

Perceptions of Primary Schoolteacherstowardstotal Quality Management Practices in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

Improving the quality and relevance of education in Malawi has long been a goal of the sector as a whole. But how does one improve the quality of education, especially when so many factors are involved? Total Quality Management (TQM), which originated in the 1980s, has emerged as a process of improving quality in different sectors. Primary education in Malawi is the most accessible level of education with more than 80% of Malawians having access to it, thanks to Free Primary Education. However, the quality of primary education is undoubtedly poor and it is mostly unable to meet the needs of its main customers- the learners. As such, TQM presents a way for systematically and holistically improving the quality of primary education. This paper therefore examines the existing perceptions of teachers towards TQM practices in primary schools. TQM is split into 6 dimensions which are Visionary Leadership, Customer Satisfaction, Education and Training, Strategic Decision-Making, School Environment and Culture, and Benchmarking. Data was collected through the use of a rating scale and the findings show that there exists no significant difference among perceptions of teachers towards total quality management with type of school. However, a significant difference was found among perceptions of government males and females teachers.

Key Words: Primary teachers, primary education system, quality, TQM, Malawi

Introduction

Total Quality Management (TQM) is not just a series of practices, it's a philosophy. At its heart, TQM is a belief of what quality looks like in the context of a particular organization. It is the shared belief of what quality means to us. As such, any TQM approach must address the perceptions of the employees and stakeholders involved otherwise it will not succeed. It requires the buy-in of all people involved. There are 3 aspects of TQM as follows:

- Total- Involves every member of the organization
- Quality- Customer (in this case, student) requirements are met
- Management- Senior executives are fully involved

There are 2 main reasons why improving quality of education at Primary level is of paramount importance to Malawi's education sector. The first is that, as mentioned above, primary education is far more accessible than any other type of education in the country. The sharp drop in enrolment ratios between primary and secondary education is a clear indicator of this. In short, improved quality at this level will affect far more learners. The second reason is that primary education forms the basis of all other education and training which learners go through later in life. The knowledge, skills and attitudes formed at this level are the foundation of further

learning and specialization. Therefore, if the learning experience is poor, it will affect all other subsequent learning. Research has noted that poor grasp of fundamentals has a cumulative effect on future learning and even job placement and performance. As such, poor basic education has been linked to the continued cycles of poverty in low-income communities. In Malawi, this means that poor educational quality is a barrier to most of the population escaping the poverty traps that persist in the majority of communities.

In Malawi, the issues affecting quality of education have been researched but there has been no relation to TQM, especially at Primary Level. However, applying TQM principles at Primary Level (the most accessible level of education in the country) could have greater impact than at any other level. As such, the research area has been mostly un-explored. Despite this, the study reviewed literature on 2 areas which are the quality of education in Malawi and Total Quality Management, particularly in relation to primary education.

Quality of Education in Malawi

Kadzamira and Rose (2003) state that Malawi's Free Primary Education (FPE) policy made it easier for low-income households to access education, but it failed to consider how the quality of education would be affected by such a massive influx of students. The paper questions the relevance of such an education system when the majority receives only a few years of primary education. It concludes by noting that FPE might not be as effective in alleviating poverty in Malawi as was once hoped. Chimombo (2005) noted that Free Primary Education has increased the access of pupils to education but the quality of education has suffered. For one thing, schools are not equipped with the human and material resources to handle the number of learners. Furthermore, the increase in access is undermined by disturbing drop-out rates. Increasing the resources is not enough to solve the problem but measures should include improving the relevance of content in regards to local living conditions and cultural issues. Ng'ambi (2010) notes that in Malawi the ratio of pupil to teacher 81:1 and the ratio of pupil to qualified teacher was 92:1. These statistics show a massive shortage of qualified teachers which has led to the government and private institutions employing unqualified teachers to address the overwhelming demand. These are individuals who have not gone through any form of teacher training but may have completed secondary or higher education. This has led to poor quality of teaching in schools. Chirwa and Naidoo (2014) noted that Malawi began its journey to reform its curriculum in 2001 and adopted an Outcomes Based Curriculum (OBC) in 2007. This was greatly influenced by the educational reform which took place in South Africa after the end of the apartheid era. This curriculum differed from those adopted since colonial times in that it attempted to be more learner-centred. However, the paper questions the borrowing of policies from other countries (particularly South Africa) and their subsequent application in the Malawian context. It was noted that South Africa rejected Outcome Based Education in 2009 under the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

Total Quality Management

Ngware (2006) studied the extent to which TQM was practiced in secondary schools in Kenya. He collected data from 300 teachers and found that higher authorities such as the Board of Governors were not providing the leadership required to support implementation of TQM, particularly when it came to supporting continuous improvement. Most schools are also not committed to strategic planning. However, schools are promoting human resource development

and empowerment of employees. Lowe (2008) notes that essentially the Malawi's curriculum has changed very little since colonial times since external examinations still controlled the whole system of education. It is argued that accomplishing the aims of education would always suffer as long as external examinations had such influence on the system. Thornhauser and Passmore (2006) studied the use of ISO 9000 as a total quality management system by comparing educational institutions in the U.S.A. and the UK on. It was found that ISO 9000 was mostly being used in technical and higher education- rather than in primary schools- mostly as a marketing tool. It was also found that ISO was being dropped in many schools due to cost, overwhelming number of inspections and changes. TÖremen, Mehmet and Yasan (2009) studied total quality management practices in Turkish primary schools. In particular, they studied the perceptions of nearly 400 teachers on different variables related to TQM. It was found that teachers perceived change management to be a problem in the implementation of TQM. It was also found that there were significant differences in perceptions of teachers of different branches, levels of education and tenure. There were, however no significant differences between males and females. It was recommended that there is need for change management, staff training and effective use of human resources to implement the principles of TQM. Wani and Mehraj (2014) suggest that for TQM to be successful in education, it requires the establishment of Quality Circles- small groups of employees that discuss problems in quality, suggest possible solutions and to implement them in cooperation with management. It also required a participative (democratic) style of leadership. Spaul (2015) suggests that poor quality education promotes a cycle of poverty across generations where children inherit the social standings of their parents regardless of their personal abilities or efforts. This means that education may not be the great equalizer of social inequality, especially when quality is poor. This is due to drop out rates, learning deficits in mathematics and lack of focus on foundational learning skills. He noted that only 44% of black South Africans attained matric as compared to 83% of Indian youth and 88% of white youth. These inequalities could be entrenched as early as the age of 8. Poor grasp of fundamentals (such as the 3 Rs) at an early age have a cumulative deficit as they get older, particularly when it comes to the jobs they acquire. As such, poor quality education promotes poverty traps. Ravindran and Kamaravel (2016) emphasize that TQM can help realize targets and missions in education by upgrading management quality and quality of work in educational institutions. However, it is not necessary to introduce TQM across the whole institution. They give a 9-step conceptual model for implementing TQM in Educational institutions. They also proposed 7 indicators of quality in education including curriculum, teaching and learning, research, infrastructure, student support, leadership and innovation. There are also challenges such as insufficient trust, low confidence, resistance to change, looking at students as threats (rather than allies) to faculty autonomy.

In the end, it can be concluded that though Malawi has made strides to improve primary education, there are still major challenges when it comes to quality. TQM is generally viewed as a viable and comprehensive means of improving quality but it requires a strong commitment from the leadership and management of the school. So, the main purpose of research is to give a comprehensive picture of the current perceptions towards quality and how it is managed in the primary education sector. This knowledge can successfully be used to improve the quality of education in primary schools. This paper therefore examines the existing perceptions of teachers towards TQM practices in primary schools. TQM is split into 6 dimensions which are Visionary Leadership, Customer Satisfaction, Education and Training, Strategic Decision-Making, School Environment and Culture, and Benchmarking. Accordingly, the objectives of the study were;

1. To study the perception of primary school teachers towards total quality management.

2. To explore the significant difference among perceptions of teachers towards total quality management with respect to gender.
3. To explore the significant difference among perceptions of teachers towards total quality management with respect to type of school.

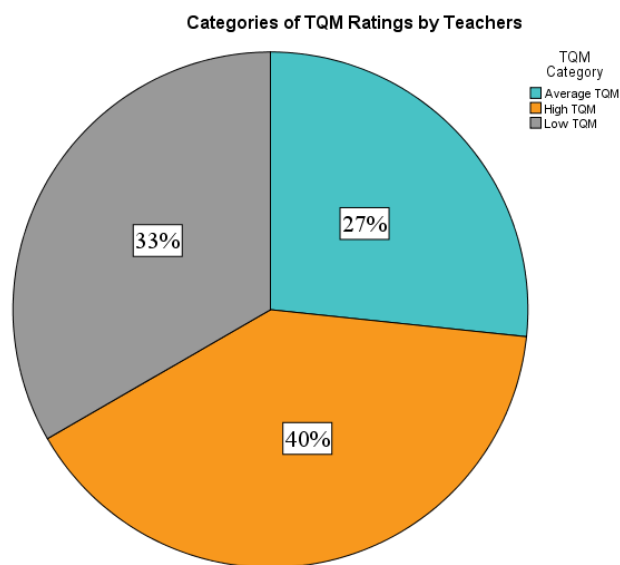
Design of the study

The study adopted a descriptive survey approach where quantitative data was collected through the use of a self-constructed 5-point rating scale. The sample comprised of the teachers from 10 schools in the Northern Region of Malawi, 5 of which were government schools and 5 of which were private schools. The Sample includes 30 primary school teachers of which 15 were Government Primary School Teachers and 15 were Private Primary School Teachers. In terms of gender distribution, 17 (56.67%) of the teachers were female while 13 (43.33) were male. In government schools there were 11 female (73%) and 4 male (27%) teachers while in private schools there were 6 female (40%) teachers and 9 (60%) male teachers. Quantitatively, the teachers were asked to fill out a 5-point rating scale on TQM in primary schools. The scale had 50 items which measured their perceptions about TQM practices in the 6 dimensions which are Visionary Leadership, Customer Satisfaction, Education and Training, Strategic Decision-Making, School Environment and Culture, and Benchmarking. The 10 primary schools were located in 5 of the districts in the Northern Region of Malawi namely Mzimba, Rumphu, Karonga, Nkhata-Bay and Mzuzu City. In terms of procedure, the first point of contact in each district was the District Education Manager (DEM) who gave permission to visit the schools within their district. After this, appointments were booked at each school and then, on the selected day, the data was collected. Most schools welcomed the research because of the endorsement from the District Education Manager but one private school denied to take part in the research and was replaced with an alternative.

Results & Discussions

A total TQM rating was calculated by adding up the scores of each item on the 5 point rating scale. With 50 items and a maximum score of 5 per item, the highest score obtainable was 250 while the lowest score obtainable was 50. The quartiles were formed and primary school teachers were classified under three perception levels towards TQM viz. low perception level, average perception level and high perception level.

Perceptions of TQM were also compared with respect to gender (male or female) and the type of school. First of all, the Total TQM scores were divided into 3 categories by dividing them into quartiles. These categories were Low TQM, Average TQM and High TQM. Having Low TQM meant that a respondent had a more negative opinion of the TQM practices at their school while having a higher TQM rating meant that they had a more positive opinion towards TQM practices at their schools.



As shown in the graph, 33% of teachers are having low level of perception towards TQM in their school, while 27% of them are having average level of perception towards TQM and 40% are having high level of perception towards TQM. Further perception levels towards TQM are given in table 1 given below.

Table1: Level of perception towards TQM among Primary School Teachers

TQM Level		Government Primary School Teachers		Private Primary School Teachers	
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
High Level of perception towards TQM	40%	13%	27%	33%	7%
Average Level of perception towards TQM	27%	13%	7%	14%	20%
Low Level of perception towards TQM	33%	0%	40%	13%	13%

To find out the significant difference among perceptions of primary school teachers towards total quality management with respect to gender t’ test was computed. 1st significant difference between means is calculated for total sample i.e. 17 females and 13 males. Then, same is calculated for private male & female teachers, and government male & female teachers. The purpose is to see, when the school environment is constant whether the perceptions of teachers differs with respect to their gender or not.

Table2

Perceptions of primary school teachers towards TQM with respect to gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value	Remarks
Total TQM	Female	17	184.41	18.070	.250	Insignificant
	Male	13	194.85	30.345		

From the table 2, it is clear that p value is 0.250 which being greater than 0.05 indicates that the males and females do not differ significantly in their perceptions towards total quality management in Malawi. But mean values show that perceptions of male primary school teachers towards total quality management are higher than females.

Table 3
Perceptions of Government primary school teachers towards TQM with respect to gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value	Remarks
Total TQM	Female	11	185.182	17.2558	.040	Significant
	Male	4	207.500	15.0222		

The tables 3 show the difference in perceptions of male and female teachers towards TQM in government primary schools. The p-value is 0.040 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, there exists a significant difference between the Total TQM rating of male and female teachers in government schools. The perceptions of male government primary school teachers towards total quality management are significantly higher than female government primary school teachers.

Table 4
Perceptions of Private primary school teachers towards TQM with respect to gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value	Remarks
Total TQM	Female	6	183.000	21.1092	.700	Insignificant
	Male	9	189.222	34.3649		

In this case, the table 4 shows the difference in perceptions of male and female teachers towards TQM in private primary schools. The p-value is 0.700 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, there is no significant difference between perceptions of male and female teachers towards TQM in private primary schools.

Similarly, t' test was computed to find out the significant difference among perceptions of primary school teachers towards total quality management with respect to type of school.

Table 5
Perceptions of primary school teachers towards TQM with respect to type of school

	Type of School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p-value	Remarks
Total TQM	Private	15	186.73	29.050	.628	Insignificant
	Government	15	191.13	19.116		

From the table 3, it is clear that, p value is 0.628 which being greater than 0.05 indicates that private primary school teachers and government primary school teachers do not differ significantly in their perceptions towards total quality management in Malawi.

Conclusion

The paper has given an overview of the perceptions that teachers have towards total quality management practices in their schools. The majority of teachers rated their schools as having High TQM. Female teachers were more likely to rate their schools as having Low TQM while males were more likely to rate their schools as above average. However, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers in their perceptions towards TQM practices at their schools. Government and private schools were also analyzed individually and it was found that there was no significant difference between males and females in their perceptions of TQM in private schools. However, there was a significant difference between perceptions of males and females in government schools. Finally, private primary school teachers and government primary school teachers do not differ significantly in their perceptions towards total quality management in Malawi. As such, TQM practices need to be improved at both types of schools if the quality of education in Malawi is to be improved.

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