Quality in Education: An Attempt at Explaining its Dynamism

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Abstract
Education as an enterprise of preparing learners or students for future tasks by equipping them with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude is a complex venture. This is partly because stakeholders in education are many and has varied expectations; education has multiple clients; and products supplied by education are also different. Due to the multiple nature of stakeholders in education, expectations of these stakeholders are most of the times not the same. This makes quality in education quite amorphous. And this quality continues to change as stakeholders’ expectations also change. This puts quality in education on a slope of continuous change. This article attempts to explain the dynamic nature of quality in education in the context of the multiplicity of the stakeholders and their expectations. It reviews literature on the concept of quality and then argues that due to the multiple stakeholders of education and their different expectations, coupled with the multiple clientele and products of education, quality in education is dynamic and cannot be static.

Key Words: Dynamic, Static, Quality, and Education.

Introduction
Heraclitus the philosopher of Ephesus (530-470 BC) is credited with the philosophy of constant change; nature according to him is in a state of constant flux (Rayner, 2008). The significance of this profound saying appears to be more relevant in this twenty first century than ever before; with the rapid and in some cases revolutionary changes which characterise every aspect of human life including education, the world indeed is in a state of constant flux.

The thrust of this article is to advance reasons in support of the proposition that “Quality in Education is dynamic and not static”, and to draw the attention of readers especially management and stakeholders in education to the need for continuous improvement in quality of education. This article provides brief explanation of quality; quality in education; and then gives reasons to support the dynamic nature of quality education.

Quality
Definitions of ‘quality’ by three renowned quality experts; Philip Crosby, Edward Deming and Joseph Juran will be a fitting way of capturing what quality means for the purpose of this article. Cited in Suarez (1992), Crosby defines quality as conformance to requirements (Crosby, 1979); for Juran, quality is fitness for use (Juran and Gryna, 1988); and according to Deming quality is what the customer says it is. From these definitions quality can be conceptualised as an objective attribute of a product which can be measured and assigned a value; quality can also be viewed as the consistency between what a product is meant for and how well it lives to its expectation; moreover, quality can also be explained as a subjective construct which lives in the psyche of the customer. Clearly one can see that the three quality gurus referred to, view quality in different lights, but one thing stands out of all definitions of quality and that is; quality is a desirable thing and provides utility for the user and a reward for the supplier.

Quality in Education
Quality in education appears more difficult to define even than the concept ‘quality’ itself. Quality in education means different thing for different people in different times and space. According to UNESCO (2005) quality education is about education for all, and is also about students achieving decent learning outcomes, and being equipped with values and skills that make them useful to themselves and to their societies. Quality education consists of effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance, and sustainability (Barret et al., 2006). In Ghana the meaning of quality education has
continuously changed over the years; at a point in time quality education meant the extent to which students were able to absorb the facts taught them by teachers; at another time it was about how well schools managed and utilised available educational supplies; to a large extent quality education in Ghana has been about teaching and learning outcomes, but in recent times issues of accessibility have also found expression in Ghana’s definition of quality education (Opuku-Asare, 2006).

It is quite obvious that one cap fits all definition of quality education will not be appropriate because the different stakeholders have their own perspective of quality education; whilst the student might view quality education as acquisition of relevant skills and competencies which will gain him/her a decent job and a respectable social status, the employer will consider quality in terms of how well graduates perform on the job to ensure profit maximisation, the government’s view is likely to relate to effective and efficient use of school resources and the extent to which students are trained to become good and productive citizens, and the list goes on. The difference in views about quality by the different stakeholders in education makes the dynamic nature of quality of education more complex.

**The Dynamic nature of Quality in Education**

Products change, customers’ expectations change, times change, cultures change, and so do quality; real or imaginary. Moreover, new products and services surface now and then displacing existing products and redefining their qualities. An emphatic statement can be made that quality in education is among the most dynamic things that can ever be found under the sun. This is because education, by nature is a major driver of change and civilisation and as such continues to change with new discoveries and innovations in time and space. In addition, the stakeholders in education: the learner (student); parents and guardians; the industry and employers; the community (both immediate and extended); the state/government; teachers, other staff and educational managers; sponsors of education; and I dare say the world in general have varied expectations of educational processes and outcomes, and these expectations are not static but change continuously, making quality in education not static but dynamic.

**Education has different stakeholders with different interests**

Stakeholders are individuals or groups who have interest in the success of an organisation in fulfilling its mandate over time and who are affected positively or negatively from the success or failure of the organisation (Paine and McCann, 2009; Gross and Godwin, 2005). Key stakeholders in education include the government, employers, students, parents, management and staff of educational institutions, the society, global academic community, donors and sponsors of education, professional bodies, and the media (Contact, 2006; Paine and McCann, 2009; Singh and Weligamage, 2012).

The interest and expectations of the numerous stakeholders in education are different and vary over time. For instance from the perspective of the student, education should lead to personal success throughout school, future opportunity, appropriate academic environment, skills of employability, lifelong learning experience and achievements. The government expects smooth functioning of the educational system, good governance, prudent management of resources, good returns on taxpayers’ money, competent, productive and good citizens. Employers expect skilful and market oriented graduates who will help industry maximise stakeholders’ value. Parents and guardians expect academic success, opportunities for the students, and students who will grow to become skilful and responsible in the future. The school management sees quality education in the light of the achievement of the mission and vision of the educational establishment; and the larger community expects employable and responsible graduates who will contribute to the development of the larger community and serve as positive role models, to mention but a few of the expectations of the many stakeholders in education (Nicholson, 2011; Gross and Godwin, 2005; Singh and Weligamage, 2010, Paine and McCann, 2009; Eaton, 2006).

Due to the different and constantly changing expectations of stakeholders in education, what is perceived as quality also changes in line with changing expectations. This makes quality in education very dynamic. Managers of educational institutions especially higher institutions are expected to engage all the stakeholders at least all the major stakeholders to know what they expect so that all the
expectations can be taken on board and harmonised in order to be able to produce educational outcomes which are consistent with the expectations of the stakeholders.

**Quality in Education is context bound**

Educational institutions are set up to achieve various objectives, and these objectives are usually captured in the mission and vision statements of these institutions. The conditions under which institutions operate and the societal needs that these institutions seek to address also differ. Therefore one cannot compare the quality of one institution with that of another without taking into consideration the context in which these institutions operate. This is to say that quality in education is context bound, and whether or not an institution is achieving quality will depend on the extent to which the institution is fulfilling what it has promised to do and whether the expectations of its stakeholders are being met or not (The Inter-University Council for East Africa, 2010).

Because educational institutions operate in different contexts and these contexts are not static but change in course of time and under different circumstances, perceptions of quality also change as the contexts change. Quality in education can therefore be said to be dynamic and not static.

**Education has multiple clients/customers**

Education especially higher education has multiple customers (Pereira and Da-Silva, 2003), the main ones being; students, alumni, employers, education authorities, families and accrediting bodies (Robinson and Long, 1987). Deming’s view of quality stresses the importance of the customer; quality according to him is what the customer says it is (Chandrupatla, 2009; Suarez, 1992).

If quality in education is what its customers say it is then as their views about education change, quality will also change. As students expectations just like the expectations of other customers of education change over time (Utahloy International School Guangzhou, 2012) quality of education cannot be static, but it is dynamic; as it changes when the customers of education change their views about what quality in education means.

**Education has multiple products**

A product can be defined as anything that can be offered to a market with the expectation of satisfying some wants or needs (Kotler et al., 2007). Education offers a number of products with the expectation that these products will satisfy certain needs and wants. To the learner/student education offers a programme of study as a product; it is common knowledge that programmes of study especially in higher educational institutions are among the most marketed merchandise in these current times of knowledge economies. For example in Ghana currently, business management and administration programmes are among the most marketed programmes in the tertiary educational institutions. Apart from the main programmes of study, some educational institutions also offer other skills and competencies including moral development, physical development through sports, effective communication and public speaking, and conflict management skills. Students who at a point in time were customers, patronising programmes of educational institutions, at another time become products which educational institutions sell to external customers such as employers.

Programmes of study as products of education change over time; the emphasis placed on programmes by educational institutions change with social and economic trends. For instance the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, which sometimes ago focused only on science and technical programmes has changed drastically over the years and presently one will find it difficult identifying the programme of study which is the main focus of the University; the sciences or the arts and social sciences. Again with the coming on stream of oil, higher educational institutions in Ghana are now directing their focus on oil and gas related programmes. The needs of employers also change over time, and as such the attributes they require of their employees also change. Presently, it is difficult to imagine an employer who will not demand ICT skills from employees. As the demand for programmes of study change over time and the expectations of employers from employees also keep changing, products offered by educational institutions cannot be static; they have to change with changing trends and conditions. This is another reason why quality in education is dynamic.
Apart from all the reasons mentioned in preceding paragraphs it is also worth noting that the world as a whole is not static. Dynamism is a necessary condition for survival, man has survived through ages because of the ability to adapt and change according to prevailing conditions. Knowledge, science, technology and innovation are very critical in the survival and development of the species Homo sapiens, and education is the embodiment and the key driver of all the changes that have occurred and continue to happen. To be able to perform its role as the agent of change and driver of development, quality in education cannot be static. So even the natural process of survival, growth and development makes change in education quality a necessary condition and a natural requirement. Quality in education can therefore not be static but it is dynamic.

Conclusion
The complex nature of education in terms of its multiple stakeholders, products and clients, makes it more dynamic than many other things. This is because all the multiple factors of education are in a constant process of change. With the different and varied opinions about quality as expressed by the various stakeholders, it becomes quite a complex task harmonising all the different expectations of the multiple stakeholders. This is a clear indication that quality culture is a requirement in all educational institutions. The need for staff well vest in quality management issues with the wherewithal in our educational institutions cannot be overemphasised.

The article argued that education has different stakeholders whose interests might be different, and therefore their view about quality may also not be the same; moreover, because interests and expectations change over time, expected quality also change, thereby defeating any argument about static quality in education. Further arguments raised include: the fact that education is context bound; education has multiple products and multiple clients; and education as a social entity has a natural tendency for change; all these push quality in education along the slope of dynamism. As a matter of fact, quality in education is dynamic and not static, therefore there is the need for managers in education to be abreast with stakeholders expectations so as to be in a better position to provide the kind of education which satisfies and delights stakeholders as much as possible.

References


