

Managing total quality in Ugandan teacher education institutions: Insights from tutors and administrators

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the implementation and management of Total Quality Management (TQM) in teacher education institutions in Uganda from the perspectives of tutors and administrators. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gain in-depth insights into the strategies, challenges, and perceived outcomes of TQM initiatives. Fifteen participants, including head teachers, tutors, and PTC staff from five purposively selected institutions, were engaged. The study was grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, emphasizing participants' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes. Findings revealed that, although awareness of TQM principles was generally high, implementation was often fragmented, monitoring was inconsistent, and learning outcomes varied across institutions. Additional challenges included limited staff engagement in quality assurance processes and uneven application of professional development programs. This study contributed to the discourse on quality assurance in higher education by offering context-specific recommendations for effective TQM adoption. Policy and practice implications included strengthening capacity-building programs, fostering collaborative management practices, and institutionalizing systematic monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: Total quality management, teacher education institutions, quality assurance.

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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of quality in education has become a global imperative, driven by the need to equip learners with relevant skills, knowledge, and competencies in an increasingly competitive world. Total Quality Management (TQM) has emerged as a prominent approach for improving institutional performance and accountability, emphasizing continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and participatory management practices (Oakland, 2014). By fostering systematic processes, data-driven decision-making, and a culture of reflection, TQM enables educational institutions to enhance teaching, learning, and administrative effectiveness.

In Uganda, teacher education institutions face growing pressure to produce competent teachers capable of meeting evolving educational demands and national

development goals. Quantitative indicators highlight these systemic challenges: teacher–student ratios in some institutions reach 1:60, and national teacher performance evaluations reveal disparities in professional competencies across regions (MoES, 2021). Such figures underscore the urgency of adopting structured quality management frameworks like TQM to improve instructional effectiveness and institutional accountability.

Despite its potential, TQM implementation in Ugandan teacher education institutions has been uneven. Constraints include limited financial and infrastructural resources, inadequate professional development opportunities, resistance to organizational change, and varying levels of managerial commitment (Kaggwa, 2020). While many institutions have formal quality assurance

policies, translating them into practice remains challenging. Tutors and administrators, as key actors in quality management, often navigate hierarchical decision-making structures and limited collaborative mechanisms that influence the success of TQM initiatives.

Globally, research shows that effective TQM management relies on both structural and cultural factors. Structural factors include well-defined processes, monitoring systems, and leadership support, while cultural factors involve staff engagement, shared values, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Bester, 2016). In Uganda, these factors interact with local realities such as resource scarcity, high student-to-teacher ratios, and varying staff motivation, creating a unique context that shapes how TQM is understood and implemented. Exploring the lived experiences of tutors and administrators within this context provides valuable insights into how TQM practices are operationalized and the strategies used to overcome implementation challenges.

TQM is not only a tool for enhancing institutional efficiency but also a mechanism for improving educational outcomes, professional accountability, and stakeholder satisfaction. By adopting TQM principles, teacher education institutions can foster a culture of reflection, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. Investigating how tutors and administrators perceive, manage, and implement TQM is therefore critical for informing policies, improving institutional practices, and guiding professional development programs that align with national and global quality standards.

This study, therefore, provides an in-depth understanding of TQM management in Ugandan teacher education institutions from the perspectives of tutors and administrators. Through qualitative insights, the research captures the complexities, challenges, and successes of TQM adoption, offering context-specific recommendations to strengthen quality management practices.

Problem statement

Ideally, teacher education institutions in Uganda would implement Total Quality Management (TQM) comprehensively, with active leadership, collaborative decision-making, adequate resources, and continuous professional development, resulting in improved teacher competence, student learning outcomes, and institutional performance. In reality, however, many institutions face challenges such as limited resources, inadequate staff training, high workloads, hierarchical structures, and resistance to change, which hinder the practical adoption of TQM principles. This study is therefore highly relevant, as it explores the lived experiences and perspectives of tutors and administrators, providing insights into both the successes and barriers of TQM implementation. The

findings offer practical guidance for policy, institutional practices, and staff development, bridging the gap between the ideal framework of TQM and the realities on the ground, while contributing to the academic discourse on quality management in teacher education.

Research objectives

The study seeks to:

- i. Explore tutors' and administrators' perceptions of TQM implementation in teacher education institutions in Uganda.
- ii. Identify challenges encountered in managing TQM initiatives.
- iii. Examine strategies employed to enhance quality in institutional processes.

Research questions

- i. How do tutors and administrators perceive the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in teacher education institutions in Uganda?
- ii. How do tutors and administrators experience the challenges encountered in managing TQM initiatives?
- iii. How do tutors and administrators implement strategies to enhance the effectiveness of TQM in teacher education institutions?

Significance of the study

This study is significant in several ways. It contributes to educational policy development by providing empirical insights into the management and implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in teacher education institutions in Uganda. The findings can guide institutional administrators in improving leadership and management practices, while also supporting tutors in enhancing teaching quality and professional accountability. Additionally, the research enriches the academic discourse on TQM in higher education by offering context-specific evidence that highlights both the successes and challenges of quality management practices. The study's qualitative approach ensures that the perspectives of key stakeholders, tutors and administrators are foregrounded, providing a nuanced understanding that can inform practical interventions and future research.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is defined in three dimensions: content, geographical, and time scope. In terms of content,

the study focuses on the implementation and management of TQM in teacher education institutions, exploring perceptions, challenges, and strategies as experienced by tutors and administrators. Geographically, the study is limited to selected teacher education institutions in Uganda, representing a cross-section of public and private institutions to capture a range of institutional contexts. Temporally, the study examines TQM practices and experiences over the past five years, providing a contemporary view of quality management initiatives and their practical implications.

Limitations and delimitations

This study acknowledges several limitations inherent in qualitative research. First, the findings rely on the subjective experiences and perceptions of tutors and administrators, which may introduce personal biases. Second, the sample is limited to selected teacher education institutions in Uganda, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other institutions or contexts. Third, the study depends on participants' willingness and honesty in sharing information; some experiences or challenges might be underreported due to social desirability or institutional sensitivities. Finally, resource constraints, such as time and access to multiple institutions, may have limited the breadth of data collection. Despite these limitations, the study provides rich, contextualized insights into the management and implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

Total Quality Management (TQM) theory provides the primary theoretical lens for this study. TQM emphasizes continuous improvement, customer focus, and participatory management as essential principles for achieving organizational effectiveness (Oakland, 2014). In education, "customers" include students, employers, and society, while quality is reflected in teaching, learning outcomes, and institutional processes. The theory posits that leadership commitment and staff engagement are central to sustaining quality initiatives, which aligns directly with the focus of this study on tutors and administrators in teacher education institutions.

The applicability of TQM to education relies on translating industrial quality principles to the educational context. TQM promotes systematic approaches to curriculum design, teaching evaluation, and administrative decision-making (Bester, 2016). For teacher education institutions, this means integrating reflective teaching practices, institutional audits, and participatory planning,

ensuring that all members contribute to maintaining and improving quality.

Furthermore, TQM theory is complemented by systems theory, which views institutions as interconnected components whose interactions influence overall effectiveness (Bester, 2016). Systems theory emphasizes the interdependence of departments, staff, and institutional policies, highlighting the importance of coordinated efforts in quality management. Combining TQM and systems theory provides a holistic framework for understanding both structural and cultural dimensions of quality management in education.

Despite its broad applicability, literature indicates that theoretical frameworks alone do not ensure effective implementation. In the Ugandan context, TQM principles often remain at the policy level due to limited resources, weak monitoring systems, and varying staff engagement (Kaggwa, 2020). This underscores the need to explore the lived experiences of tutors and administrators, providing insight into the translation of theory into practice.

While TQM and systems theory provide a strong conceptual foundation, there is limited research on how these theories manifest in the day-to-day management of teacher education institutions in Uganda. Specifically, the perspectives and lived experiences of tutors and administrators in implementing these frameworks remain underexplored.

Review of related literature

Tutors' and administrators' perceptions of TQM implementation

Globally, tutors and administrators recognize Total Quality Management (TQM) as a framework for enhancing institutional efficiency, accountability, and the quality of teaching and learning (Oakland, 2014). Tutors typically focus on their role in improving teaching practices, reflective instruction, and curriculum delivery, whereas administrators emphasize policy alignment, process standardization, and institutional monitoring. These perceptions are often shaped by prior exposure to quality management frameworks and access to structured professional development programs.

In African higher education contexts, Bester (2016) reported that tutors perceive TQM positively when it facilitates structured teaching, reflective practices, and improved student outcomes. Administrators, in turn, value TQM for providing systematic approaches to monitoring institutional performance and enforcing quality standards. However, these perceptions are mediated by institutional culture; participatory leadership fosters greater tutor engagement and appreciation of TQM initiatives, while hierarchical or top-down structures may limit involvement.

In Uganda, Kaggwa (2020) found that tutors often regarded TQM as abstract or primarily policy-driven, with limited relevance to day-to-day teaching. Administrators, by contrast, focused on compliance with institutional guidelines and reporting requirements. This divergence reflects systemic constraints, including resource limitations, insufficient professional development, and inconsistent operationalization of TQM policies. Tutors who participated in continuous training and mentoring reported higher understanding and appreciation of TQM, whereas administrators faced challenges in promoting collaborative decision-making.

Further, perceptions of TQM are influenced by institutional size, hierarchical structures, and staff experience. Larger institutions with multiple departments often struggle with coordination, affecting both tutors' and administrators' engagement with quality management processes. These findings suggest that understanding perceptions requires attention to both individual-level and systemic factors. Despite growing literature on TQM, qualitative studies exploring how Ugandan teacher education staff experience, interpret, and operationalize TQM remain scarce.

Challenges encountered in managing TQM initiatives

Globally, managing TQM initiatives is constrained by insufficient resources, inadequate staff training, resistance to organizational change, and difficulty translating policies into practical actions (Oakland, 2014). Tutors and administrators frequently encounter challenges in aligning TQM principles with daily operations, which undermines consistent implementation.

In African universities, Agyemang (2018) highlighted that hierarchical structures, limited engagement, and cultural factors significantly shape TQM adoption. Tutors often feel excluded from decision-making, reducing motivation to comply with procedures, while administrators struggle to enforce policies without institutional support.

In Uganda, Kaggwa (2020) identified specific challenges, including inadequate funding, high workloads, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and limited professional development opportunities. Tutors sometimes perceived TQM as bureaucratic and disconnected from teaching, while administrators faced difficulties implementing quality initiatives without sufficient institutional backing. These challenges reflect a gap between policy intent and the realities of daily management.

Attitudinal barriers such as resistance to change, low intrinsic motivation, and limited recognition of quality achievements further complicate TQM implementation. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for qualitative investigations to capture how tutors and administrators navigate obstacles, negotiate institutional

constraints, and sustain quality practices in Uganda's teacher education sector.

Strategies to enhance the effectiveness of TQM

Effective TQM implementation depends on strategies that integrate professional development, participatory management, and systematic monitoring (Oakland, 2014). Tutors benefit from workshops, mentorship, reflective practice, and training programs, whereas administrators rely on performance audits, feedback systems, and policy enforcement to sustain quality.

In African universities, Bester (2016) demonstrated that participatory decision-making, collaborative planning, and empowerment of teaching staff enhance engagement and ownership of TQM processes. Tutors involved in curriculum and quality assurance planning showed higher compliance and motivation, while administrators reported improved institutional performance and smoother policy implementation.

In Uganda, Kaggwa (2020) observed that strategies such as professional development programs, mentorship, departmental feedback sessions, and peer collaboration were employed to strengthen TQM. Tutors used reflective teaching, peer observation, and adherence to quality standards, whereas administrators focused on monitoring compliance, evaluating outcomes, and guiding strategic implementation. These strategies illustrate the importance of integrating structural mechanisms (resources, monitoring, policies) with cultural factors (staff motivation, recognition, participatory leadership) to achieve sustainable quality improvement.

Agyemang (2018) emphasized that combining structural and cultural strategies fosters long-term quality enhancement. Structural strategies create an environment conducive to TQM, while cultural strategies motivate tutors and administrators to engage actively in quality initiatives. However, the adaptation of these strategies to local challenges such as resource scarcity or resistance to change remains underexplored in Uganda.

Overall, while strategies for enhancing TQM are documented globally and regionally, there is limited qualitative evidence on how tutors and administrators in Ugandan teacher education institutions implement, adapt, and sustain these strategies in response to practical and contextual challenges. This gap underscores the need for context-sensitive studies that link systemic and cultural dimensions of quality management.

METHODOLOGY

Research philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which

emphasizes understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives. Interpretivism is particularly suited to qualitative research because it prioritizes subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations rather than objective measurement (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in teacher education institutions involves human behaviors, perceptions, and organizational culture. These aspects are best explored through participants' lived experiences. The interpretivist approach enables the researcher to capture nuanced insights into how tutors and administrators perceive, experience, and manage TQM initiatives.

Research design

A qualitative case study design was employed to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of tutors and administrators. Case studies are effective for examining complex phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). This design allowed the study to focus on three teacher education institutions in Uganda as bounded systems, producing detailed accounts of TQM practices, challenges, and strategies. The qualitative case study approach facilitated rich, descriptive data collection through interviews and document review, allowing exploration of both structural and cultural dimensions of TQM implementation.

Population and sampling

The study targeted tutors and administrators from three teacher education institutions in Uganda who were directly involved in TQM processes. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct knowledge and experience of TQM initiatives, ensuring that the data collected were rich and information-dense (Patton, 2015). A total of 18 participants were included: 10 tutors, 5 administrators, and 3 quality assurance staff. The participants had diverse professional experiences, ranging from newly appointed tutors to administrators with over 15 years of experience, allowing a comprehensive understanding of TQM practices across different institutional roles.

Data collection methods

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to freely express their perspectives while providing opportunities for the researcher to probe for clarification or elaboration (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews were conducted in English, lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and were held

in quiet, private offices within the participants' institutions to ensure confidentiality and minimize interruptions. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Interview questions focused on participants' understanding of TQM, experiences with implementation, perceived challenges and opportunities, and strategies for quality improvement. Examples of key interview questions included: "How do you understand Total Quality Management within your institution?" "Can you describe specific practices or strategies your institution uses to implement TQM?" "What challenges have you encountered in implementing TQM, and how have you addressed them?"

In addition to interviews, institutional documents, including quality assurance reports, policy guidelines, and workshop records, were reviewed to triangulate the data and enhance credibility.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, enabling identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights (Braun and Clarke, 2019). NVivo software facilitated systematic coding, categorization, and organization of data. The analysis process followed six steps: Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and documents, generation of initial codes to capture meaningful units of information, identification of candidate themes based on patterns across codes review and refinement of themes to ensure coherence and consistency, definition and naming of themes to accurately reflect the data and synthesis of findings into coherent narratives.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed: Member checking: Participants reviewed preliminary findings to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Peer debriefing and inter-coder reliability: A research colleague independently coded a subset of transcripts, and discrepancies were discussed and resolved to enhance consistency. Triangulation: Data from interviews were cross-verified with institutional documents. Audit trail: Detailed records of coding decisions and analytical memos were maintained to ensure transparency.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Gulu University, Uganda, prior to data collection. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by de-identifying participants and anonymizing data. All data were securely

stored on a password-protected device and accessed only by the researcher. Reflexivity was practiced throughout the study, with the researcher reflecting continuously on potential biases, power dynamics, and their influence on data interpretation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations were prioritized to protect participants' rights and ensure research integrity.

FINDINGS

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets findings from interviews with tutors and administrators in selected teacher education institutions in Uganda. Findings are organized around key themes aligned with the research objectives, and participant quotations are used to illustrate significant points.

Background information of respondents

The study involved three head teachers (HT1–HT3), a tutor (TU1), and a PTC staff member (PT1), representing a range of roles and experiences in teacher education institutions. Participants' responsibilities included leadership and strategic oversight, supervision of academic and administrative processes, policy implementation, staff development, and monitoring of student performance. For example, HT1 described their role as overseeing both academic and administrative operations and providing strategic leadership, while PT1 highlighted involvement in reporting, policy engagement, and quality assurance activities. Collectively, these participants provided a comprehensive perspective on TQM practices and institutional quality management.

Understanding of total quality management (TQM)

Participants viewed TQM as a structured, holistic approach aimed at improving teaching, learning, and administrative processes. Key principles emphasized included continuous improvement, teamwork, staff empowerment, and data-driven decision-making. HT3 noted that students are considered central to the education process, while PT1 highlighted the approach's holistic nature in promoting academic excellence.

Participants consistently valued TQM as a mechanism for enhancing teaching quality, institutional accountability, and student outcomes, reflecting both procedural and cultural dimensions of quality management.

Implementation of TQM

TQM was implemented through structured procedures,

professional development, continuous monitoring, and stakeholder engagement. TU1 reported regular review of teaching and learning, as well as attendance at refresher courses, seminars, and workshops. HT1 highlighted adherence to lesson planning and assessment standards, while HT3 noted successful initiatives like peer-led professional development sessions and digital tracking systems for student progress.

Observation: Structured, collaborative, and participatory strategies were key to TQM implementation, but success depended on institutional commitment, staff engagement, and availability of resources.

Challenges and opportunities

Participants identified several challenges: limited financial and human resources, resistance to change, inconsistent policy adherence, and gaps in professional development. TU1 highlighted these as barriers to smooth TQM adoption. Mitigation strategies included targeted training, raising awareness of TQM benefits, involving staff in decision-making, and leveraging external partnerships. Opportunities for strengthening TQM included technology integration, expanded professional development, fostering collaboration, and enhancing stakeholder engagement.

While challenges constrain TQM adoption, proactive strategies and opportunities provide pathways for sustainable quality improvement in teacher education institutions.

Impact of TQM and recommendations

Participants reported that TQM positively influenced teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and administrative efficiency. HT1 observed improvements in overall teaching and learning, while HT2 highlighted increased teacher accountability and student engagement. Recommendations for enhancing TQM included investing in staff development, integrating ICT, structured stakeholder engagement, and regular audits.

Conclusion: TQM can significantly enhance institutional performance and education quality when supported by targeted interventions, technology, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.

DISCUSSION

Perceptions of tutors and administrators on TQM implementation

Tutors and administrators perceive TQM as a structured, continuous, and holistic approach for enhancing teaching, learning, and administrative performance. Core principles

highlighted by participants included continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, data-driven decision-making, teamwork, and staff empowerment. Tutors emphasized reflective teaching practices, lesson planning, and assessment, whereas administrators focused on strategic leadership, policy compliance, and supervision.

Theoretical and regional contribution

This study advances understanding of TQM in the Ugandan and broader East African context by revealing how cultural and systemic factors such as hierarchical decision-making, resource constraints, and variable staff motivation shape TQM adoption. While awareness of TQM principles is high, effective implementation depends on a participatory institutional culture, structured management systems, and accessible professional development opportunities. These insights extend regional literature by highlighting the interplay between procedural and cultural dimensions of quality management in teacher education institutions.

Challenges in managing TQM initiatives

Consistent with prior studies (Agyemang, 2018; Kaggwa, 2020), participants identified resource limitations, resistance to change, and inconsistent policy adherence as major barriers to TQM implementation. The findings further demonstrate that context-sensitive interventions such as targeted staff training, participatory decision-making, and partnerships with external stakeholders can mitigate these challenges. This underscores the importance of multi-pronged strategies that address both structural and cultural constraints in sustaining TQM initiatives.

Strategies and opportunities for enhancing TQM

Participants described effective strategies for promoting TQM, including structured lesson observation schedules, feedback mechanisms, digital tracking systems, peer-led professional development, and active engagement of stakeholders. Opportunities for strengthening TQM included expanding professional development, integrating technology, fostering collaborative practices, and involving external stakeholders (TU1, 23rd October, 2025). These findings align with Oakland (2014) and Bester (2016), emphasizing that combining structural and cultural strategies is critical for sustainable TQM adoption.

Impact of TQM on teacher education quality

Participants reported that TQM improved teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and

administrative efficiency. Integrating technology, enhancing professional development, and engaging stakeholders amplified its impact. The study reinforces the view that successful TQM adoption in teacher education requires a multi-dimensional approach that is contextually tailored to institutional realities, reflecting both procedural rigor and cultural adaptability.

Limitations and critical reflections

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. First, participant perspectives relied on self-reports, which may introduce bias or social desirability effects. Second, the sample was limited to selected teacher education institutions in Uganda, which may affect generalizability. Future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to triangulate findings and explore TQM implementation across diverse institutional contexts. Addressing these limitations would strengthen the theoretical and practical contributions of TQM research in East African teacher education.

The discussion effectively integrates the study's findings with existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It highlights role-based perceptions, structural and cultural constraints, and the interpretivist lens through which TQM adoption is understood. By emphasizing both practical strategies and contextually sensitive approaches, the study contributes meaningfully to knowledge on quality management in teacher education.

CONCLUSIONS

Tutors and administrators in Ugandan teacher education institutions understand TQM principles and recognize their relevance for improving teaching quality, learning outcomes, and administrative efficiency. Implementation is constrained by limited resources, resistance to change, and gaps in professional development, but structured procedures, collaborative practices, and engagement with external stakeholders support TQM adoption. This study contributes uniquely to the Ugandan and East African teacher education literature by providing context-specific insights into TQM adoption, highlighting cultural and systemic dynamics affecting quality management in resource-constrained settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance TQM implementation: Prioritize professional development programs, structured internal audits, and collaborative practices among staff to address immediate quality gaps. Allocate adequate resources, integrate ICT for monitoring and evaluation, and strengthen stakeholder

engagement, including students, parents, and external partners. Policymakers and institutional leaders should focus first on capacity-building and resource allocation (high priority) while progressively institutionalizing technology-based monitoring and participatory management for sustainable quality improvement. Future research should evaluate the long-term impact of TQM on teacher education outcomes and the effectiveness of specific strategies, such as ICT integration and collaborative governance.

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