Chapter 37
Student Perceptions of E-Learning Service Quality, E-Satisfaction, and E-Loyalty

Long Pham

School of Management, College of Business and Social Sciences, University of Louisiana at Monroe, Monroe, USA & Department of Economics and Management, Thuyloi University, Hanoi, Vietnam

Stan Williamson

School of Management, College of Business and Social Sciences, University of Louisiana at Monroe, Monroe, USA

Ronald Berry

College of Business and Social Sciences, University of Louisiana at Monroe, Monroe, USA

ABSTRACT

With the growing ubiquity of the Internet and the continued evolution of the Internet of Things, universities are focusing more on web-based strategies to deliver higher education (i.e., e-learning). In spite of this, few studies on e-learning service quality have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of these efforts. This study seeks to identify primary e-learning service quality dimensions and to examine the relationships among e-learning service quality dimensions, overall e-learning service quality, e-learning satisfaction and e-learning loyalty as perceived by e-students in the college setting. Results identified five main factors that measure e-learning service quality: e-learning administrative and support service quality; e-learning instructor quality; e-learning accuracy; e-learning course materials quality; and e-learning security and privacy. The quality of e-learning administrative and support service, instructor performance, and course materials were positively related to overall e-learning service quality, with e-learning instructor quality the most influential. There was a positive association between overall e-learning service quality and e-learning loyalty, and between e-learning satisfaction and e-learning loyalty. Results are consistent with most studies of traditional and online services and other e-learning studies that customer loyalty is strongly influenced by customer satisfaction and quality of service and that customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by quality of service.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning as an Internet-enabled teaching platform is having a resounding impact on higher education (Eom et al., 2006; Sarabadani et al., 2017; Sohrabi et al., 2012). Growth in Internet-based education has been notable (Tsai et al., 2013). As early as 1997-98, one survey revealed an increasing number of credit-granting courses at the college level were being provided through e-learning, supporting enrollments of more than 1,400,000 students (Rost, 2000). With respect to e-learning in higher education business programs, during the academic year 2005 – 2006 in the U.S. more than 318,000 individuals received undergraduate business degrees and more than 146,000 individuals earned a master's degree in business (NCES, 2007). There is every indication that in the future virtual enrollments in e-learning will keep proliferating as many advanced Internet-based applications continue to be implemented in universities (Beqiri et al., 2010; Wu, 2016).

E-learning is any formal learning approach where the instructor and students interact with each other at a distance using Internet-based technologies (e-infrastructure) (Beqiri et al., 2010; Fazlollahtabar and Muhammadzadeh, 2012). Mcfarland and Hamilton (2006) argue that there are four typical characteristics embedded in e-learning. Such characteristics are: (a) the instructor and students are at a distance during all or almost all of the time of the learning/teaching process; (b) universities (or educational organizations) have influences on the learning/teaching process via special forms of student evaluations; (c) technologies, especially Internet-enabled technologies, are utilized for substantial interactions between the instructor and students; and (d) the effectiveness of e-learning is influenced by effective communications among the stakeholders such as the instructor, tutors, and students.

The popularity of e-learning in higher education makes sense on a number of levels. As with traditional students in face-to-face classes, there is a host of reasons that students would like to pursue e-learning (Beqiri et al., 2010; Fazlollahtabar and Muhammadzadeh, 2012). Many students would like to earn degrees in the hope of getting better jobs (Grossman and Johnson, 2016; Liu et al., 2010). Others would like to enlarge their knowledge base through taking e-courses rather than ultimately earn a degree. The difference for e-students is that they can pursue learning goals from their homes, workplaces, study centers, in addition to classrooms (Roberts, 1996). Consequently, students with busy lifestyles are finding e-learning very attractive (Arbaugh, 2005) since it gives them more control over what, when and where they receive instruction (Lawrence, 2003). Similarly, older, non-traditional students including those who are working, and/or have families are attracted to the flexibility offered by the e-learning platform (McEwen, 2001). Further, Arbaugh (2005) concludes that e-learning benefits students by lowering workplace-related education and training expenses.

E-learning can bring benefits, not only for students, but also for universities (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Lange et al., 2003). E-learning is very likely to reduce costs and enable universities to become more advanced and digitally-enabled (Taylor, 2007). In addition, e-learning can help universities lower some student support requirements, such as facilities and transportation (although this might be off-set by some distinct costs for e-learning students like time and equipment, security, retraining, and consultation). Under the setting of e-learning, except for investments in relevant e-infrastructure, marginal costs relating to serving one additional student might be small (Arbaugh, 2005). Last but not least, many people believe that learning/teaching is equally effective with respect to quality between the traditional setting and e-setting provided that appropriate methods (e.g., good student-to-student interactions and timely instructor's feedback to the students) and technologies are utilized (Mcfarland & Hamilton, 2006).

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