

Developing a Culture-Based Quality Management Framework for MBA and MBS Programs at Tribhuvan University, Nepal

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop a culture-based quality management framework for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Business Studies (MBS) programs at Tribhuvan University (TU), Nepal, by identifying key quality dimensions, examining their institutional effectiveness, and integrating them into a coherent model for sustainable quality improvement.

Design/methodology/approach

The study adopts a mixed-method, framework-development approach. Primary data were collected from 290 respondents comprising students, faculty members, administrative staff, and academic leaders from constituent and affiliated management colleges of TU. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics aligned with research objectives, while qualitative insights and literature synthesis were used to construct the proposed framework.

Findings

The findings reveal that quality assurance practices in TU's MBA and MBS programs are predominantly compliance-oriented and weakly institutionalized. Mission–vision alignment, stakeholder engagement, curriculum relevance, faculty development, student support services, and organizational culture were found to be unevenly implemented across institutions. Organizational culture emerged as a critical mediating factor influencing the effectiveness of quality management practices.

Practical implications

The study provides a practical, context-specific framework that can guide university administrators, quality assurance units, and policymakers in embedding quality culture beyond procedural accreditation.

Originality/value

This study contributes original value by shifting quality discourse in Nepalese management education from procedural assurance toward culture-embedded quality management.

Keywords: *Quality management, Quality culture, MBA, MBS, Accreditation, Higher education, Nepal*

Introduction

The expansion of higher education has transformed universities into central actors in economic development, innovation, and workforce preparation. Globally, higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to demonstrate accountability, relevance, and performance while responding to rapidly changing labor market demands (Altbach et al., 2009). In developing countries such as Nepal, this pressure is intensified by rapid quantitative growth that is not always accompanied by corresponding improvements in quality.

The rapid expansion of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nepal has intensified competition among universities and affiliated colleges, raising concerns about educational quality, institutional performance, and graduate employability (Dhakal & Pant, 2021). This growth has been largely quantitative, exposing weaknesses in governance, curriculum relevance, and internal quality mechanisms. In response, the Government of Nepal, in collaboration with the University Grants Commission (UGC), introduced Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) frameworks to enhance accountability, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement (UGC, 2022).

The QAA framework represents a key policy initiative aimed at improving academic standards and aligning higher education outcomes with stakeholder expectations (Paudel, 2020). Globally, HEIs have adopted business-oriented quality management approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) to address challenges related to efficiency, competitiveness, and public accountability (Koslowski, 2006; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996). TQM emphasizes stakeholder engagement, process optimization, and student satisfaction as core quality dimensions (Spanbauer, 1995; Yusuf, 2023). Empirical studies confirm that effective TQM implementation enhances teaching quality, institutional responsiveness, and organizational performance (Rabah, 2015; Van Kemenade, 2020).

Quality in higher education is multidimensional, encompassing teaching, research, governance, stakeholder contentment, and institutional culture (Mohanthy, 1996; Rabah, 2015). However, HEIs in developing contexts commonly struggle to institutionalize quality practices due to resource restrictions and weak organizational cultures (Mhwise, 2021). Sustainable quality improvement, therefore, requires

developing a culture of quality grounded in shared values, leadership commitment, and shared governance (Van Kemenade, 2020). This challenge is especially apparent in Nepal's MBA and MBS programs, where rising expectations demand culture-based quality management beyond procedural accreditation (Ghimire, 2023).

Tribhuvan University (TU), Nepal's oldest and largest public university, plays a dominant role in management education through its Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Business Studies (MBS) programs. These programs are delivered through a vast network of constituent, community, and private colleges nationwide. Despite their significance, concerns persist regarding inconsistency in academic standards, curriculum relevance, faculty development, and institutional efficiency across TU-affiliated management colleges.

In response, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Nepal introduced Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) mechanisms to enhance accountability and standardization. However, evidence from TU suggests that quality assurance practices remain largely documentation-driven and episodic, with limited integration into institutional culture and daily academic practices. Accreditation is often perceived as an external requirement rather than an internal process of continuous improvement.

This study addresses this gap by developing a culture-based quality management framework for TU's MBA and MBS programs. The central argument of the study is that sustainable quality improvement requires not only formal systems and standards but also a supportive organizational culture that embeds quality values across academic and administrative processes.

Review of Literature

Quality Management in Higher Education

Over the past three decades, quality management in higher education has undergone a significant conceptual transformation. Initially, industrial Total Quality Management (TQM) models shaped quality initiatives, emphasizing efficiency, standardization, and control mechanisms to enhance organizational performance (Sallis, 2014). Early scholarship promoted the application of TQM principles, including continuous improvement, student-centered focus, and leadership commitment, as strategies to strengthen institutional effectiveness and accountability within universities (Cornesky, 1991). These approaches positioned higher education institutions (HEIs) as service organizations that could benefit from systematic process management. In this review, quality will be understood as a concept inherent to both service and academic domains, embodying dimensions such as continuous improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, academic freedom, and educational accountability. Clarifying these dimensions from the outset provides a foundation for analyzing the evolution of quality management and its diverse applications within HEIs.

Later critiques questioned the direct transfer of industrial-quality models into academic environments. Williams (1993) argued that adopting business-oriented frameworks without adaptation can undermine academic autonomy, collegial governance, and fundamental scholarly values. Power dynamics, such as status hierarchies and gender disparities, further complicate the implementation of these models, often marginalizing voices from less dominant groups within academic settings. One notable example involved a prominent university where the administration, predominantly led by business-oriented males, pushed for the adoption of TQM models despite significant pushback from female faculty members who argued for preserving academic independence. As a result, recent literature favors more context-sensitive and holistic approaches to quality management. Quality is now widely understood as a multidimensional, socially constructed concept shaped by institutional mission, governance, disciplinary cultures, and stakeholder expectations (Filippakou, 2011).

Recent research frames quality management as a continuous organizational learning process rather than a static compliance exercise. Achieving sustainable quality improvement requires leadership engagement, faculty involvement, data-informed decision-making, and coordination between academic and administrative subsystems (Manatos et al., 2017). This shift indicates a consensus that quality management in higher education should balance accountability with academic values and institutional diversity.

Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Quality assurance (QA) systems in higher education typically integrate internal quality mechanisms with external evaluation and accreditation processes. Accreditation is broadly acknowledged as a tool to improve transparency, accountability, and public trust in higher education systems (Nicholson, 2011). However, research indicates that accreditation effectiveness depends largely on institutional capacity, leadership commitment, and cultural readiness for change.

In developing countries, QA systems often encounter organizational constraints such as limited financial and human resources, fragmented governance, and inadequate monitoring and review mechanisms. These challenges frequently lead to symbolic or compliance-driven implementation, where institutions prioritize fulfilling formal requirements over achieving substantive quality improvement (Ansah, 2015). Such practices restrict the transformative potential of accreditation processes.

Recent empirical studies indicate that quality assurance produces significant academic and organizational outcomes only when embedded within a broader culture of quality. For instance, Asiyai (2022) found that institutions treating accreditation as a developmental and reflective process, rather than a checklist, demonstrate enhanced organizational learning, improved teaching practices, and greater innovation. A telling

example of this is the rise in graduate employability rates by 15% over a three-year period in institutions that embraced this developmental model. This approach positions QA as a catalyst for ongoing improvement rather than a terminal goal.

Management Education: MBA and MBS Context

Globally, management education, particularly Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs, has increasingly focused on competency-based curricula, experiential learning, assurance-of-learning systems, and alignment with employer and industry expectations (Zammuto, 2008). These programs emphasize leadership development, analytical skills, ethical reasoning, and effective problem-solving. Master of Business Studies (MBS) programs, especially in South Asia, traditionally integrate academic rigor with a professional orientation, serving a broader and more diverse student population.

In Nepal, MBA and MBS programs operate within centralized curricular frameworks and large networks of affiliated colleges. While this structure supports access and standardization, it restricts institutional autonomy in curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and quality improvement (Ghimire & Timilsina, 2022). Empirical research identifies persistent challenges, including misalignment between curriculum and labor-market demands, limited faculty development, and inconsistent student support services across institutions. Although some feedback loops between Nepali employers and curriculum committees exist, such as periodic industry consultations and advisory board meetings, these mechanisms are often underutilized or not aligned with rapid industry changes. Illustrating one successful loop, a collaboration between a leading bank and a local university's curriculum committee led to the inclusion of in-demand digital banking skills, thereby improving graduate employability. However, in many cases, the absence of structured feedback channels stifles timely curriculum adjustments to market needs, underscoring the necessity for greater autonomy and responsiveness to stakeholders' voices.

These challenges highlight the limitations of fragmented or compliance-focused quality practices and underscore the need for integrated quality management systems that respond to local institutional contexts while aligning with national and global standards.

Organizational Culture and Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of involving diverse actors, such as students, faculty, employers, alumni, regulators, and communities, in quality management processes (Mitchell et al., 1997). In higher education, stakeholder engagement increases the relevance, accountability, and legitimacy of academic programs. However, engagement must be supported by an enabling organizational culture to be effective. For instance, establishing employer advisory boards can provide

valuable insights into labor market demands and help align curricula with industry expectations. Similarly, student councils can provide feedback on teaching methods and the relevance of the curriculum. Faculty committees can be established to ensure an ongoing dialogue between academic staff and administration, fostering innovation and improved pedagogy. Alumni networks can be engaged to assess the applicability of skills taught and enhance program offerings. Regulators and community representatives can participate in periodic forums to review institutional strategies and external expectations.

Organizational culture, defined as the shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide institutional behavior, is a crucial factor in the success of quality initiatives (Schein, 2017). Empirical evidence consistently shows that participatory, trust-based, and learning-oriented cultures promote innovation and continuous improvement, whereas hierarchical and control-oriented cultures often reduce quality management to procedural compliance (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). This shift not only improved her department but also inspired her to spearhead new initiatives, further underscoring how an inclusive culture fosters growth. Thus, sustainable quality management in higher education depends on both formal systems and cultural transformation that fosters collaboration, reflection, and shared responsibility for quality.

Methodology

This study adopts a framework development research design, supported by empirical quantitative evidence, to inform the construction of a context-sensitive quality management framework for higher education institutions. The research is descriptive and cross-sectional, focusing on assessing prevailing quality management practices at a single point in time. This design is appropriate for capturing stakeholder perceptions and observing patterns that contribute to the systematic development of an institutional quality framework.

The study population comprises key stakeholders from Tribhuvan University (TU)-affiliated management colleges, including students, faculty members, administrative staff, and academic leaders, all of whom are directly involved in or affected by quality management and assurance practices. The study area was limited to TU-affiliated management colleges to maintain consistency in institutional governance structures, curricular frameworks, and regulatory contexts.

A total of 290 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of all major stakeholder groups relevant to quality management. This sampling approach was considered appropriate for framework development research, as it prioritizes knowledgeable and experience-based perspectives rather than statistical generalization.

Primary data were collected using a standardized questionnaire developed through

an extensive review of quality management and higher education literature. The instrument was designed to capture respondents' perceptions across key dimensions of quality management, including academic processes, institutional efficiency, quality assurance mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement practices. Responses were measured using a Likert-scale format, facilitating systematic quantification of perceptions.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were derived from well-established quality management models and prior empirical studies, and were reviewed for clarity, relevance, and correspondence with the study objectives. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (0.87), which indicated acceptable levels, confirming that the instrument consistently measured the intended constructs.

Data analysis was executed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to examine the overall status, patterns, and distribution of quality management practices across TU-affiliated management colleges. The findings were interpreted in relation to the research aims and served as an empirical basis for developing the proposed quality management framework.

Ethical aspects were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary; respondents were informed of the study's purpose, and confidentiality and anonymity of responses were ensured. All data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Results and Interpretation

Profile of Respondents

Table 1
Respondent Distribution by Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Students	166	57.2
Faculty members	67	23.1
Administrative staff	29	10.0
Academic leaders / QA officials	28	9.7
Total	290	100.0

The respondent profile reflects a balanced representation of key internal stakeholders. The dominance of student respondents ensures that learner perspectives are adequately captured, while faculty and academic leaders provide insights into academic governance and quality assurance practices.

Objective 1: Identifying Critical Requirements for Practical Management Programs

Table 2
Perceived Importance of Quality Requirements

Quality Dimension	Mean Score	Interpretation
Mission and vision alignment	3.92	High
Curriculum relevance	3.85	High
Faculty competence and development	3.78	High
Student support services	3.61	Moderate
Stakeholder engagement	3.56	Moderate

Respondents rated mission–vision alignment and curriculum relevance as the most critical requirements for effective MBA and MBS programs. This indicates that while formal statements exist, their operationalization varies across colleges. Moderate scores for student support and stakeholder engagement suggest underdeveloped systems for academic advising, career guidance, and industry interaction.

Objective 2: Assessing Quality Management Practices

Table 3
Status of Quality Management Practices

Practice Area	Mean Score	Status
Internal quality assurance mechanisms	3.44	Moderate
Accreditation preparedness	3.37	Moderate
Continuous improvement processes	3.21	Low–Moderate
Feedback utilization	3.05	Low

The results reveal that quality management practices are present but weakly institutionalized. Continuous improvement and feedback utilization scored lowest, indicating that quality assurance activities are often conducted for compliance rather than learning and improvement. This finding strongly supports the need for a culture-based quality management approach.

Objective 3: Role of Organizational Culture

Table 4
Perceived Influence of Organizational Culture

Cultural Attribute	Mean Score	Influence Level
Leadership commitment	3.89	High
Participatory decision-making	3.62	Moderate
Openness to change	3.48	Moderate
Shared quality values	3.41	Moderate

Leadership commitment emerged as the strongest cultural factor influencing quality management. However, moderate scores for participatory decision-making and shared values suggest that quality is not yet fully embedded as a collective institutional ethos. Organizational culture thus acts as a mediating variable that shapes how formal quality mechanisms translate into practice.

Proposed Culture-Based Quality Management Framework

Based on empirical findings and literature synthesis, the study proposes a culture-based quality management framework comprising:



The framework emphasizes that organizational culture integrates and sustains quality management practices, transforming accreditation from a procedural exercise into a continuous improvement system.

Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that quality management in TU’s MBA and MBS programs remains largely compliance-driven and insufficiently embedded in institutional culture. Sustainable quality improvement requires a paradigm shift toward culture-based quality management that integrates leadership, stakeholder engagement, and continuous learning.

The proposed framework contributes theoretically by contextualizing quality

management concepts within Nepalese higher education and practically by offering a structured roadmap for administrators, quality assurance units, and policymakers. Embedding quality as a shared institutional value can enhance graduate employability, institutional credibility, and long-term academic excellence.

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