Expectation of Learners' towards Student Support Servicesin Study Centers of Bangladesh Open University: Reliability and Empathy perspectives

Masud Mohammad Pervez

Abstract

Along with conventional education, open and distance learning becomes a key to develop skill resources. To do so, effective distance learning requires student support services to make it success. Keeping it in mind, researcher aimed in this study is to explore the expectation of learners' towards student support services provided by the study centers in Bangladesh Open University through the two familiar variables that are used to measure service quality namelyreliability and empathy. The study is descriptive and quantitative in approach. The study conducted in Rajshahi district with twenty four study centers. Sample size is three hundred and seventy in number where learners are sample unit or respondents. Random sampling technique finally used to collect data through self-administered, structured questionnaire. The study found reliability_2, reliability_5, empathy_3, and empathy_5 needs higher degree of concentration and strategic tools to improve as quick as possible, rest others also needs intensive monitoring and opportunity seeking for further improvement to make all the programs of Bangladesh Open University successful and effective.

Keywords: Reliability, Empathy, Distance Education, Learning Support Services, Study center.

I. Background of the Study

In modern days, conventional educational institutions are not enough to meet the increasing demand of educational in front. To meet the huge gap, distance education emerged in a rapid pace (Dursun et al., 2014). To fulfill the vision of creating opportunities for the unskilled and less educated people, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was established in 1992 and it was the only public university that provides distance mode education (Pervez &Rahman, 2013).In distance education teacher and learners even learners to learners face to face communication is occasional. That is why it is more challenging to get success(Belanger and Jordan 2000).

Many distance education institutions already recognized that their education system has some deficiency and requiressomething apart from a text which is called as 'Student Support'(Simpson 2016). According to Robinson (1995), student support services are the key role factor behind successful distance education program.Every distance education institution now has a particular wing named as'Student Support Service' and noted that the successful distance education system typically depends on the effectivenessof student support services (Sanchez &Simpson, 2018; COL, 2017;).

Majority of the distance institutions do not proper knowledge to plan and at a time organize quality support services system (Robinson, 1995). Most of the institutions are running with traditional quality measurement tools that produce ineffective result. Researchers for a longtime discussed and demands for a technique or tool to implement, evaluate, monitor and control the quality of student support system for distance education (Simpson, 2016). Again, some literatures reveal that providing support to learners are very effective in distance education and urges for further study to achieve sustainable satisfaction of learners(Potter, 1998).That is why,Sanchez and Simpson (2018) said; only a well-organized student support system can help learners overcoming and developing attitudes for the success of distance education. With a view to this, researcher tried to identify the crucial indicators with expectation scale of the learners' in the context of reliability and empathy for student support services.

II. Objective of the Study

Main purpose of the study is to measureReliability and Empathy dimensions of service quality model introduced byParasuraman, (1985, 1988) with dynamism in questionnaire for tracking learners' expectation towards student support services offers in Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh.

III.   Methods and Materials of the Study

Research methodology is an action plan of any research that scientifically guides to collect data and resolve research questions based on the analyses of those data. Research design is of two types (Malhotra et al., 2007). The study followed quantitative research design where descriptive nature dominates.Continuing this, researcher implemented survey design to collect data with cross-sectional design in front. Along with primary data, few secondary data used as supplement to the study. The study purposively selectedRajshahi district from Bangladesh where one regional center, and twentyfour study centers and 9770 students exists out of 1506 study centers and 0.52 million of learners approximately across Bangladesh(BOU, 2019). Learners are the sampling unit and sampling frame exists. Sample size for the study determined from the following formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2.N.p.q}{e^2(N-1)+z^2.p.q} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 9770 \times .5 \times .5}{.05^2(9770-1)+(1.96)^2 \times .5 \times .5} = \frac{9383.108}{25.3829} = 369.6626$$

Service providers consist of the single regional center in Rajshahi district and all the twenty four study centers with nine study programs inside it considered as sampling area. Samples drawn from the sampling listwith of different group proportionately. Simple random sampling technique used in the final stage for drawing samples. A self-administered pre-tested structured questionnaire used to collect data from the learners where each question directed with Likert scale (Likert, 1932) 1 to 5 points (strongly disagree=1, up-to strongly agree=5)based on the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991). Finally, data analysis toold settled down to interpret data.

IV.   Data Analysis and Findings

Collected data organized, processed with customization and processed through statistical tools for presenting findings and interpretation required for the study in hand:

Demographic Aspects of Respondents
The following table presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents:

Table 4.1: Demographics of Respondents

Particulars	Dimensions	Percentage
Gender	Male	56.3
	Female	43.8
Age (In Years)	<20	4.5
	20-24	20.5
	25-29	33.0
	30-34	12.5
	35-39	18.8
	40 $\geq$	10.7
Marital Status	Unmarried	65.2
	Married	31.3
	Others	3.6
Residence	Urban	40.2
	Rural	59.8

Occupation	Service Business Unemployed Others	49.1 15.2 22.3 13.4
Income (In Thousands)	no income <10 10-19 20-29 30-39 40 ≥	26.8 8.0 26.8 29.5 6.3 2.7
Study Programs	SSC HSC BA/BSS MBA M.ED	7.1 22.3 59.8 1.8 8.9

Source: Survey data for the study

The ratio of male and female is consistent as male students are56% and female students are 44%.Age group of 25-29 shows the highest (33%) learners followed by 20-24 (20.5%), 35-39 (18.8%), 40 and above (10.7%), 30-34 (12.5%), and less than 20 of age (4.5%). It indicates that most of the learners are over 20 years of age. In terms of marital status, unmarried students (65.2%) compare to married (31.3%) and others (3.6%) respectively. It indicates the domination of unmarried students' intake more for study. Again, from the residential status, rural (55.4%) are higher than the urban (44.6%) indicates;learners come from rural area as intake.The employment status shows that service holders (49.1%) comparing to unemployed (22.3%) and businessmen(15.2%) are more eager to study in distance education.Furthermore, income perspectives show, most of the respondents' income falls between 20 to 29 thousand(29.5%) and 10-19 thousand (26.8%)per-month respectively shows their ability to meet the expenses for the study by their own. Finally, from the learners of different program BA/BSS students are highest (59.8%) as intake followed by HSC (22.3%), M.ED (8.9%), SSC (7.1%) and MBA (1.8%) respectively. It indicates that most of the learners' like to get admission in BA/BSS in BOU for distance education.

Reliability and Empathy Variables
Table 1: List of Items for Reliability and Empathy Variables

Item name	Code
They keep their promise	Reliability_1
Tutorial classes, delivery of study materials, audio- visual programs maintain schedule time.	Reliability_2
Student Support Services staffs show sincere interest to learners' problem	Reliability_3
Upgrade course curriculum/syllabus with job requirements.	Reliability_4
Maintain official procedure and keep error-free records.	Reliability_5
Tutors and support service staff keep individual attention to learners	Empathy_1
Keep willingness to recognize learners need and focus on it	Empathy_2
Settle convenient time for tutorial and exam dates etc.	Empathy_3
Academic staffs are polite and understand individual need of learners	Empathy_4
Easy access of learners	Empathy_5

Source: Relevant Literatures

Table 2: Measurement of Reliability

		Reliability_1 percent	Reliability_2 percent	Reliability_3 percent	Reliability_4 percent	Reliability_5 percent
Valid	SD	24.2	13.7	18.4	21.8	11.4
	D	32.7	14.9	37.8	33.8	17.3
	N	11.7	14.7	8.5	11.4	14.8
	A	17.5	38.3	18.6	17.7	38.9
	SA	12.3	24.2	12.7	14.7	22.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data of the study

According to the above table, reliability_1, reliability_3, and reliability_4 demands for immediate actions to improve the situation as around sixty percent of the learners are against the statements. Though other two items; reliability_2, and reliability_5 are in much better position comparing to others in the study, still they need intensive monitoring and seeking development area.

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation of Reliability

Reliability	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reliability_1	3.21	1.29
Reliability_2	4.11	.91
Reliability_3	3.19	1.31
Reliability_4	3.18	1.32
Reliability_5	4.13	.90

Source: Survey data of the study

As per the above table, mean of reliability_2 (4.11) and reliability_5 (4.13) are much higher with lower standard deviation of .91 and .90against the other three variables: reliability_1 with mean 3.21 and standard deviation 1.29, reliability_3 with mean 3.19 and standard deviation 1.31, reliability_4 with mean 3.18 and standard deviation 1.32. Above findings indicate that reliability_2and reliability_5are in bettershapein comparison to reliability_1, reliability_3and reliability_4 variables. However, a large number of participants are searching for efficient performance. Therefore, the authority needs focus on the expectation along with its problems and take action to improve the existing situation and improve performance.

Table 4: Measurement of Empathy

Empathy		Empathy_1 percent	Empathy_2 percent	Empathy_3 percent	Empathy_4 percent	Empathy_5 percent
Valid	SD	21.8	26.6	9.8	18.4	11.2
	D	42.4	34.7	16.5	36.4	18.6
	N	12.4	11.8	17.8	13.6	10.8
	A	18.3	14.5	43.6	21.5	41.3
	SA	6.4	9.3	12.6	11.2	18.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data of the study

The table indicates,learners showed negative attitude towards empathy_1, empathy_2, and empathy_4. So, these items need to be considered and take actionfor setting desired expectation from the learners' side. The other two items; empathy_2, and empathy_5 are in much better condition but not in a desired position. Therefore, they need to take into consideration for settling expectation of learners.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics (Mean and standard Deviation)

Empathy	Mean	Std. Deviation
Empathy_1	3.34	1.34
Empathy_2	3.47	1.28
Empathy_3	4.17	.94
Empathy_4	3.59	1.21
Empathy_5	4.12	.96

Source: Survey data of the study

The table indicates, mean of empathy_3 (4.17) andempathy_5 (4.12) are much higher with lower standard deviation of .94 and .96where the other three variables;empathy_1 with mean 3.34 and standard deviation 1.34, empathy_2 with mean 3.47 and standard deviation 1.28, empathy_4 with mean 3.59 and standard deviation 1.21. Findings indicate,empathy_3and empathy_5 are in much better condition than the other items;empathy_1, empathy_2,and empathy_4. Still a large number of participants are not getting/receiving the efficient performance from the authority. Therefore, the authority needs to focus on the learnersexpectation with its relevant challenges and take action to improve the existing situation and improve performance.

V.   Discussion on Findings

Most of the learners are dropped out from the traditional education system here in Bangladesh and after a long break of study they enrolled in distance education. Survey reveals, most of the learners were unaware about the distance education system and how it works. To make them familiar with this system, the authority may provide general orientation sessions at the beginning of the academic year.

The learners struggle with a lot of issues, including late assignment feedback. Therefore, all assignment due dates need to set up in the assessment plans to be at least ten to twelve weeks prior to a final examination and all assignments be tracked using systems that have been put in place.

This study discovered a poor delivery system for study materials, and many learners frequently claim that they never receive their textbooks or other study materials before class begins. So, BOU authorities need to manage and administer this in a methodical manner.

VI.   Conclusion

The study focused on the expectation of learners who take services from BOU in the context of regional and study centers to carry out their education further. Very importantly, reliability and empathy are very crucial factors to get effective services. Accordingly, the study tried to identify their expectation in these regards. The findings of the research may be used by the concerned authorities to settle down learners' expectation in designing student support services further to provide an effective system.

References

[1]. Bangladesh Open University, 2019, https://www.bou.ac.bd.

[2]. Belanger, F., & Jordan, D. H. (2000). Evaluation and Implementation of Distance Learning: Technologies, Tools and Techniques. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE, 5(2).

[3]. COL. (2017). Open universities in the Commonwealth: At a glance. Burnaby: COL

[4]. Dursun, T., Kader, O., & Cansu, G. (2014). Perceived Quality of Distance Education from the User Perspective. CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY, 5(2), 121-145.

[5]. Kothari, C.R. 2004. Research methodology: Methods and techniques, New Delhi: New Age International.

[6]. Likert, R. 1932. A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes.Archives of Psychology,140, pp. 15–20.

[7]. Malhotra, N. K., and Birks,D. F. Marketing research: An applied approach,(3rd edition), Spain: Pearson Educational Limited.

[8]. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A. & Berry L. L. 1985. A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and its Implications for Future Research. The Journal of Marketing, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 41-50.

[9]. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A. & Berry L. L. 1988. A Multi-item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality.Journal of Retailing, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 12-40.

[10]. Parasuraman, A. Berry, L. L. and Zeithaml, V. A. 1991. Refinement and Reassessment of

the SERVQUAL Scale.Journal of Retailing, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp. 420-50.

[11]. Pervez, M. M., & Rahman, M. M. (2013). Tri-partite Collaboration in Leveraging ODL Towards Open Schooling, Developments of JSC Program in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Bangladesh Open University (BOU). Journal of History and Civilization, 1, 203-212.

[12]. Potter, J. (1998). Beyond Access: Student Perspectives on Support Service Needs in Distance Learning. Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, 24(1), 59-82.

[13]. Robinson, B. 1995."The management of Quality in Open and Distance Learning." In Indira Gandhi National Open University, Structure and Management of Open Learning Systems.

[14]. Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities, New Delhi, India.

[15]. Sánchez-Elvira Paniagua, A and Simpson, O. 2018. Developing Student Support for Open and Distance Learning: The EMPOWER Project. Journal of Interactive Media in Education, 2018(1): 9, pp. 1–10, DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ jime.470Tait, A. 2003. Reflections Tait, Alan 2003.Reflections on Student Support in Open and Distance Learning.International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, Vol.4 No.1 pp.1-10.

[16]. Simpson,
O. (2016). ResearchGate. Retrieved 30 July, 2019, fromhttps://www.researchgate.net/ publivation/294428578_'Student_Support_Se rvices_for_Success_in_Open_and_Distance _Learning'