

Measuring online service quality: with special reference to online education programmes in Sri Lanka

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As a result of the advancements made in technology, online businesses are growing at an increasing pace all over the world today. The Educational institutes, especially universities also have started to offer online certificate, diploma and degree programmes targeting pools of candidates who are seeking higher education for career advancements. The situation is no different in Sri Lanka as well with the educational institutions mushrooming around the island. However, the Sri Lankan national universities today, as public administrative bodies are highly emphasizing on maintaining the highest level of Service Quality (SQ) in today's competitive educational industry. This creates the need to evaluate the performance in terms of the quality of the services provided. Most of the past studies are focused on identifying factors affecting online education and online SQ, but not on student's expectations and perceptions towards the quality of online educational programmes, especially in the Sri Lankan context. Thus, this study intended to measure the online SQ with special reference to online education programmes in Sri Lanka. The research objectives were to identify the key dimensions of both Expected SQ (ESQ) and Perceived SQ (PSQ), and the overall level of SQ. This study is descriptive and conclusive in nature. A single cross-sectional research design was adopted to collect data through a self-administered online questionnaire. The population is the students who have registered for an online educational programme in Sri Lanka. A sample of 100 students who has registered for an online degree programme offered by a national university was extracted using the simple random sampling technique. The unit of analysis is a student who has enrolled for the above mentioned degree programme. Mean values, One Sample T-Test and Gap Score were performed to test the hypotheses. The results demonstrated that the key dimension of ESQ is 'Ease of Use' with the highest mean value. Conversely, the key dimension of PSQ is 'Credibility'. As per the Gap Score Analysis, only the 'Reliability' dimension showed a positive gap, which means that perceptions are higher than expectations, and that students are satisfied in terms of 'Reliability' dimension. All the other dimensions showed negative gaps, illustrating that the perceptions are below expectations. However, the gap between the expected and perceived SQ is insignificant. Hence, it can be concluded that the level of the overall SQ of the chosen online degree programme is high. The inferences of this research can be used in developing strategies to enhance the level of SQ of online educational programmes.