

ABSTRACT

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is a higher education mode which was derived from the concept of distance learning distinguished by no any prior qualifications are required. It permits students to obtain higher education qualifications from any university over the world which are operated in ODL mode overcoming access limitations. Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is the one and only University operated in distance education mode in Sri Lanka (SL). It offers ODL to local and foreign students. But the students enrolled in higher education through ODL are facing difficulties to continue in their studies due to various reasons and those who are not very strong in facing these difficulties and barriers in ODL environment will tend to dropout on the way before achieving their targets. In the distance learning process, student enrollment and graduation statistics of OUSL over last two decades revealed that there is immense gap between the student enrollment rate to ODL courses and the graduation rate. Service quality and the students' satisfaction in ODL contribute a lot to overcome this serious problem. In this research, determinants of Students' Perceived Service Quality (PSQ) with relation to Students' Satisfaction (SAT) and Behavioral Intention (BI) in ODL in Sri Lanka was explored. Independent variables of the study were selected based on the service quality literature. It is included five variables of modified SERVQUAL and Grade Expectation, Convenience, User Skills and Experiences, Computer Expertise, Career Opportunities, Cost & Time, Institutional Image, Course Organisation and Peer Interaction. Dependent variables were students' PSQ, SAT and BI. Data collection was carried out with a self-administered questionnaire from 744 undergraduates of OUSL representing all regional centers over the country. The analysis was based on descriptive and inferential statistics. Final model was formed from only significant variables. The ascending order of the significant path co-efficient results showed, the independent variables of Website Content (0.219), Convenience (0.170), Cost and Time (0.154), Reliability (0.144) and Course Organization (0.118) were significant with the Students' Perceived Service Quality. As same, the Website Content (0.298), Reliability (0.219), Physical Aspects (0.104), Computer Expertise (0.104), Convenience (0.098) and Grade Expectations (0.097) were significant with the Students' Satisfaction. The relationship tested between Students' BI and Institutional Image (0.138) also showed a significant relationship. Furthermore, the significant relationships were found between Students' PSQ and SAT (0.183), Students' SAT and BI (0.574) and Students' PSQ and BI (0.075). This significant results could be used for final service quality model for the ODL in OUSL to enhance the quality of Students' PSQ, SAT and BI in ODL in OUSL. Policy makers and stake holders can use the results to enhance the quality in the learning process through strategic decisions. The limitation of cross sectional research could be addressed by longitudinal research as a future research based on regional centers. It would be a snapshot of the registered students and can realize the implications of the service quality which impact SAT towards the students' retention.