

ABSTRACT

“Service-Focused Education”: An Investigation Of Education Policies And Practices, And Their Effect On Public Perceptions About The “Quality” Of The United States Education System

Purpose

The literature concerning customer service in education is limited. Yet education does provide a service to students, business and society. Education has an image as a system, and in connection with its processes and outputs. Professionals in education have an image, as well as specific degree programs and institutions. At present, many of these images and public perceptions are negative and movements have stressed increasing “quality.” Although quality management has been an increasingly “hot” topic in the literature over the past few years, evidence indicates successful implementations in academic settings are limited. The purpose of this study was to examine the applicability of quality and customer service concepts to education, with the underlying objective of revealing policy implications as well as practical methods for increasing effectiveness.

Methods and Procedures

Data were captured from online and CD ROM databases, and a row-by-row search of the Georgia State University Library periodicals stacks. In addition, over 2500 trade magazines and journals from the researcher’s own collection were reviewed for key words in articles and titles over a period of months. A database consisting of 2333 references from culled data was created after a two-year search and over 700 data collection hours. Critical data were flagged for inclusion in the findings based on criteria such as recency, thematic recurrence, author expertise, and direct or inferential applicability to the issues of education quality, service and public perceptions.

Results

Results of the study indicate that in the context of associated terms which invariably yield discussions about education quality, such as “education reform,” there are significant amounts of data due to decades of debates, movements, official acts, and grassroots efforts at changing the U.S. education system. Formal corporate training investment, estimated at over \$48 billion annually, partially replaces the education system’s role in the United States. The public views education as a failed system, and yet, the attainment of formal education is highly desirable and respected. Still, without measures to better determine the desired outputs of the system, many educators may be “shooting in the dark,” tightening evaluation procedures for students and teachers, while paying little attention to societal purpose and a desire for skills-based outcomes. There is a market for education and training, and educators have lost “share” due to underdeveloped corporate linkages, an image of impracticality, a lack of marketing expertise, and a failure to develop desired product-service offerings.

Conclusions

The study yields several conclusions and implications for educators. If educators are to protect “market share,” efforts are needed to further understand the wants and desires of those who consume education directly, e.g., student populations, as well as those who consume the final outputs of the education system such as corporate hiring executives. Subsequent to these assessments, fundamental changes in theory for curricula, delivery methods, service offerings and other variables are likely to be identified as appropriate.

Specifications

Three sections, including seven chapters and appendixes. Includes an extensive bibliography of 796 references acquired for review by the researcher from a compiled computer database of 2333 listings and abstracts. Also, from those acquired references, a subset-listing of 134 “References Used,” is provided indicating critical readings cited in the text. Total volume, 291 pages.