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# Quality Changes in Education

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# Quality Changes in Education

**Abstract:** *There has lately been increased awareness in the educational and training institutions that all is not well in their sectors, and their services need to be scrutinized to the extent that they are able to play their due role in the society and meet the national expectations and aspirations. Armed forces institutions have taken the lead in this direction by changing their mindset about provision of quality education and training services through effective implementation of ISO 9000 quality assurance standards. Good signs are that other educational institutions in the public sector like the Engineering Universities (NED and NWFP UET) are also in the process of following the suit. But I am not expecting substantial change in the quality standards of education at the national level till the time we address the quality of our education system at the grass root level and in particular the rural areas. Educational administrators in all the Provincial governments need to be motivated towards this end. Not only the public sector, but even our private schools need to be guided towards enhancement of their quality standards by implementing the principles of ISO 9000 QMS standards. We, The House of Quality, are proud that we are playing our part and have been associated with most of the quality efforts made in this field and have also been able to convince NPOs like Tameer e Millat Foundation and Sultana Foundation to join hands in waging a crusade against the traditional dogmatic way of education in our country. This article addresses the role that ISO 9000 can play in our educational institutions by enhancing their quality of education and provision of quality educational services.*

## Introduction

I'm excited and pleased. Why? Not only that The House of Quality has been instrumental in the achievement of ISO 9001 certification for the Pakistan Naval academy but because things that many of us in the quality circles have been talking about are beginning to happen. We're proving that Total Quality in Education is not theoretical rhetoric but, in fact, "a hands-on" leadership strategy that helps us improve and serve our customers more effectively. Till 1997, quality of education had only remained a theory that was discussed at the ICQC'95. It was during the address that I made to the quality management team of the College of E & ME in March 1998 that I saw some rays of hope that at last our dream would soon become a reality. This tough transition from theory to practicality-from debate to implementation has neither been smooth nor easy, it has been realized against all odds. It is a win of customer-focused and pro-active approach over the traditional dogmatic and reactive approach towards education.

What is TQ really about? Two things - customer focus and continuous improvement. That's what educators in the international arena are addressing in elementary, middle, and high schools; colleges and universities; and in adult education and lifelong learning environments. Let's first take a look at one of those two TQ areas of emphasis, customer focus.

## Customer Focus

The primary question is who are our customers and, just as important, are they being included in our individual TQ planning processes? "We know what's good for you, trust us. Here's our new plan." Sound familiar? Sure does. It's the attitude that even the QMT of College of E & ME faced when they started off with their interpretation of ISO 9000 as they were treating their educated students as their "products" - the kind that industry produces to meet the satisfaction of their clients. They were not

alone with this understanding, even the "In Scope" magazine of BVQI (Issue 22, Fall 1999) boasts of certifying a School District of Lancaster who are proud of their products (Educated Students). First we need to clarify this aspect in detail.

The fact is that ISO 9001:1994 standard, despite the definition of product given therein and the way the quality process has been presented and worded, is responsible for this misleading understanding and tends to push you towards that kind of interpretation of the product whereby the onus of responsibility of imparting quality learning shifts from the schools (and their teachers) on to the students. This is why the ISO 9000 is being reframed and rewritten into one of education's most important quality documents, Z1.11. It is at the draft international standards stage and should be available soon.

Somehow I have never liked and could not gulp the very idea of using the word product for the educated students. One tends to offend the dignity and the intelligence of students by terming them as the "products". Though they gain as a result of value added quality educational processes, they are not like a hardware in which you install software and then expect "you reap what you sow" or "garbage in, garbage out". Students are human beings and they are expected to individually react differently under different circumstances. Thus the term product should instead confine to the training material, curriculum or syllabus which is designed and developed to attain the learning objectives and learning outcomes.

Students at the most can be termed as the direct beneficiaries, and their sponsors (organizations, parents, society etc.) can be termed as the indirect beneficiaries. In all circumstances, a student could be an external customer as well as an internal customer to an educational or training institution as advocated in the EFQM model. When you take the direct and indirect beneficiaries as your customers you would focus on their learning requirements as well as other needs like both qualitative and quantitative views of knowledge. This not only ensures stipulation of learner characteristics (like learners abilities, interest in topic, concept of learning and approach to learning) but also due weightage is given to the teaching factors (like curriculum content, course structure, teaching methods, classroom climate, and sources of stress, workload, etc.).

This change about customer focus would however require a paradigm shift in the attitudes of our educationists and their administrators. I say so because when I see a beautifully designed national curricula by the Curricula Wing of the Govt of Pakistan in the form of a document but nowhere do find its manifestation in any of our schools. Here the question arises whether we really know what quality means or customer satisfaction is all about. What we require is change not only in the attitude and perception about education but also the will to implement it in true spirit. We are living in a society where the attitude of most of the schools is that the quality of education will improve only when society provides education with more money or when parents start producing brighter children. This is very unfortunate.

## **Need for Change in the Right Direction**

We all know that there are problems with our today's education system. School or college leaving students are not prepared to meet the demands of society. One cannot think of customer satisfaction if we don't know what is it that we have to satisfy. Money is not the key to improving quality of education. The quality of education will not improve until we become mission oriented, when administrators, teachers, staff, and school board members develop new attitudes that focus on leadership, teamwork, co-operation, accountability, and recognition.

But the tradition is preventing the educational processes to be changed into meeting the student needs. Parents on the one hand demand that the quality of education should improve, but at the same time do not support the efforts that are made to improve the education. They feel satisfied once our educational institutions regularly churn out 100% results with over inflated grades. In the primary schools we would find 90% of the students getting A+ or A-1. The child who comes first secures

99.75%, the second secures 99.5% and the last one in the class of 50 gets abysmally low 85%. But seldom would you find the parents worried about the way the results are suitably inflated. Schools are satisfied that the parents are happy and happy parents are happy that they are getting their money's worth and satisfied that their children are at least B+. A pat on the back and good bye to their future careers. Now they can easily work out quality for themselves once they end up in the public offices, in the industries, businesses or workplaces.

We would keep on adding students who are not prepared to become responsible and productive citizens until we bring meaningful changes in our education delivery processes with proper checks and balances. Quality management and ISO 9000 standard is the vehicle that our education professionals can use to cope up with the forces of change and effectively deal with the system failures that are preventing them from developing or implementing new educational processes that will improve the quality of education.

But the problem is that most of our educational professionals lack the knowledge or expertise to bring the requisite changes. This is where we need to seriously invest in developing quality awareness and providing knowledge and skills amongst the educationists and the teachers to successfully implement quality programmes in their educational institutions.

## **Teachers' Development**

We treat educational services also as another commercial business where teachers are treated as mere workers whereas the role of teachers and educators is not that of workers involved in value addition process of the products in the industries. Teaching is a noble and a specialized job but the treatment meted out to the teachers is, in my opinion, too degrading in our country. What respect a teacher derives from the society is evident from the fact that they, despite their masters degrees, do not even earn an amount equivalent to a domestic woman worker. Under the circumstances, the chances are that we shall fall prey to the dictates of the business and exhibit all the traits of a business person in the educational services as well. The seats of learning can not be entrusted the task of behaving like commercial enterprises, they would hardly achieve their mission if they start acting like one.

Teachers are the key to successful implementation of the quality programmes and need to be involved in all aspects of quality education programmes. To what extent educational processes can be controlled and improved upon however would largely depend upon the perception of educators about adoption of quality philosophy for education and the skills acquired by them in determining the course contents and developing syllabus in consonance with the national curricula, writing course objectives, designing task-related processes, developing quality characteristics that are measurable, and the development of a measurement system that enables them to document and demonstrate the added value of education for the students and the community.

Education professionals need to be made conscious of the fact that there are costs to the educational system when wrong things are done right or the right things are done wrong. These costs include wasted resources, lost opportunities to influence students, poor use of financial resources, job dissatisfaction, student disinterest, and lack of support from the community.

## **Continuous Improvement**

If implemented properly, Quality management can help education professionals cope with the changing environment at the global level and also enable them to monitor educational work processes so as to identify opportunities for improvement.

The process begins with the development of a quality vision and mission for the educational institution and for each department within the institution. The quality vision focuses on meeting the needs of the customers, total involvement of the community in the programme, developing systems to measure the added value of education, support systems that the staff and students need to manage change, and continuous improvement in the educational services.

The process of continuous improvement in the educational setting would however require proactive participation by all those involved with the well being of the society including members of the educational board, beneficiaries, stakeholders, school board of directors, community councils or neighbourhood associations, government agencies, NGOs & NPOs, religious organizations, educational institutions, and businesses (chambers of commerce). A School Management Committee (SMC) or a Quality Council (QC) at the community level can provide such a forum.

The structured approach of continuous improvement brings other factors into play, leadership and learning to name two. Meetings are more productive when active listening skills are among the participants' communication skills. TQ tools help to provide focus for citizen efforts.

At the very beginning of the process, the strategy should be to recruit those familiar with TQM who can act as facilitators and provide training for each team or community organization. A vision statement is developed so the community may share, support, and comment on it. The SMC then identifies and prioritizes the key issues facing the community. Using either the SMC or an open conference, each issue is examined and strategies to address the issues are developed.

Those strategies become a long-range plan presented to the SMC for comment and revision. Through feedback to the SMC or an annual community goals conference, more honoured citizens are involved, new teams are formed, and continuous improvement is built into the process.

The result is cohesive leadership, a clear vision for the community, a long-range plan, issues and strategies, organizations/teams trained in problem solving, and resources promoting TQM in your educational setting. A quality community knows where it is, and where it is going; has a plan for getting there and support structures in place; has constancy of purpose, and empowers people to act.

The question however is - are we willing to do it?

## **Conclusion**

Change is inevitable. Change is relentless and is taking place at a very fast pace. It sweeps over organizations that refuse to acknowledge it and it creates chaos when organizations fail to accept its presence and deal with it. Industry has learned: Change or die.

Our educational institutions too have started realizing and are showing their willingness to accept change. But unfortunately, they are changing at a slower pace than our ultimate customer - industry - would like. Thus the burden of teaching those skills which were required to be taught in the schools have fallen on the industries. With the high human turnover, industry is also reluctant to spend and invest in their human capital with the result that we are producing products of low quality leaving us further behind in the race of competition.

Our economy has moved from jobs involved in agriculture, to mass production. We are now in an information- and knowledge-based economy requiring greater educational levels for success. True, our school buildings have changed; some are even air-conditioned. We have new forms of technology, including computers, photocopy machines, faxes, and e-mail.

Yet the attitude remains the same and the school model has hardly changed. Our schools are organized after the industrial top-down management model designed to train people for low-skilled jobs requiring rote learning, with highly time-structured and tightly disciplined environments. In many classrooms, students still sit in straight rows. Teachers stand in front of the room, giving the perception of having all of the answers, using chalk-and-talk methods, pouring knowledge into the seemingly empty heads of students.

We stand poised to enter the 21st century with school calendars, teaching methods, and classroom designs developed in the 19th century.

We are furiously trying to row our education boat into the future while the boat is firmly tied to the rooted paradigms of the past. We cannot succeed as a nation until we untie the boat and row it towards the right direction.

The answer is obvious. Either we make the change or it will be made for us.

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**Engr Tariq Abdul Majid** is the Executive Director of The House of Quality, a premier national organization registered as Quality Management Consultant with Ministry of Science & Technology (Pakistan) and providing training-cum-consultancy services on ISO 9000 QMS, Change Management, and Quality Improvement to scores of organizations/companies particularly in the education sector.

An IRCA Registered Quality Auditor, he has conducted a number of IRCA approved ISO 9000 Lead Auditor Courses throughout Pakistan and abroad, has contributed many articles to the national dailies and working papers on Engineering and Quality Management.

He is a Life member of Pakistan Engineering Council, Associate Member of IEEE (USA), Member of Laser and Fibre Optics Society (USA), and included in the Millennium Edition of Marquis Who's Who in the World.