

Students' Satisfaction on the Students' Support System on Distance Learning: Basis for Development Programs

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship of self-determined competency of graduate students to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to their satisfaction in the Students Support System of Open University System (OUS) of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. A descriptive and correlational study was employed from the data collected from 454 respondents from all centers of OUS. The salient findings of the study showed that respondents were competent for ODE and that they were also satisfied to the service provided by OUS for student services in terms of people providing the service, pedagogical aspect, and technology being utilized for ODL. It also manifests that there is strong relationship between self-determined competency of students and their satisfaction to the service support system of PUP OUS, thus, it is recommended to develop programs that will increase the level of satisfaction on student services and improve the competency of the ODL students. The obtained data can help in the formulation of policies that would help improve the support system being provided to students.

Keywords: e-Learning; Open and Distance Learning; Students' Satisfaction; Students Support System

Introduction

Students' satisfaction is a major driving force for retention and performance in an academic institution. In a study conducted by Masserini et al (2019), fulfilling students' expectation is a serious determining factor for them to continue pursuing their program in distance education. The same result in the study of Arifin (2018) showed that student support is an important contributing factor that influences students to continue their study. The students' satisfaction not only influences students to be persistent with their study but also brought strong loyalty among alumni to their alma mater. (Schlesinger, 2018). These only explain that satisfaction contributes to continue their study and eventually become loyal to the institution as their expectations happen.

Because of the intense competition among higher education institution, universities adopt market-oriented strategies to attract more students to enroll in their institution Weerasinghe and Fernando, 2017). The strategies revolve around identifying and satisfying students' needs and expectations. However, Cheng et al. (2016) argued that too much exerting effort to satisfy students may bring challenges in keeping integrity and may bring down intellectual challenges among PhD students. These findings manifest that there are also precautionary measures in terms of improving the level of satisfaction of the students despite the above-mentioned contributions.

The above-mentioned literature and studies manifested that satisfying the needs of the students have advantages. However, it is also important to recognize that there are also disadvantages.

Hence, there are strategies to integrate among school management for a clear purpose of improving students' satisfaction which will not mislead the learners.

Quality of Student Services and Students' Satisfaction

There are several studies that proved student services are a strong determinant for student satisfaction. Among them is the study of Chandra et al. (2019) where they found out service quality has positive and significant influence on student satisfaction. Santini et al. (2017) also had identified service quality to be the most influential factor for students' satisfaction in learning management system. Generally, these findings explain that quality of services and student satisfaction are related to each other.

In the study conducted by Lodesso et al. (2018) on service quality, they found out that service quality was perceived to be very poor by students particularly on reliability and tangibles dimensions. The same result was found in the study of Makoe, M., &Nsamba (2019) where tangibles, reliability, and delivery dimensions failed students' expectations this is due high expectations of students to quality of service by universities. In the case that there are unmet expectations, expect that there is poor satisfaction among students.

According to Ohliati and Abbas (2019) success of distance education is reliant to the quality of support services it provides. As student support service proved to be the important factor for students' satisfaction, Makoe, M., &Nsamba (2019) said that gaps in Open and Distance Learning in universities must be assessed for the programs development that could address the insufficiencies. Academic institution in either traditional and non-traditional like distance education, there is a need to regularly check the quality of services and students satisfaction through regular assessment.

Challenges in Student Support System in Open and Distance Education

Open and distance education are facing a lot of challenges. Teachers and students are physically parted and instructions are basically delivered through technology (Abuhassna and Yahaya 2018). The distance education for rural students seems to have the worst experience in accessing to services adequately according to Arko-Achemfuor (2017). Even in India, distance education was seen to have below the standard for quality of services as seen by policy makers (Ramzan, 2017).

In the open and distance education, the satisfaction of learners are affected by different elements. Pedagogy, technology and provider of service are among the factors that impacted their experiences. The students' ability for distance education also plays a part in learner satisfaction.

These only say that as long there are high level of quality of services given by the institution, high level of student satisfaction is expected. On the other hand, low level of quality of services given by the institution link to low level of student satisfaction. However, it is also important to regularly assess the quality of ODL to test if this generalization is applicable in that context since traditional and non-traditional mode of delivery have different challenges.

Literature Gap

Most of the studies and literature pointed out that the importance of ensuring quality student services as it leads to student satisfaction. Many authors have identified various factors for student satisfaction, however, very seldom that studies identified how the readiness and competency of students to online learning could affect their satisfaction to services provided by open and distance institutions. Therefore, this study would be contributing to the body of knowledge on understanding how satisfaction on the different services provided for student by open and distance education are affected by the quality of students capability involving their personal factors.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored to theory-based design framework for e-learning by Dabbagh (2005). The model identified the three components: pedagogical models, instructional and learning strate-

gies, and the online learning technologies. These three works together serve for a purposeful learning and cooperation in distance education. Aparicio et al. (2016), reconstruct this model and designed e-learning systems framework. They identified the three components of information system which are people, technology and services. People relate to e-learning systems while technologies provide support to integrate to services as to pedagogy and instructional strategies. The study utilized the system for e-learning to best investigate the satisfaction of students in stakeholders or the providers of service who are also users of the e-learning system, the technology or the learning management system utilized by OUS and pedagogy being used to deliver instructions.

Objectives of the Study

In this paper, the level capability for distance learning of graduate students and their satisfaction to the service being provided by OUS was attempted to gauge. This study also attempted to understand the relationship between competency of students to distance learning and their satisfaction to the student support system of OUS.

This will help the OUS officials to design policies and programs that could improve the quality assurance for outstanding experience on distance learning and determine non-academic programs that will help students stay motivated in their study. This will also serve as basis for distance learning empowerment for OUS stakeholders.

Materials and Methods

A quantitative approach was employed in this study. Descriptive and correlational researches were used to describe the satisfaction of graduate students of PUP OUS and to analyze the relationship between competency and their satisfaction to student services system. Data were taken from 9 centres which include Manila, Maragondon, Lopez, Unisan, Taguig, Quezon City, Sablayan, Sto. Tomas, and Bansud. The total enrolment for graduate programs for the current semester is 848. There are 455 graduate students participated in the survey through google form which exceeded the target sample size of 285.

Majority of the respondents are 25-29 years old (29.9%) followed by 30-34 years old (20.7%). The 68.6% of them are earning P19, 041.00 – 38,080.00 while 20% are earning between P9,521-19,040.00. Almost half of them are into entry-level and another half are in the mid-level job. The 73.6% of respondents have Smartphones and 72.1% have laptops for their distance learning. 53.2% are using Wifi, while 31.6% are cellular data for their internet connection.

The instrument used was a researcher-made survey questionnaire which contained 3 parts. The first part was for profile determination where checklists were provided. The second part dealt with uncovering the competency on distance learning and the third part is on detecting the satisfaction level of respondents to the services provided by OUS. Both second and third part used a 5 point Likert scale. It was pre-tested to 30 respondents and underwent reliability test through Cronbach alpha which has .841 for assessment on competency and .976 for satisfaction. The overall data gained .946 and therefore we assumed that the instrument is reliable having a higher result of more than .70.

The data was treated using frequency and percentage for profile, mean for competency and satisfaction, and Pearson Correlation to test the relationship.

The purpose of the study was clearly stated in the survey questionnaire and it contained statement of confidentiality and non-disclosure of respondent's information, thus complying to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Respondents answered the survey with full consent and under their free will.

Results

The data on assessment on students' competency in open and distance learning were presented in Table 1 which was analysed by getting the mean. The grand mean shows that students assessed themselves as competent for open and distance learning (Grand Mean = 4.0474). In view of all the items, it was found out that the competency on valuing interactive and collaborative learning yielded the highest mean (M =4.47), it was followed by strong academic self-concept (M=4.16). While the lowest competencies are knowledge with technology uses (M = 3.87) followed by good communication skills (M=3.92).

Table 1. Respondent's Assessment on their Competency in Open and Distance Learning

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I am motivated to learn through ODL	4.1	Competent
I value interaction and collaborative learning	4.47	Competent
I have strong academic self-concept	4.16	Competent
I am knowledgeable with technology uses	4.03	Competent
I am familiar with technology terms	3.87	Competent
I can manage my time effectively	3.93	Competent
I am supported by my family and employer	4.09	Competent
I have a good study environment	3.84	Competent
I have good communication skills	3.92	Competent
I can learn independently or through self-directed learning	4.06	Competent
Grand Mean	4.0474	Competent

Table 2 indicates the satisfaction level of respondents to the provider of service in OUS. It can be deduced in the data that students are generally satisfied with the service being provided to them by different personnel (Grand Mean = 4.048). The highest satisfaction was from the course specialists (M = 4.24) while the lowest is service provided by Registrar's office (M = 4.0).

Table 2. Respondent's Assessment on the Level of Satisfaction to OUS Services in terms of People Providing the Services

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I am satisfied with the extent of support/advise or counselling being provided for distance education by the Registrar's Office	4	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the extent of support/advise or counselling being provided for distance education by the Program Chair	4.04	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the extent of support/advise or counselling being provided for distance education by the Institute Director	4.02	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the extent of support/advise or counselling being provided for distance education by the Course Specialists	4.24	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the extent of support/advise or counselling being provided for distance education by the Administrative Staffs	4.02	Satisfied
Grand Mean	4.0648	Satisfied

The satisfaction level of students to OUS services in terms of pedagogical aspects is illustrated in Table 3. The overall result shows that respondents are generally satisfied (GM = 4.0604). The item garnered the highest mean are on how e-learning was facilitated in terms of innovative ways of delivering instructions and in terms of modelling and explaining (M = 4.08). It is the timely feedback or assessment of outcomes obtained the lowest mean (M = 4.03).

Table 3. Respondent's Assessment on the Level of Satisfaction to OUS Services in terms of Pedagogical Aspects

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I am satisfied with how e-learning was facilitated in terms of online interaction	4.07	Satisfied
I am satisfied with how e-learning was facilitated in terms of innovative ways of delivering instructions	4.08	Satisfied
I am satisfied with how e-learning was facilitated in terms of modelling and explaining	4.08	Satisfied
I am satisfied with how e-learning was facilitated in terms of timely feedback or the assessment of outcomes	4.03	Satisfied
I am satisfied with how e-learning was facilitated in terms of supporting multiple perspective	4.04	Satisfied
Grand Mean	4.0604	Satisfied

Table 4 demonstrates the students' satisfaction on the technology being utilized by OUS for open and distance education and it shows that respondents are generally satisfied with technology (GM = 4.0335). Furthermore, the highest score was found in utilization of technology for synchronous communication and forum chat (M = 4.11), however, the technology to access audio and access to video both rated the lowest (M = 3.99).

Table 4. Respondent's Assessment on the Level of Satisfaction to OUS Services in terms of Technology Being Utilized

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
I am satisfied with the technology being utilized in distance learning in terms of synchronous communication and forum chat	4.11	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the technology being utilized in distance learning in terms of access to online learning materials	4.05	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the technology being utilized in distance learning in terms of access to audio tools	3.99	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the technology being utilized in distance learning in terms of access to videos	3.99	Satisfied
I am satisfied with the technology being utilized in distance learning in terms of forms of assessment	4.03	Satisfied
Grand Mean	4.0335	Satisfied

This study was also conducted to determine the relationship of determination of graduate students' competency to their satisfaction on student support system provided by PUP OUS. Base on the correlation analysis, it was found out that competency was positively correlated to the three aspects of student support system. People providing service has a weak positive correlation to competency ($r = .437$), while pedagogical aspect and technology being utilized both have strong positive correlation ($r = 0.545$, $r = 0.528$). The three aspects have significant relationship to competency of students for open and distance learning.

Table 5. Pearson's r Test: Relationship of Respondents' Assessment on their Competency in Open and Distance Learning and their Satisfaction about the Service Provided by OUS

Competency in Open and Distance Learning					
Services	Pearson's r	Interpretation	p-value	Decision	Remarks
People providing the services	0.437	Weak Positive Correlation	>0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Pedagogical Aspect	0.545	Strong Positive Correlation	>0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Technology being utilized	0.528	Strong Positive Correlation	>0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

Discussion

The results of the study implied that students of Open and Distance Education in PUP OUS assessed themselves as capable for open and distance learning. They value interactive and collaborative learning as Alqurshi (2019) also discovered that learner-content interaction is the strongest and most significant predictor for student satisfaction. Students understand the importance of interaction while confronting the difficulty in achieving them with the arrangement in distance education (Caliskan et al., 2017). The knowledge on the use of technology plays a crucial importance in ODE as it utilized e-learning system. Students are expected to have adequate knowledge on information communication technology (Kołodziejczak, 2017). However, the results showed that students have the lowest confidence level in this aspect. The same result was found out in the study conducted by Edumadze (2017), where students have little or no experience with the Learning Management Tools.

The findings inferred that student services system by its providers was satisfactory found by students. While the experience with the course specialists on their support and advice were deemed meaningful by the students. The study conducted by Makova et al. (2017) proved that commitment on the part faculty is expected for an effective and highly successful distance learning. On the other hand, the service being provided by the registrar office was found to have the lowest mean which could mean that there are particular services which might have affected its satisfactory service. According to Abouchedid, K., & Nasser, R. (2002) the registrar and advising offices are the frontline services where students have their first encounter in their university experience in which they experience the frustrating process of registration which left them lasting impression of their university experience. Therefore, it was suggested by Southwell et al. (2018) to invest more in training the personnel who works in delivering student services to the unique needs of students. As Muhafidin (2020) said that delivering frontline services should ensure service quality, precision of documents and records and promptness.

The students also showed satisfaction on the method and practice of teaching in the OUS particularly on the reinforcement of e-learning. The students found the delivery of instructions to be

innovative. According to Masserini (2019) students' satisfaction is mainly influenced by teaching and lectures that also drive students' loyalty to educational service. Nevertheless, satisfaction on receiving feedbacks for assessment on students' outcomes diminished. With the physical separation of teacher and students, responding immediately to any concern curbed the feeling of remoteness. According to Ghamdi et al. (2016) teacher immediacy promotes connectedness between students and teachers, thus prompt pedagogical approaches is an important factor to reduce the sense of transactional separation especially in ODE. Simpson (2017) also stated that feedback and assessment are key areas for retention in distance education, thus, it would be helpful if interactive computer mark assessment where students could immediately receive the results could be utilized.

As technology plays a pivotal aspect in ODE, students acknowledged the technology being used in UOS for synchronous communication satisfactory where remoteness is an issue. The use of technology enhances the feeling of social presence in the traditional classroom setting in the ODE. (Bickle, 2019). This is why student support mainly focused on how the online and blended learning modes could be best supported because technologies enable development for more flexible, interactive and personalized learning environment. According to Arif (2017) the ease use and usefulness of web services have positively contributed to students' satisfaction. This study also revealed that students have the lowest assessment on their access to audio and video of OUS technology.

The study revealed that perceived competency of students for ODE is positively related to their satisfaction with the services provided by OUS. The more they feel capable for online learning, the more they acknowledged and understand the services in terms of providers, pedagogy and technology. Students' competence has strong positive correlation with pedagogical and technology aspect. This means that high competency would lead to high satisfaction assessment to services. This finding validates Abdel-Jaber (2017) study which indicated students' self-efficacy and self-regulated learning are critical factors for students' satisfaction in e-learning especially with instructors' interactivity. On the other hand, Osman (2019) didn't see the significant influence of self-determination or their intrinsic motivation of students' satisfaction with the K-MOOC course. Likewise, Eom and Ashill (2016) found no significant relationship for student motivation and self-regulation with their satisfaction and learning outcomes but intrinsic student motivation affects their learning outcomes. This only shows that relationship of self-determined competency to satisfaction to students service systems of graduate students in Open and Distance may vary according to the type of course the students are taking.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research has shown clearly that graduate students from PUP OUS identified themselves to be capable for online learning where it manifested that interaction was given importance. However, graduate students have low self-determined competency in the uses technology wherein ODL highly utilized as instructional delivery platform. In this state, the OUS may conduct a special training for the graduate students particularly on the use of Learning Management System to address student's needs on technology capability for ODL.

The graduate students assessed the Student Support System of PUP OUS to have provided satisfactory service in terms of provider, pedagogy, and technology. However, services particularly by the registrar office could be further improved through training of its personnel and assessment on the office needs so that better service may be rendered for the student support. Likewise, on the area of pedagogy, course specialist may devote themselves to provide timely feedback because this may alleviate the feeling of remoteness which is given in an ODL setting. The OUS may administer further training for course specialist on the different methods of assessment ideal in ODE. In the area of

technology, access to audio and video are crucial for effective learning in online platform, hence, the Learning Management Office may look into details how these difficulties arise and look for possible solutions so that students may have an excellent experience with the LMS.

On the correlation test, the study proved that self-determined competency of graduate students has strong positive correlation to their satisfaction to Student Support System. This provided an understanding that OUS may also look into the attributes of students that will make them succeed in distance learning. This suggests that satisfaction is not solely dependent on the three components of e-learning namely pedagogical models, instructional and learning strategies, and the online learning technologies which was identified by Dabbagh (2005). The model may also consider to include self-determined competency of graduate students as the study showed a clear association of self-determined competency to student satisfaction.

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