LINKING ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION TOWARDS SERVICES QUALITY AMONG ONLINE ADULT LEARNERS: A CASE OF UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA (UITM)

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the online or web-based learning as a potential course delivery and the competitive platform, combined with the increasing interest in lifelong learning has created a significant incentive for higher learning institutions to develop online programs. Hence, over the past years, there was an influx of adult distance learners pursuing their studies at the tertiary level. However, there was some issues related to satisfaction towards quality service such as lack of support system and thus lead to high attrition rates among adult learners. Therefore, this study was intended to examine the relationship between academic motivation and satisfaction towards service quality among the online adult learners of UiTM, Shah Alam. A total of 222 adult online learners participated in this study. Pearson’s Product – Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The finding showed that there was a positive and moderate relationship between academic motivation and program service quality among the online adult distance learners of UiTM, Shah Alam. Implications and recommendation were discussed in this paper.

Field of Research: Online learning, adult learners, academic motivation, service quality.

1. Introduction

The development of modern information and communication technologies has greatly helped the emergence of global distance educations systems. The result is that many higher learning institutions have adopted distance and on-line education as the next logical step on educational delivery systems. In fact, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of distance education and web based learning programs offered by local institutions (Khoo Choo Sim and Rozhan Idrus, 2004). In this sense, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is no exception. UiTM has offered e-learning or online web-based learning which is termed as e-PJJ program since 1981(Zainuddin, Zakaria; Faizatul Akmam & Moktar, Awang; 2005). Under certain conditions, Baker et al.(1997) reported that the advantage of online learning is that it provides adult learners with better and faster access to information, allows for more individualized instruction, accommodates different learning styles and increase students satisfaction with their courses. Thus, to further enhance their knowledge, these students are also required to interact with other learners through chat room, email or bulletin board system and lecturers perform as facilitators. However, one of the problems is that, these students need to use computers and this may be the obstacles and a source of anxiety for some adult learners (Collin, 1996). Besides, the issue of poor quality service such as lack of support system could lead these adult learners dissatisfied and decided to leave the program (Bekele, 2010). In fact, many firms have recognized that service quality has increasingly become a critical factor in success of any business (Parasuram et al, 1988). Therefore, educational providers need to understand adult learners’ satisfaction and motivational orientation to learn so that they could draw some strategies to improve their quality services and meet the customers’ expectation.
1.1 Understanding Adult Learners’ Motivation To Learn And Its Relationship With Service Quality

Over the years, there are an increasing number of adult learners seeking access to higher education, in line with the government policy towards lifelong learning. These adult students generally enter the learning environment, whether traditional or distant, with a high degree of motivation (Ehrman, 1990). Motivation has been defined as the level of effort an individual is willing to expend toward the achievement of a certain goal (Brennen, 2006). According to Bandura (1986) goal setting is an important aspect of cognitive process that affects motivation. He further elaborated that students are likely to experience an initial sense of self-efficacy for attaining it. Self-efficacy influences choice of activities, effort, and persistence. Pintrich & Schunk (1996) stated that motivation may affect how and why students learn as well as how they perform. In this context, Knowles’ (1984) stated that much of adults’ intentional learning activity is motivated by desire to move from their current level of proficiency to higher level ones. Nonetheless, adult learners are motivated to engage in formal education for a wide variety of reasons. As stated by Borshier & Collins (1985), one of the reasons was motivation in learning activities for the sake of social interaction professional advancement, cognitive and intellectual and social obligation.

In an institutional setting, the perception of learner as a customer is based on educational quality and services offered. However, service quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction (Wei and Ramalu, 2011). According to Muhammad Sabbir Rahman, Abdul Highe Khan and Mahmudul Haque (2012) the quest for customer’s satisfaction depends on the organization overall service quality and it is thought of to be an essential strategy. Nevertheless, Boone and Kurtz (1996) asserted that service quality is very much depending on one’s views and perception of the products and services provided by the institutions. They elaborated that personal needs and requirements of a product are based on individual past experiences that he or she received which will influence his or her perception and expectation on the services offered. However, a gap exists between the services received and the expected services. In this sense, Parasuram et al.(1985, 1988) claimed that, there are five gaps exist during the service expectation till the actual service delivery; 1) the service providers do not know what the expectations of the customers about the service, 2) the service providers do not recognize the standard of service that the customer expect, 3) the service providers do not know the specifications of the service and delivery of the service, 4) the gap is related to the delivery and 5) the gap between customers’ expectation about the service and the perceived service. Hence, understanding the level of customers’ satisfaction and being able to integrate service quality concepts into managing customers’ satisfaction are critically important for educational providers in order to sustain their businesses. On that note, Boulton, Kannan, & Bramlett (2000) found that there is a linked between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Thus, if the customers are not satisfied, they are less likely to repurchase the product or service. Boulton, Kannan, & Bramlett (2000) also noted that repurchase intentions are based on the evaluation of many underlying service dimensions. In higher learning institution, retention is a repurchase decision. Hence, students’ satisfaction with online learning program is potent factor in explaining perceived quality service of such program. The argument is that perceptions of service quality may establish whether adult learners would want to continue to enroll in such program or leave the program.

A study done by Ainon Jauhariah Abu Samah and Poh Ju Peng (2006) indicated that there was a relationship between students’ satisfaction with the quality of education in UNITAR. The factors studied were facilities, course content, teaching style, teaching medium, assessment, social activities and others. Apart from this, studies done by Levy (2007) and Doo & Kim (2000) also revealed that learners’ satisfaction with the online course and relevance to learners’ job, prior knowledge and experiences are the major factors affecting their decision to drop out or persist. According to Park & Choi (2009) online learners can easily lose motivation unless the course needs to be designed in ways to guarantee learners’ satisfaction and be relevance to learners’ needs. A study conducted by Alliance for Higher Education Competitiveness with 21 institutions that carried out online learning
program found that student services tied for third as one of the most important factors in achieving success. The study emphasized that, course materials must be available and easy to use, and students must have someone to call when they need technical help (Abel, 2009 as cited in Lorenzo, 2007). Nonetheless, Khoo Choo Sim and Rozhan Idrus (2004) reviewed that there was strong emphasis on the provision of learner support, which is designed to facilitate interaction and communication between students and academic staff. They claimed that the support services require constant interactions between instructional designers, counselors, student support staff, administrators, and technical staff, help support staff, and students. Bekele (2010) did a critical review on students’ satisfaction and motivation in internet support learning environment and found that technology attributes such as software quality, screen layout, structure, friendliness, and flexibility tend to satisfy the students. Besides, Johnston, Killion, & Oomen (2005) found that students’ satisfactions were strongly related to interaction with faculty and peers, timely comments, variety of assessment and personality.

The highly demanding and competitive adult learners’ enrolment with other universities requires UiTM to sustain its competitiveness in providing quality education and services. Thus, understanding the diversity of adult learner s’ motivations could lead toward designing effective educational courses and programs. Even though numerous studies have been conducted to investigate adult learners’ satisfactions and service quality, however, only a handful research studies have empirically explore issues on adult learners motivation and satisfaction in web-base learning in a local context. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between satisfaction towards service quality and academic motivation among online adult learners of UiTM, Shah Alam.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are three-folds, namely to determine (1) the level of academic motivation among the online adult distance learners; (2) the level of satisfaction towards service quality provided by UiTM; and (3) the relationship between academic motivation and satisfaction towards service quality among online adult learners of UiTM.

2. Methodology

This study utilizes a survey method and it is descriptive in nature. A self report questionnaire was used to gather information related to the objectives of the study. The items measuring academic motivation and program service quality were adapted from Yong Gun Fie (2005) with modifications to suit the purpose of the study. Academic motivation consists of 20 items with a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. The instrument measuring service quality comprised of students satisfaction towards program delivery, content and support and services. This instrument consists of 26 items with a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. The samples were drawn from the faculty of Public Administration adult learners undertaking an on-line Diploma in Public Administration (DPA) program. Based on a mathematical formula table taken from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), a total of 278 students were selected. However, only 222 students responded and completed the questionnaire. Hence the responses rate was 79.8%. Majority of the respondents were female (66.2%) and only 33.8% were male respondents. Most of them were also full time employed (95.8%) and their average position tenure was 4 years.
3. Findings

3.1 Analysis on the Level of Academic Motivation among the Online Adult Learners

The findings indicated that majority of respondents, comprising 56.3% (125), demonstrated a high level of academic motivation, 43.2% (96) had moderate level of academic motivation and only 0.5% (1) of the respondents demonstrated low level of academic motivation. Table 1 shows the levels of the level of academic motivation among the online adult distance learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Frequency (n=22)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Analysis on the level of satisfactions towards program service quality among the online adult learners

The findings revealed that majority of them, that is, 75.7% (168) demonstrated a moderate level of satisfaction towards online program service quality and 54% (24.3%) showed a high level of satisfaction. Table 2 displays level of satisfactions towards program service quality among the online adult learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further analysis was conducted to determine the mean and standard deviation scores of each program service quality component as shown in Table 3. Table 3 displays the mean and standard deviation scores of the three components of students’ satisfaction towards program service quality provided by UiTM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program delivery</td>
<td>4.5250</td>
<td>0.84502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program content</td>
<td>5.0506</td>
<td>0.71358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program support service</td>
<td>4.18886</td>
<td>1.04476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mean score indicator:** 1.00 - 2.99 (Low), 3.00 – 5.00 (Moderate) and 5.01 – 7.00 (High)

The mean scores are arranged in descending order and the result depict that the mean scores of all the three components range from 5.05 to 4.188, which indicates that the scores are between high to moderate. The result also indicates that program content mean score (mean=5.05, SD=0.7135) is higher than program, delivery mean score (mean=4.525, SD=0.845) and program support service mean score (mean=4.188, SD=1.044). This finding is in line with the study done by Ainon Jauhariah Abu Samah and Poh Ju Peng(2006).
3.3 Analysis on the relationship between academic motivation and program service quality

Each component of program service quality was individually compared to academic motivation. The results depict that all the components of program service quality show positive linear relationships with academic motivation but the relationship strength varies from moderate to low. The two components of program service quality, namely program content ($r=0.675$, $p=0.000$) and program delivery ($r=0.638$, $p=0.000$) demonstrated moderate and linear relationships with academic motivation. On the other hand, Pearson’s Product Moment correlation analysis show that there were low and linear relationships between program support service ($r=0.431$, $p=0.000$) and academic motivation. This finding supports the study done by Nurul Atikah Abdullah (2006) and Nek Kamal Yeop Yunus, Salomawati Ishak and Ahmad Zainal Abidin Abdul Razak (2010). The relationship between academic motivation and program service quality was examined using the Pearson product moment correlation as presented in the Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>motivation</th>
<th>content</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
<th>support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>0.675</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>content</td>
<td><strong>0.638</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.507</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivery</td>
<td><strong>0.431</strong></td>
<td>0.247**</td>
<td><strong>0.754</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed); Cronbach Alpha, $p<0.005$

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study is aimed at examining the relationship between academic motivation and satisfaction towards service quality among online adult learners. The finding showed that there was a positive and moderate relationship between academic motivation and satisfaction towards service quality. This finding is consistent with other studies that have been reported elsewhere such as Moore & Kearsley (2005), Reinhart and Schneider (2001). The result suggests that the adult learners’ motivation could be enhanced if educational providers take special attention to learners’ satisfactions towards service quality. Marra (1989) noted that if educational providers are sensitive to customers’ needs and expectation, hence, in return they would be loyal towards the products or services. In this sense, Park and Choi (2009) suggested that the course design strategies and learners’ motivation should be prioritized at the course development stage in order to make the course participatory and interesting and to keep learners engaged. Pak and Choi (2009) also advised to take into account the learners’ situation while managing the course so that it is easier for them to seek for help when needed. For example, instructor could provide support in terms of paying extra attention, using appropriate motivational strategies, and providing additional internal support. The result of this study reveals that the level of academic motivation among adult learners was high. This finding also suggests that the online adult learners were very motivated with their learning goal activities. In this context, the online learning providers need to provide resources that will direct towards facilitating persistence and achievement of the students’ educational goals. However, the finding also revealed that the overall adult learners’ satisfaction towards service quality was at moderate level. This means that these adult learners were moderately satisfied with the delivery and support system provided by UiTM. However, they were very satisfied with the content of the course. Marra (1989) emphasized that customers’ satisfaction is part of fulfilling an individual needs, desire and expectation. Students are viewed as consumer- orientation, education as product and pertinent to be purchased and consumed. Therefore, there is a critical need for UiTM to increase the level of service quality of the online learning program to meet its learners’ needs and expectations. In fact, UiTM needs to take extra effort to improve the quality services for retaining and improving the level of competitiveness.
This study has several practical implications to the educational providers, instructional designers and instructors. Firstly, educational providers need to understand and learn about the adult learners’ characteristics and motivational orientation as well as their satisfaction towards the program and course quality, students’ learning motivation and supporting services. Understanding adult learners’ satisfaction and expectation could help providers to continuously improve their service quality. In addition, educational providers need to consistently improve their service quality by reviewing feedback gathered from their customers. Secondly, program instructors or instructional designers need to understand that adult learners have unique learning characteristics, which are distinct from the younger learner. According to Knowles et al. (2005), a training and education program that ignores the adult learning principles will demotivate them in learning. Usually, they favor pragmatic subjects and are eager to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life situation. In addition, they need different kinds of information regarding the program flexibility support system as well as taking into consideration their experiences and learning that has occurred in the workplace. Thus, understanding these adult learners’ characteristics and need together with providing support services may impact their motivation, persistence and educational attainment. Instructors should encourage adult learners to participate actively in their learning by providing opportunities for them to reflect on their motivation and use of motivational strategies in learning. Since web-base learning has become important means for adult learners to pursue their studies, hence, the technology and net-work system should be well in placed and implemented as well as user friendly. More importantly, the learning institution should also develop a comprehensive total quality management (TQM) system so as to ensure that the institution consistently meets and exceeds customer requirements. Besides, TQM processes and practices are needed to eliminate waste and pursue continuous improvement.
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