LEARNERS' PERCEPTION ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING VIA ONLINE: A CASE FROM OUSL

Dodan Godage Kanchana

Department of Social Studies, The Open University of Sri Lanka

The adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has strengthened the modes of deliveries to achieve the core values of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Among other departments of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), Department of Social Studies (DSS) has been able to attract quite a large number of learners due to its multi-disciplinary nature and the different delivery modes of courses which come under the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Sciences. The DSS uses basically two modes of delivering courses to learners: traditional and online. In the traditional mode, courses are offered through printed study materials with face-to-face classroom discussions. When it comes to the online mode, there are two methods. In the first method some of the undergraduate courses are entirely facilitated through a Learning Management System (LMS). In the second method, even though some of the courses are facilitated by the LMS, they are also supplemented with printed materials. Both methods have classroom discussion. This study, focused on the second method of the online mode. This method was used to offer a course to the final year learners of the 2017/2018 academic year and those learners were considered as the focus group of the study. According to the data from the LMS, even though the learners were advised to build connections with the course teacher and colleagues by conducting the assigned activities of the selected course of this study, it was identified that there was low participation. Therefore, the main objective in conducting this research was to examine the learners' perceptions of studying a course via the online mode of delivery and thereby to observe their perceptions about the course content, course activities, continuous assessments, final examinations, marks, feedback on assignments, teacher's responses, access to internet and login status, availability of resources, course administration, classroom discussions, etc. Both primary and secondary data were collected using the quantitative and qualitative methods. A survey was conducted through an open-ended questionnaire, and the interview method was also used to observe the learners' perception on studying a course via the online mode. The sample size for the questionnaire survey was 112 learners from the total number (125) of eligible learners for the final examination of the selected course of this study from seven regional centres. A total of 30 learners were interviewed. For the content analysis, log reports from LMS, books, journal articles and websites were used. A purposive sampling technique was followed in selecting the sample for the questionnaire survey and the interviews. In the questionnaire survey, a Likert Five-Point Scale was also used to collect learners' perceptions on some of the given statements. In analyzing the quantitative data, simple statistical methodology –frequency analysis, descriptive statistics and crosstabs were used

with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 20). The findings of the survey revealed that low participation was not because of inadequate support from the course teacher or the way that the online course was organized. E-learning is encouraged by an e-culture at the institutional level or a societal level in most of the developed countries and therefore learners are active and benefit a lot. However, e-culture in a society like Sri Lanka is yet to develop—especially in remote areas, the life-style of the people is being very slowly changed by ICT. Therefore, the learners' dynamic passion towards e-learning is low and this attitude has also negatively affected open and distance learning in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Online mode of delivery, Learners' perception, Undergraduates, Sri Lanka

[*]Corresponding author: email- dgkanchana84@gmail.com