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Survey on the acceptance of online education in state universities of Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic situation

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Online education is a mode of electronically facilitated distance education method. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, global educational institutions transformed into online platforms. As a developing nation, Sri Lanka had to make a rapid transition from face-to-face to the online teaching-learning process. According to the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, only 22.2% of households owned desktop or laptop computers (2020). Consequently, the availability and accessibility of infrastructure to transform into an online education platform are at a question. Hence, to appraise this current situation based on students' points of view, a sample survey was conducted to explore the acceptance of online education mechanisms in state universities of Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. As a first step, a pilot study was conducted on 44 undergraduates, who were selected by convenience sampling. With the experience of the pilot survey, the final questionnaire was fine-tuned with 27 questions, and it was delivered to the undergraduates in 14 state universities employing the snowball sampling technique. Based on observation of the pilot study, the required minimum sample size was found to be 570 with a margin of error of 0.04. Finally, a descriptive analysis was performed using 574 responses using Minitab software. Most of the students are more inclined to use online lectures (33%) and videos (55.3%). From 64.2% who had online sessions for practical courses, 38.9% are dissatisfied. Even though 36.3% had faced network problems, regular and usual participation figures were approximately 70%. 57.6% of the respondents in the sample are females, and among them, a higher percentage (44.8%) were participating in online lectures regularly compared to that of males (25.4%). The majority of the student has complained of difficulties in health problems (81%), inability in raising questions (64.9%), understanding course contents (86.9%), and heavy workload (89.4%). Overall, comparisons of face-to-face and online lectures revealed that the majority preferred face-to-face lectures (43.8%), and a significant proportion accepted both study modes (39.3%). On average, the acceptance of online education is ranked 2.86 on a scale of 1 (highly reject) to 5 (highly accept). Based on the findings, it is recommended to strengthen the interactions between students and lecturers, conduct break-through room assignments during the lectures, and use multiple communication platforms. In addition, student grievances can be accommodated by relaxing deadlines on assessment, aiding of educational, technical, and financial needs.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Descriptive analysis, Minitab, Convenience sampling, Snowball sampling