
Empirical evidence of the relationship between service quality and educational accountability

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ABSTRACT

Service quality is an essential component of successful organizations as it leads to efficiency and effectiveness in discharging responsibilities thus increasing the level of employee's accountability. In the education sector and to be precise in a school system, teachers as public servants are expected to demonstrate high level commitment in the teaching and learning process as this enhances quality service delivery towards attaining academic excellence. The paper argued that when there is quality service delivery the level of teacher's commitment will be greater thereby increasing the level of accountability which also leads to accomplishing educational policy goals of ensuring quality educational output. Using quantitative research approach, data was collected from a sample of 194 respondents and analyzed using confirmatory structural equation modeling. The results showed that the hypothesized positive relationship between service quality and educational accountability is supported. The paper therefore concludes and recommends that education stakeholders especially at the school management level should intensify efforts in discharging their duties and responsibilities diligently. Stakeholders at the ministerial level should also see to it that the required support services are adequately provided so that overall the aim of accomplishing educational policy goals of achieving academic excellence through quality service delivery and accountability could be achieved.

Key words: *Service quality, Accountability, Educational policy, Academic excellence*

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality service delivery is the instrument used by most organizations in order to gain employees and client's confidence and loyalty. This is due to the fact that efficient service delivery is capable of enhancing employee's commitment to duty and thereby increasing their level of accountability. As a component of good governance, accountability is the duty bound on government and its officials to perform their duties diligently and enthusiastically in conformity with the laid down rules and regulations (Adegite, 2010). Due to the fact that accountability leads to effectiveness in organizations, most organizations placed more weight on accountability in service delivery in order to achieve quality output (Yaro et' al. 2015). This is crucial in the education sector as the concern of governments is on how to achieve academic excellence and this is linked to the quality of services rendered. Such services normally referred to as the educational support services, are meant to provide to conductive environment for disseminating and receiving knowledge. Thus, when these services are of poor quality, the intended policy goals of achieving academic excellence will not be

accomplished. These services include adequate infrastructure and facilities, good atmospheric environment, sports and recreational facilities, modern libraries with complete collection the capacity and ability of the teachers to provide prompt and accurate services as well an avenue for developing and improving teacher's competence among others. This is why the national policy on education stressed the need for adequate provision of the support services because they leads to quality service delivery which also leads to effective implementation of the education policies and accomplishing educational policies of ensuring academic excellence.

However, inspite of government's efforts of achieving academic excellence and despite the fact that the United Nations categorized education as a public good that no child should be denied (Dorathy et al., 2009), most of the high schools in Nigeria are not only in dilapidated condition, but the quality of graduates produced is very poor due to ineffective implementation of the education policies as a result of lack of quality service delivery and absence of accountability (Bateye & Ogunyemi, 2015; Innocent, 2013). This necessitated the need to engage the service of people with proven integrity; sound knowledge and commitment to duty at both the ministerial and school level (Newell & Shackleton 2000). Because when there are committed personnel, quality services would be rendered and consequently quality output would be attained. This paper is aimed at analyzing the relationship between service quality and educational accountability and hypothesized a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variable. The paper begins with a review of literature, research methodology, results and discussion and finally a conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Service Quality

Service quality is the overall judgement or opinion of the customers or recipients of the services about their satisfaction or otherwise of the services rendered. Presently, service quality is been incorporated in strategic planning of formal education of most African countries due to the desire and interest of achieving international economic integration (Stephen & John, 2015). Stephen and John (2015) further opined that quality education should be in conformity with the requirements and objectives of main stakeholders (i.e. students, parents, employers, community and the government). The argument is that educational institutions that provide improved quality services on a continuous basis are believed to have the confidence and satisfaction of both staff and students. Because excellent service delivery is capable of restoring customer's loyalty and at the same time attracting new ones; it is also capable of reducing cost of governance and enhancing the image of the organization which eventually improves effectiveness (Stodnick & Rogers, 2008; Berry et al., 1988; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Cronin et al., 2000; Kang & James, 2004; Yoon & Suh, 2004). Thus, service quality is a fundamental organizational aspect that differentiates it from others (Ladhari, 2009).

In the education sector, service quality with the aid of the support services is capable of meeting the teacher's and student's needs. At the same time, the management of the school will have the confidence of achieving its stated goals, aims and objectives. This is due to the fact the information received from the experience of customers (students and teachers) is very vital towards developing external benchmarking program in order to improve service quality

(Smith, 2000). In this study SERVQUAL is used to evaluate service quality for the fact that evaluation of an entity's service quality is currently done in most organizations using the SERVQUAL which is a measurement method used in organizations irrespective of the services provided in order to assess quality (Zeithaml, et al., 1990). It is generally used in the service industry particularly in the education sector and has earned great popularity and wide application in the last decades due to its ease of use, having simple structure and the ability of making generalization (Zeithaml, et al., 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988).

2.2 Accountability

Agara (2009) noted that accountability is crucial to the effective functioning of organizations being it the primary tool of implementing government policies. Accountability served as a quality control mechanism in the public service designed to ensure that the government and its officials carry out their responsibilities appropriately in accordance with the laid down rules (Adegite, 2010; Agara, 2009). Accountability in education is a means of ensuring quality service delivery. For instance when the teachers are accountable, they will judiciously utilize the available resources towards imparting the right knowledge which eventually leads to academic excellence. To support this view, Bandele (2007) noted that educational accountability are efforts of making sure that education stakeholders particularly the teachers perform their duties appropriately for the purpose of achieving academic excellence. The main concern of accountability is to ensure that public servants discharge their duties in conformity with the ethics of their profession. In the education sector, this is for the purpose of producing right thinking graduates who will be useful to the entire society (National Policy on Education, 2004). Accountability is currently seen as result oriented, for the fact that the focus of good governance is more on outputs than on inputs. Accountability in the teaching profession therefore, becomes essential so that the aims of achieving academic excellence which is the anticipated educational output could be realized.

3. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research approach was used and the data for the research was collected through administered questionnaires. A six point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used in collecting the data. The data was however, collected from a sample of 194 respondents and analyzed using structural equation modelling in order to test the relationship between service quality and educational accountability. The research hypothesized a significant relationship between service quality and educational accountability.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Measurement Model: Construct Validity

As stated in the methodology, the data was analyzed by using structural equation modeling. The measurement model was initially assessed in order to ensure goodness-of-fit and construct validity of the model. The result showed that the goodness-of-fit indices are acceptable, but despite this, the initial measurement model needs some modifications because the factor loadings for some measurement models are less than 0.6. The items with

unacceptable loading values are therefore, deleted as this improves the quality of the model (Hair et al., 2012). Also by maintaining “Responsiveness” as an indicator of service quality may cause the failure of the model to achieve discriminant validity. The sub-construct for “Responsiveness” was thus deleted. The modified measurement model is depicted in Figure 1 which indicates that all the indices are in the acceptable level, whereby χ^2/df is 2.224, which is less than 3.00. RMSEA is .079, which is less than .080; and CFI and NNFI are .881 and .870 respectively, which are close to .900. Hence, overall measurement model fits the data well. In other words, the GOF is satisfactory.

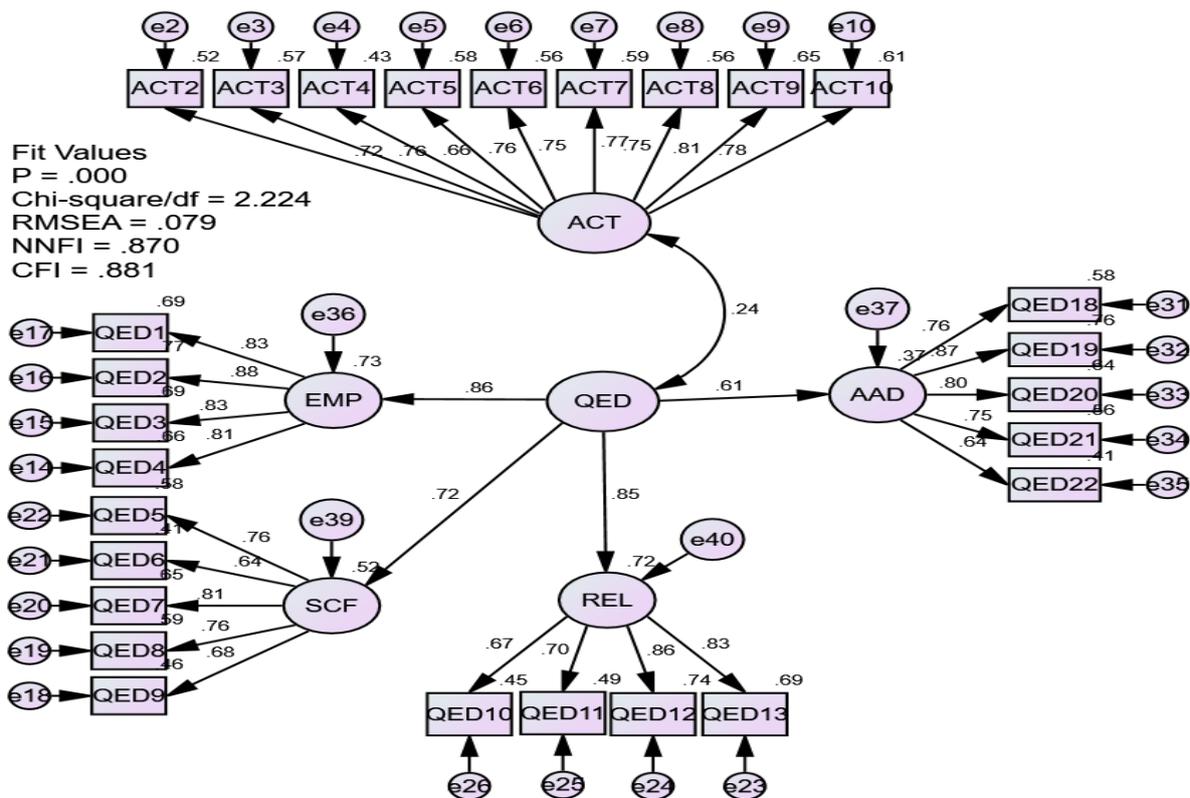


Figure 1: Modified Measurement Model **ACT: Accountability** **QED: Service quality**

Besides evaluating the goodness-of-fit indices; construct validity, in terms of convergent validity and discriminant, was also investigated. Convergent validity ensures whether the measurement items are truly measuring their particular constructs (Hair et al., 2014). It was evaluated by using factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). As indicated in Table 1, all the measurement items have acceptable factor loadings, which are greater than 0.50. AVEs of each construct are correspondingly in the acceptable level, which are greater than 0.50. Similarly, CRs indicating the consistency of the measurement items to measure their particular construct are also satisfactory, which are more than 0.70. Based on these three criteria, the convergent validity of the model is adequate.

Table 1
Convergent validity

Indicator	Sub-construct	Factor loadings	AVE	CR
Service quality	Reliability	0.85	0.59	0.85
	Empathy	0.86		
	School facilities	0.72		
	Assurance and discipline	0.61		
Accountability		0.72	0.56	0.92

Equally important, in attempting to ensure the construct validity, is evaluating the discriminant validity. This evaluation was done by comparing square root of AVE of a particular latent variable with correlation between the latent variable with other latent variables (Fornell & Larker, 1981). The result is exhibited in Table 2. Based on the table, all the square root of AVEs are greater than correlations among the variables, indicating adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity

	Accountability	Assurance & discipline	School facilities	Empathy	Reliability
Accountability	0.75				
Assurance & discipline	0.15	0.77			
School facilities	0.18	0.44	0.73		
Empathy	0.21	0.52	0.62	0.84	
Reliability	0.21	0.52	0.61	0.73	0.77

Note. Diagonal values (bolded) are square root of the AVE, whereas the off-diagonals are correlations.

4.2 Structural Model

After all the criteria of goodness of fit and construct validity are achieved, the measurement model was then converted to structural model for assessing hypothesis of the study (i.e. there is a positive relationship between service quality and educational accountability). The structural model is as shown in Figure 2.

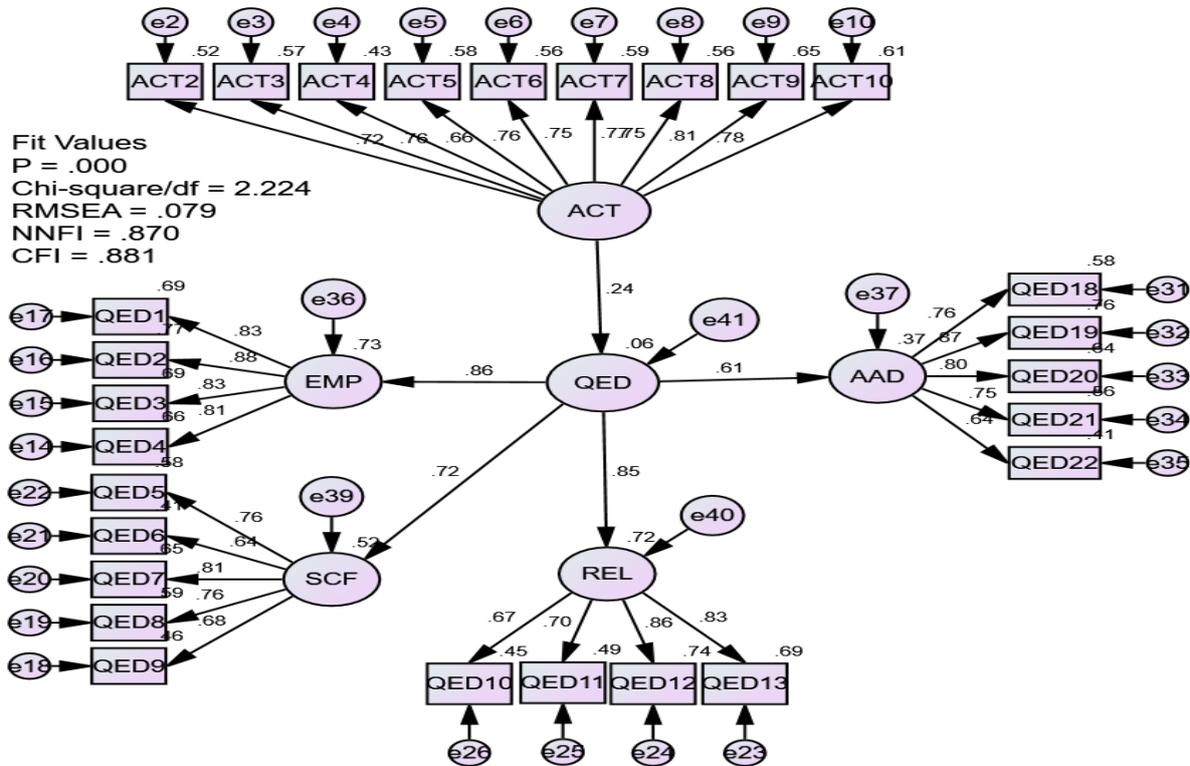


Figure 2: structural model ACT: Accountability QED: Service quality

Based on the structural model, the standardized beta relating service quality with accountability is 0.24; which is significant at $p < 0.05$. Hence, the study hypothesis fails to be rejected. In other words, even though the R^2 is relatively small, there is a significant contribution of service quality to accountability. Thus higher service quality leads to accountability.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study a model was developed to test the relationship between service quality and educational accountability. In any entity service quality is often used and regarded as the general judgement and customer's views of the services offered with a view to ascertaining whether they are satisfied or not in terms of the quality of the services rendered. Most often service quality leads to employee commitment to duty and thereby enhancing their level of accountability. In the public service accountability is a kind of regulatory mechanism and a means of checkmating the activities of the employees. This is imperative in the education sector as it leads to effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery which also leads to effectiveness in the implementation of educational policy goals of achieving academic excellence. The outcome of the analysis showed that the respondents are pleased with the service quality aspects of empathy, reliability, school facilities and assurance and discipline but there is a lapse in terms of responsiveness which is the readiness of the teachers' to assist the students in providing quality knowledge. This aspect need to be strengthened and improved by developing the teacher's competence through constant training in order to enhance their level of understanding and be able to conform with international best practices in terms of education dissemination and development. To achieve this, the government needs

to allocate sufficient financial resources to the education sector so as to make available all the required support services that enhances quality service delivery towards accomplishing the government mission of achieving academic excellence for a better society.

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