe that it is required an "integrated model of quality in education". This model is built on two levels: the quality of the educational system and the of educational institutions. In order to ensure the coherence of the model and the strategic character, we used the management by objectives method. Designing and applying management by objectives involves the following steps:

- establishing the fundamental objectives of the education system,
- establishment of derived, specific and individual objectives at the level of local structures, educational institutions and individuals,
- development of the other components of management by objectives (actions programs, time schedules, budgets, list of methods and techniques, instructions),
- tracking the achievement of the objectives (this stage is based on the mechanism of feedback through which operative intervention takes place in order to take prophylactic or corrective decisions).
- evaluating the achievement of objectives, making corrections and resuming the process (comparison of the results achieved and the objectives set at the beginning, and the evaluation is used to set the targets for the next period).

As a model integrator we used the PDCA cycle steps: planning, action, verification, implementation (Figure 2).

The process of quality assurance can be "restricted" to the ability of management to permanently establish, develop and apply all corrective and preventive actions related to the quality processes. The quality assurance process in education have to be correlated and supplemented with the other components of the quality management system: planning, control and improvement, to which it adds a tool of great importance, already used in the "construction" of European references in the area of education quality: PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-act).

Figure no. 2. Integrated Quality Model in Education
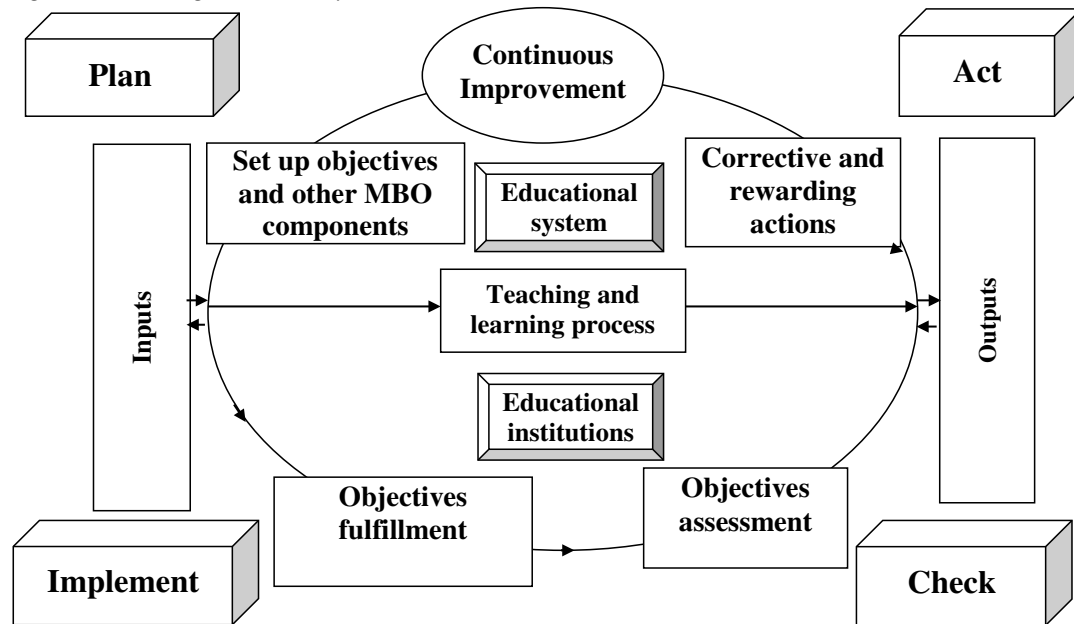
Source: (own concept)

5. Conclusions

Quality in education means an approach to quality management at the educational system level. This is, first and foremost, strategic visions issued at the system level. In this context, public education policies can play the role of strategic visions, as long as they are planned prospectively, on a long and medium term basis. Quality management in education means quality management implemented and developed at the level of education system. Quality management in education should include a systemic view of quality.

A deep understanding of the need to improve the performance of the education system can be the motivation factor to stimulate the creation of a strategy to improve the quality of education. Following research into the literature and the observations we have made, we considers that it is absolutely necessary that a quality assurance strategy in education also includes an approach based on management by objectives strengthened through the PDCA cycle. In this sense, we have built an integrated model of quality in education that can be a benchmark for both the higher management of the education system and the management of the educational institutions. In future work, we will seek to improve the model and build the tools needed to implement the integrated model in practice.

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