

Chapter 37

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

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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.

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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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