

Examining The Impact Of Total Quality Management Practices And Organizational Learning On Organizational Performance: Innovation As A Mediating Factor

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Abstract

In developing economies, the poor performance of public-sector institutions, specifically of ministries of education, is a major obstacle to sustainable national development. This conceptual paper examines the relationship between Total Quality Management (TQM) practices and organizational learning (OL), and between OL and organizational performance (OP), and explores the role of innovation as a mediating variable. Based on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), the paper creates an integrated conceptual framework to explain the interaction between TQM practices (top management commitment, continuous improvement, employee involvement, customer focus, process management and fact-based decision-making) and OL capabilities (knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation and organizational memory) to achieve organizational outcomes in public sector contexts through innovation (administrative and technical). The paper synthesizes new empirical evidence from Nigeria and elsewhere. It highlights important research gaps, especially the under-researched mediating role between TQM performance and OL performance in public education ministry contexts. The paper ends with concrete policy recommendations for decision makers and stakeholders from the ministry level as well as for researchers, focusing on the need for holistic investments in quality management, learning infrastructure, and innovation support systems. The paper is a welcome addition to the literature on public-sector capability building and provides a replicable model for enhancing the effectiveness and capacity of institutions in resource-limited educational governance settings.

Key Words: *Total Quality Management, Organizational Learning, Innovation, Nigerian Education Ministry, Organizational Performance.*

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I. Introduction

In public institutions, the quest for better organizational performance has become one of the most challenging governance issues of the twenty-first century, especially in a developing economy like Indonesia, where the effectiveness of public institutions directly impacts the quality of services they provide for citizens (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2023; Yulianto et al., 2025). Performance gaps lead to lower learning outcomes, reduced economic potential, and entrenched poverty in ministries of education (MoE), where human capital development and national competitiveness are constitutionally mandated. The Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, is one such ministry facing these problems, as evidenced by recently published staffing data, which show that only 4,266 of the 9,583 approved staff positions are occupied, thereby limiting its capacity to operate in all areas (Federal Ministry of Education, 2024). The critical cadre of Quality Assurance (QA) is worse off, as only 447 officers are deployed in this cadre, while a total of 2,603 officers are approved, resulting in a deficit of 2,156 officers that seriously hampers the monitoring of educational standards in the Ministry (Federal Ministry of Education, 2024).

The education sector in Nigeria still has a long way to go despite the many reform efforts over the years. The allocation of education in the 2024 and 2025 Nigerian budgets was 7.9 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively, which is less than UNESCO's recommended 26 percent (Independent Newspaper, 2026). Performance in the education sector has also been discouraging, with only 10.7 percent of the budget executed in Cross River State in 2025, and no capital was executed in the first quarter of 2026 (Premium Times, 2026). These are all resource

limitations, highlighting the need for management strategies to achieve the best possible performance with available resources.

In this context, Total Quality Management (TQM) and Organizational Learning (OL) are considered potential strategic capacities to improve public-sector performance. As an overall management philosophy that prioritizes achieving continuous improvement with a focus on customers, people, and data, TQM has proven to have a positive impact on the performance of organizations in many applications (Isidore et al., 2023; Zubair, 2025). Organizational learning, the processes by which organizations acquire, share, and use knowledge, has been demonstrated to increase adaptability and performance, especially in dynamic environments (Abdullahi et al., 2024; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022).

But the literature lacks the information this paper fills in. First, most research on TQM has been conducted in the private sector, and public education ministries in developing countries have received little research attention. Second, although innovation is a popular theory linking organizational capabilities to performance, there remains limited empirical evidence for its role as a mediator in public education ministry settings (Tetteh et al., 2025; Ishaq & Tariq, 2025). Third, very few studies have systematically investigated the correlations among TQM, OL, innovation, and performance in the FMoE, which is crucial for national development.

The three main aims of this conceptual paper are: First, it delves into the synergies among financial, human, and social capital inputs and their impact on the success of women entrepreneurs. Second, it examines the influence of various types of capital on the extent of innovation – a key factor of entrepreneurial success. Thirdly, it discusses the challenges of work-life balance faced by women entrepreneurs and how this relates to access to capital. The paper seeks to provide theoretical insights and practical advice for improving organizational performance in public education settings by achieving these goals.

The paper has the following structure. In Section II, the theoretical underpinning is provided by combining RBV and Dynamic Capabilities Theory in an integrated conceptual framework. Recent empirical evidence is summarized in a comprehensive literature review of TQM, OL, innovation, and organizational performance (Section III). The paper's recommendations for policymakers, ministry administrators, and researchers are presented in Section IV. Contributions and directions for future research are summarized at the end of Section V.

II. Theoretical Postulation

This study's conceptual framework is based on two interrelated theories: the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT). These theories offer a solid basis for explaining how organizational capacities can lead to a quantitative and sustained performance edge, especially in public-sector settings where resources are limited and environments are dynamic.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View, developed by Barney (1991), is based on the premise that sustained competitive advantage is gained through resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable (the VRIN criteria). Given this paper's focus, RBV provides a theoretical rationale for treating TQM practices and organizational learning as strategic intangible resources that can lead to superior organizational performance.

TQM practices, when fully incorporated into organizational practices and culture, are valuable resources that can help increase operational effectiveness, minimize quality failures, and increase stakeholder satisfaction. They can be useful practices, as they help ministries provide better-quality education more efficiently. They are rare because not all organizations manage to set up a full-fledged quality management system, but some superficially use quality practices that cannot be deeply embedded in the organisation's culture. Because the effectiveness of TQM depends on tacit knowledge, organizational history, and cultural factors that are not easily imitated or acquired by competitors, these factors are imperfectly imitable (Barney & Hesterly, 2019).

Organizational learning capabilities, likewise, are an important intangible resource that has VRIN characteristics. Learning capabilities reflect an organization's ability to obtain, process, and use knowledge, which, over time, improves decision-making quality, increases adaptability to change, and enhances cumulative capabilities (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022). Abdullahi et al. (2026) showed that learning capabilities have a significant impact on organizational resilience ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) in public-sector organizations in Nigeria and confirmed that learning is a valuable capability for dealing with environmental dynamism.

RBV is therefore a logical explanation as to why the Federal Ministry of Education is concerned with TQM and OL as strategic assets. These are capabilities that belong to the specific organization, have been built up over many years, are integrated into routines, and are strengthened by organizational culture. They are not available in the market and are not easily imitable through simple copying, but require development over long periods of time through continued commitment and patience.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT)

RBV can provide an answer to what resources are relevant for organizational success, but what is equally important is how organizations utilize, manage and refresh their resources in a dynamic environment, which is the focus of Dynamic Capabilities Theory. According to Teece et al. (1997), dynamic capabilities refer to the “firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments” (p. 516).

Dynamic capabilities are higher-order routines that enable sensing opportunities and threats in the environment, acting quickly on them, and reconfiguring the resource base as needed (Teece, 2007). Dynamic capabilities within public education ministries enable ongoing adjustments to policy changes, stakeholder demands, and resource availability.

DCT has recently been applied in the public sector, for example, to understand adaptation and improvement in Governmental Organizations. Gullmark et al. (2025) discovered that to deploy and adapt organization-level dynamic capabilities, public middle managers rely on their unique use of dynamic managerial capabilities, which contradicts the upper-echelons perspective that focuses solely on top-level managers. Ongena et al. (2026) showed that dynamic capabilities play a role in the linkage between digital maturity and organizational performance in public sector organizations, and that learning is one of the most important dynamic capabilities with high impact but can be improved.

Zollo and Winter’s (2002) evolutionary elaboration of DCT is especially pertinent to this paper: it elevates the process of learning itself to a core level of dynamic capabilities. Organizations develop their capabilities over time by deliberate learning mechanisms such as knowledge articulation, codification, and sharing, which keep them in tune with environmental requirements. This conceptualization is important, as it connects directly to the development of the organization’s capabilities and strengthens the theoretical underpinning of the importance of treating OL as a predictor of performance.

Integrated Conceptual Framework

RBV and DCT are combined, offering a multi-layered theoretical framework in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts for this paper. RBV helps us understand why TQM and OL can be useful strategic resources that deliver ongoing performance benefits. DCT illuminates the processes of deploying and renewing resources, and their adaptation to drive innovation and remain relevant in shifting contexts. These complementary theories shed light on the ‘what’ (the resources that matter) and ‘how’ (the processes by which they become relevant to the creation of value) of organizational performance in public-sector settings.

The integrated framework assumes that TQM practices and organizational learning capabilities have a direct and indirect impact on organizational performance. The process through which the potential inherent in TQM and learning capabilities translates into measurable, tangible performance improvements that stakeholders can see and appreciate is the critical mediating mechanism: innovation. This positioning responds to what scholars have called the “black box” phenomenon in the current literature, in which relationships between input and output are established without explanation of the processes through which those relationships are created.

The theoretical context further considers leadership as a facilitator of these relationships. Abdullahi et al. (2026) revealed that ambidextrous leadership partially mediated the relationship between organizational capabilities and the resilience outcomes in public sector organizations in Nigeria, suggesting that ambidextrous leadership behaviors are significant to the process of translating organizational capabilities into outcomes. This discovery has justified including leadership within the conceptual framework as an enabling factor.

III. Literature Review

Total Quality Management (TQM) and Organizational Performance

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management approach that focuses on quality and performance through a culture of excellence that permeates the entire organization at all levels and in all functions. The principles of TQM focus on the customer (or, in the public sector, the stakeholder), continuous improvement, the involvement of all employees, and decision-making based on data and facts (Deming, 2020; Juran, 2016).

The evidence of the effect of TQM on the performance of organizations has improved significantly. Isidore et al. (2023) examined the effects of the generalized staff involvement in TQM practices on the organisational performance in the financial services sector of Nigeria with First Bank Nigeria as a case study and discovered that the effects of generalized staff involvement in TQM practices on the organizational performance in First Bank Nigeria are significant and substantial as reflected on the multiple dimensions ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$). They highlighted that for TQM to deliver tangible benefits to organizations, employees need to be able to implement it, focusing on customers, continuous process improvement, and systematic problem-solving.

In the public sector, Zubair (2025) studied the implementation of TQM in the Ministry of Education in Sudan and found a strong relationship between TQM implementation and the ministry’s performance, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.41 ($p < 0.001$). The results of the study revealed that there are differential effects across

the various dimensions of TQM; top management commitment ($\beta = 0.28$) and continuous improvement ($\beta = 0.24$) are the most powerful dimensions in relation to performance outcomes. This is an encouraging finding because it implies that, even with bureaucratic, political, and resource challenges, TQM principles are adaptable and can be successfully implemented to produce measurable improvements in ministry functioning.

Mutua (2023) investigated the public sector in Kenya and the practice of TQM in the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), where the researcher obtained a positive and significant relationship between all the practices of TQM and the performance of the Office of the Auditor General, with the training practice having the highest correlation value of $r = 0.908$. Results of the regression analysis revealed that the factors that had the greatest influence on performance were training ($\beta = 0.347$), leadership roles ($\beta = 0.338$), total employee involvement ($\beta = 0.279$), and focus on stakeholders ($\beta = 0.196$). The results showed that 89.6 per cent of the performance changes were due to the implementation of TQM practices.

Recently, these findings have been confirmed with the addition of mediating mechanisms. Tetteh et al. (2025) investigated the mediating effect of innovation between TQM and SMEs' performance and concluded that innovation plays a vital role as a mediator between TQM and SMEs' performance. Along the same lines, Ishaq and Tariq (2025) showed that organizational innovation is an important mediator between TQM and organizational performance, in that innovation, as a result of quality practice, helps the organization stay in tune with market needs and supports continuous improvement.

Organizational Learning (OL) and Organizational Performance

The importance of organizational learning as a key ability for adapting, innovating, and ultimately performing has been increasingly acknowledged. OL are the activities that enable an organization to acquire new knowledge, disseminate it across organizational units, and make it part of its routines and behavior (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022). OL is particularly relevant in the public domain, as in the case of a ministry of education, where policies, resource availability, and societal expectations often change.

Abdullahi et al. (2024) comprehensively examined public agencies in Nigeria and discovered that agencies with well-established and systematically applied learning practices that include a cluster of regular training, knowledge sharing routines, after-action reviews, and communities of practice had a strong association with high operational performance ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$) and employee effectiveness. Their results highlight the fact that organizational learning is not a purely theoretical construct, but a real and measurable capacity that has a tangible impact on the day-to-day situations of the organizations in terms of better quality of decisions made, better problem-solving, better adaptability, and better knowledge utilization.

Abdullahi et al. (2026), in a more recent study, investigated organizational capabilities and ambidextrous leadership, and their impact on organizational resilience in Nigerian public-sector organizations. The study revealed that organizational learning has a significant and positive impact on organizational resilience ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the premise of the Dynamic Capabilities View that learning capabilities help organizations cope with environmental dynamism and maintain service delivery. The study also found a partial mediation effect of ambidextrous leadership in the relationship between learning capabilities and resilience, highlighting the important role of leadership behaviors in the mediation process.

Abate (2025) has studied the organizational learning and organizational performance relationship in the Ethiopian public sector and concluded that organizational learning is directly and statistically significantly related to organizational performance with a value of $\beta = 0.38$ ($p < 0.001$). The study found that organizations with a high learning culture exhibited significant improvements in their ability to adapt to changes in the environment, such as changes of laws, allocation of resources, and expanding stakeholder expectations, implying that OL acts as an enabling and stabilizing mechanism in the transition process.

A strong piece of evidence was provided in the case of Tunisian industries by Tajouri and Lakhel (2024), revealing that organizational learning positively impacts innovation and organizational performance, and acts as a mediator between TQM practices and their effects. Their structural equation modelling found the direct path between organizational learning and performance to be significant ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and that there was a significant indirect path between organizational learning and performance via innovation (0.18, $p < 0.01$), thus validating that while learning capabilities are universally important, they may need to be nurtured in different ways in different organizational sizes and levels of resources.

Innovation as a Mediating Mechanism

The mediating role of innovation between TQM and OL, and their impact on organizational performance, constitute a significant theoretical contribution of this paper. As documented by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Hayes (2022), there is a need for organizational research to understand how TQM and OL influence organizational performance, not only if they do. Theoretically, innovation serves as the missing link between TQM practices, organizational learning, and improved organizational performance.

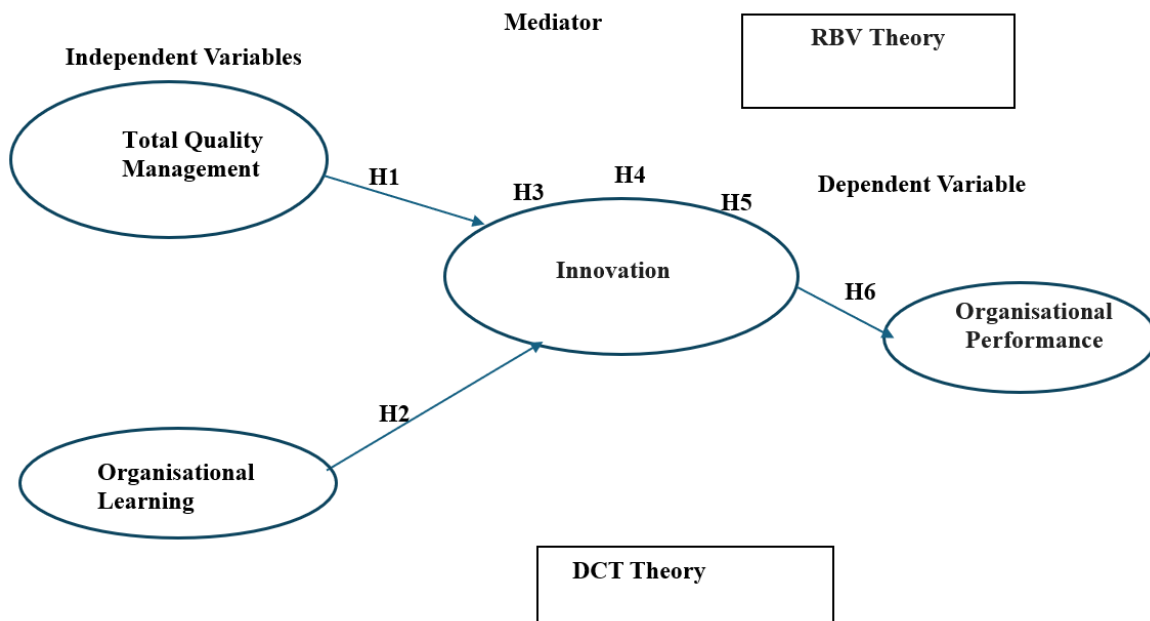
There are several related arguments that underlie the theoretical rationale for having a mediating role of innovation. Firstly, TQM practices (through focus on continuous improvement, systematic approach to analyzing customer feedback, and rigorous documentation of processes and procedures) produce a continuous flow of ideas to improve the organization's products, services, and processes. Innovation potential is created through quality circles, quality audit, employee involvement mechanisms, and customer feedback mechanisms. But these ideas can only become reality when they are turned into realized innovations that impact how the organization works and serves stakeholders. Innovation is therefore the vehicle through which the potential for achieving performance improvement in TQM activities can be turned into actual performance improvement.

Secondly, organizational learning is essential to create the knowledge base, the 'cognitive infrastructure,' and the collective capacity for innovation to be effective and consistent. Learning mechanisms accumulate absorptive capacity through systematic knowledge acquisition, information dissemination, collective interpretation of information, and organizational memory, which help organizations identify valuable new knowledge, recombine existing knowledge in new ways, and ultimately translate external knowledge into their own context (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). If these learning processes are not in place, then organizations can develop ideas that lack the foundations to grow.

Third, innovation is not just about coming up with new ideas; it's about making things happen, a stage that makes a difference to stakeholders that can be seen and appreciated. For the Federal Ministry of Education, innovations could be innovative teacher training programs, a new curriculum design, stakeholder engagement, digital learning platforms, or streamlined administration processes. When all these innovations are successful, they can improve service quality (service outcomes in education and other services) or operational effectiveness (more efficient use of resources and faster policy implementation).

Based on recent empirical research, the positioning of innovation as a mediator is supported. Tetteh et al. (2025) found that the relationship between TQM and the performance of small- and medium-scale businesses is fully mediated by innovation, meaning that the influence of TQM on performance is entirely through innovation. Ishaq & Tariq (2025) showed that organizational innovation is a major mediating variable between TQM and organizational performance, as it helps organizations adjust their operations to market requirements.

Based on the findings from SMEs in the Nigerian manufacturing industry, the study of Shuaib and He (2022) revealed that the relationship between TQM and innovation performance is completely mediated by organizational learning (indirect effect = 0.27, $p < 0.001$) and further showed that innovation performance positively influences business performance ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). The results of their study reveal that learning and innovation pathways play an important role in the TQM-performance relationship, primarily through indirect mechanisms.



Research Gaps

Even with information gained from the vast body of literature consulted, several important research gaps remain, as identified in the research framework in Figure 1. First, there is space in the context. The majority of TQM and OL research has taken place in the private sector and/or in developed-country contexts. There are studies

in an African context, but there is a lack of direct studies focusing on large-scale projects within public education ministries. While only one study exploring the Ministry of Education was conducted in Sudan (Zubair, 2025), the Nigerian context, with its unique bureaucratic culture, federal structure, and governance challenges, remains largely unexplored. Secondly, there is no intervening mechanism. Even though innovation is widely theorized as a key link, empirical support for its mediation in public education ministry contexts remains limited. There is no study that has specifically examined the mediating role of innovation between TQM and OL performance in the context of a developing country's education ministry.

The third gap is a theoretical one. Although both RBV and DCT have been used separately, there is limited research that combines both perspectives in a single empirical study in the context of public education. This paper combines these theories to offer a more comprehensive explanation of organizational performance improvement than either theory alone.

Fourthly, there is a gap in the empirical literature on the Nigerian Ministry of Education in particular. Although there are many known performance issues in this institution, there has never been a systematic study of the relationships between TQM practices and organizational learning, innovation, and performance. This study attempts to fill this gap, as it is the first comprehensive conceptual investigation of such relationships within the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review presented in this paper, the following recommendations are offered for policymakers, ministry administrators, researchers, and stakeholders interested in improving organizational performance in public education.

Recommendations for Policymakers

i. Make TQM Implementation a Strategic Reform Agenda. Policymakers should be aware that TQM is not a discretionary program but a key strategic priority in the journey of quality improvement in educational governance. Based on the results showing the positive effects of TQM on organisations' performance, the Federal Ministry of Education should design and implement a comprehensive TQM framework in keeping with the Nigerian Education Sector Renewed Initiative (NESRI). This should be a framework with quality standards, quality measures, and accountability measures for each Ministry department.

ii. Embed Learning Mechanisms within Ministries. The Nigerian civil service reform programme as contained in the FCSC 2026 – 2030 Strategic Plan, underscores the importance of competency-based human resource management and organizational intelligence (ThisDayLive, 2026). Policymakers need to make a conscious effort to ensure that these changes clearly include organizational learning mechanisms, such as after-action reviews, knowledge repositories, communities of practice, and structured training programs for staff across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). The FCSC's policy agenda aligns with its vision of "rebuilding institutional capacity, enhancing organizational intelligence, and reducing over-reliance on external consultants," and thus provides solid policy support for the investment in OL.

iii. Provide Innovation Support to workers. This paper's mediation of innovation emphasizes the need to devote resources to supporting innovation initiatives. Policymakers should create innovation funds, pilot program frameworks, and evaluation mechanisms to support ministry staff in designing, piloting, and scaling up innovative strategies to deliver curriculum, train teachers, administer processes, and engage stakeholders. Over the past few years, the Federal Government has allocated N106 billion for UBEC matching grants (ThisDayLive, 2026) and N22 billion for teacher professional development (Arise TV, 2026); these are good starting points for allocating funds for innovation.

iv. Tackle staffing shortages as a first-order priority. The shortage of quality assurance personnel (2156 people) and the high vacancy rate (55.5 percent) are fundamental limitations on the Ministry's ability to implement TQM, OL, and innovation. Policymakers should focus on filling these positions by accelerating the hiring of qualified staff through career development opportunities and competitive wages and salaries. Investments in management capabilities will have little impact if they don't address basic staffing gaps.

v. Design Leadership Development Programs. Policymakers need to focus on leadership development programs that equip middle and senior managers with the skills and experience needed for quality management facilitation, learning culture building, and innovation support, as this is crucial for translating organizational capabilities into outcomes through the mediation of ambidextrous leadership (Abdullahi et al., 2026). The recently concluded NIPSS capacity building retreat of the federal university governing councils (Independent, 2026) offers a great blueprint that can be expanded to the ministry leadership.

Recommendations for Ministry Administrators

i. Perform Current TQM & OL Maturity Diagnostic Assessments. Prior to introducing new initiatives, the Ministry administrators should systematically assess the current level of TQM implementation, the robustness of the learning culture, innovation outcomes, and performance outcomes. These assessments would help prioritize dimensions and allocate resources based on evidence, and identify specific dimensions where improvement is needed.

ii. Design and set up Quality Circles and Continuous Improvement Teams. All Ministry departments should have quality circles (small groups of employees who meet regularly to identify work-related problems, analyze them, and solve them). These circles are a vehicle for creating and testing innovations and for establishing employees' ownership and engagement in improvement processes.

iii. Develop Knowledge Sharing Platforms and Learning Routines. Administrators can have regular, systematic knowledge-sharing processes, such as after-action reviews following major projects, communities of practice for functional areas, and knowledge repositories to capture and distribute lessons learned. Cross-Departmental Knowledge Exchange is needed: Regular forums should be established to break down the bureaucratic silos for cross-departmental knowledge exchange.

iv. Connect with Quality and Innovation Measures. The Ministry's performance management framework should include measures for quality enhancement initiatives, learning engagement and innovation products in addition to the traditional performance measures. The Ministry could adopt the model of the recently launched Federal Tertiary Institutions Governance Transparency Portal (FTIGTP) which monitors various performance measures and funding sources in the 47 Federal Universities (ThisDayLive, 2026).

v. Make an investment in the training and development of employees. Since there is a strong correlation between training and TQM effectiveness, it is very important for administrators to invest heavily in training programs that develop TQM competencies, learning capabilities, and innovation skills. The Edurevamp platform is already live and has successfully engaged 37,000 teachers in digital skills training (ThisDayLive, 2026), demonstrating that large-scale PD is feasible in the Nigerian education sector.

Recommendations for Researchers

i. Do Empirical validation of the Conceptual framework. The theoretical approach proposed in this paper needs to be verified through quantitative research. Validated measurement instruments for TQM practices, OL mechanisms, innovation outputs, and organizational performance should be developed for use in public education ministries. The direct and indirect relationships, as well as the proposed mediation effects between the variables, should be tested using structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

ii. Use Systematic Methodologies. Future studies should use appropriate sample size determination, such as Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and G-Power analyses, to ensure sufficient statistical power. Subgroup analyses within the stratified random sampling frame (by department and employee category) will show contextual variations in relationship patterns.

iii. Carry out Comparative and Longitudinal Studies. The current study acknowledges a limitation of using cross-sectional studies. Future studies are needed that use longitudinal designs to examine how TQM implementation, learning capability development, innovation outputs, and performance outcomes change over time, which will help draw stronger causal inferences regarding the impact of TQM on the learning capability of organizations and identify lagged effects.

iv. Apply the Framework to other Public Sector scenarios. This paper addresses the Federal Ministry of Education, but the concept can be extended to other Public Sector Ministries and Agencies facing similar performance issues. Researchers are encouraged to conduct the study in other MDAs to test for generalizability and identify which contextual moderators affect the framework's effectiveness.

v. Explore Contextual Moderators. Future research is needed to explore the moderating role of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, political aspects, resources, and environmental uncertainty, on the linkages between TQM, OL, innovation, and performance. Knowledge of these moderators would help create more specific and contextual interventions.

Recommendations for Stakeholders and Development Partners

Encourage TQM and OL Capacity-Building activities. The international development community, including the World Bank, UNESCO, and bilateral donors, should focus on supporting capacity-building projects in TQM and OL within Nigerian education governance institutions. Technical assistance, training programmes and knowledge exchange platforms should be created for the transfer of best practice from other developing countries with successful experience of quality management reforms.

ii. Set up Innovation labs and pilot programmes. Innovation labs or pilot programmes should be supported in the Ministry for the development of new approaches, to be subsequently tested and evaluated before being rolled out on a large scale. These labs would provide opportunities for experimentation and learning in a safe space, and for generating evidence to support effectiveness in the Nigerian context.

iii. Promote PPPs for Quality Enhancement. Private-sector organizations with expertise in quality management, process improvement, and organizational learning must be involved as partners in Ministry reform initiatives. Structured partnerships between the private sector and the public sector, leveraging the optimal knowledge and know-how provided by the private sector and public sector context knowledge, could help build capability faster and spread innovation.

iv. Promote Sustained Political Commitment. Stakeholders need to promote long-term political will for quality management, learning, and innovation – beyond short-term political campaigns. This involves raising awareness within the leadership of the importance of good institutional performance for national development outcomes.

V. Conclusion

A conceptual paper has been explored in this work to examine the relationship of TQM practices, organizational learning, innovation, and organizational performance in the context of the Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE) in Nigeria. The paper has developed an integrated conceptual framework derived from the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, with innovation as a key mediating mechanism between TQM and OL capabilities and tangible performance gains.

The paper has compiled recent empirical evidence from Nigeria and the international setting, which shows that TQM practices positively influence the performance of organizations (Isidore et al., 2023; Zubair, 2025), organizational learning enhances adaptability and effectiveness (Abdullahi et al., 2024; Abdullahi et al., 2026) and innovation as a critical pathway through which the capabilities generate value (Tetteh et al., 2025; Ishaq & Tariq, 2025). The paper has pinpointed key areas for future investigation, notably the lack of empirical research on these linkage dynamics in the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, given the known performance issues, such as a 55.5 percent vacancy rate and a 2,156-personnel deficit in the quality assurance sector.

This paper has three contributions. First, it is a theoretically informed and empirically driven conceptual framework that contributes to understanding how organizational capabilities translate into organizational performance outcomes in the public sector context. The framework adds the missing link between RBV and DCT and places major emphasis on innovation as a mediator. Second, it offers practical, context-specific recommendations for policymakers, ministry administrators, researchers, and stakeholders interested in improving organizational performance. These recommendations are based on evidence from other developing countries and take into account the unique environment of the Nigerian public sector. Third, it provides a basis for future empirical studies to test and further develop the framework using valid, sound quantitative models such as structural equation modeling and longitudinal analysis.

The paper admits several limitations. It is a conceptual paper, and the propositions therein have to be empirically validated. This focuses on one ministry, and it is not possible to draw general conclusions for other public sector settings. Most of the studies have taken a cross-sectional approach which hinders the drawing of causal conclusions; longitudinal studies are recommended. Future research should overcome these limitations by testing in other MDAs through rigorous testing and explicitly considering moderating factors related to context.

To sum up, sustainable organizational performance in public education ministries is not the result of an isolated application of quality frameworks or the involvement in training programmes, but of embedding quality management, continuous learning and innovation in daily work. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) cannot improve its performance without sustained efforts to build its capabilities for TQM, create learning cultures, foster innovation, and overcome any underlying challenges, such as staff shortage. This paper offers a framework that charts the course for this journey: a theoretical perspective and some practical steps for changing the educational governance system in Nigeria and other African countries.

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