The application of total quality management, as a panacea to the problems of achieving quality in education, has been receiving a lot of attention worldwide. In India, a number of quality improvement programmes and schemes are being introduced in every level of education by the government. Parallel to this, a number of quality assessment studies at different levels of education are also being conducted, detailing the process of quality efforts and signaling the flaws in the system to remedy. However, a comprehensive study assessing total quality management in higher secondary education in Kerala, after the special quality drive programme – Activity Oriented Learner Centered Curriculum in 2005 - could not be found and no study has made a comprehensive assessment of the satisfaction of teachers, students and parents of higher secondary school education in Kerala. There were many apprehensions among the teaching community regarding the effectiveness of the quality initiatives and also with regard to the potential burden on the workload of the teachers. It is doubtful that the agenda of quality improvement efforts in the higher secondary education in Kerala has struck with some amount of disapproval and reluctance to change from the part of the teachers and related authorities. However, the fruits of such quality initiatives cannot be overlooked at any cost. Therefore, it is highly inevitable to evaluate the quality improvement initiatives of the government leading to the successful implementation of TQM process in the higher secondary school education in Kerala.

This study is descriptive in nature examining the extent to which the three important tenets of total quality management namely; continuous improvement, teamwork and customer satisfaction, are present in the higher secondary school education in Kerala, by eliciting the opinion of the teachers, students and parents in the government, aided and unaided schools, coming under the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Kerala. Continuous improvement is assessed in four pertinent aspects of school education, such as, ‘teaching’, ‘teachers’, ‘evaluation’ and ‘infrastructure’. Overall teamwork achieved among teachers is assessed through the teamwork at school level and teamwork at cluster level. The extent of customer satisfaction is assessed
by taking into account the satisfaction of teachers, students and parents of higher secondary schools. Percentage analysis and descriptive statistics were computed for identifying the nature of the data. The hypotheses are tested using Z test, one sample t test, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) along with least significant difference test for comparison between more than two groups and independent t test for comparing between two groups and also correlation. In order to identify the dimensions of the problems faced by the teachers in the implementation of total quality initiatives, factor analysis was used.

The examination of the TQM initiative in higher secondary education in Kerala could reveal a number of pertinent information about the process of implementation, current scenario of the initiative and the flaws in its implementation process. The study found that the extent of overall continuous improvement and customer satisfaction are above moderate and that the extent of the overall teamwork achieved among teachers is only moderate. The study found that 63.44 per cent of the total variance in problem is explained by a set of ten factors and of these the socio economic problem is the most pertinent one which alone is found to contribute 18.69 per cent of the total variance. The results of the study reporting, ‘above moderate level’ of continuous improvement in teaching, teachers, evaluation and infrastructure by ensuring above moderate satisfaction level of teachers, students and parents about the process, are strong indicators of the efficient implementation of TQM in higher secondary school education in Kerala.

Key words: Total Quality Management, Learner centered curriculum, Cluster, Continuous Improvement, Teamwork.