ABSTRACT

E-learning is a method of delivering knowledge using information technology and electronic media for the remote users. The advantages of e-learning method can be fully achieved with the postgraduate studies as majority of the postgraduate students are engaged in learning while they are working and also geographically dispersed due to the family and work life thus physically appearing for the lecture sessions are difficult to them. This paper attempts to develop a framework to measure the postgraduate students' perceived technology acceptance by developing a modified version of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which replaces perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in the original model of TAM with relative advantage and complexity and incorporate other variables of trialability, observability, compatibility, psychological well-being and social influence of the students. The developed model is validated using 30 postgraduate students from Sri Lanka and thus this model can be used in future researchers to measure the perceived e-learning acceptance of postgraduate students.

Keywords: E-Learning, Model Validation, Postgraduate, Social Influence, Technology Acceptance

INTRODUCTION

ICT has been used by many organizations as a tool of acquiring new knowledge and skills to compete and survive in the changing environment. With the inception of the ‘information society’ or ‘knowledge based economy’ no country would survive without absorbing the latest technological developments. A country could gain many advantages by diffusing ICT across the nation. According to the World Economic Forum Report (2009) “leading academ-
ics, global organizations and industry analysts agree that there is a direct correlation between the use of ICT and positive macroeconomic growth”. When the economy is growing, ICT contributes a lot to the growth.

Education is one of the major factors that contribute to the development and the social wellbeing of a nation. It also acts as a resource which can gain competitive advantage (Cairncross, 2003). Education has been recognized as a right that every people in the world should get. According to the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, “everyone has the right to education”. To facilitate knowledge based economy it is fundamental to have a healthy human capital enriched with quality education.

Since it has been proved that as ICT diffusion has a great impact on social and economic well being of the society, it undoubtedly can be used to deliver a quality education to the people. To reach people with limited access to resources, technology is an outstanding tool in communication and learning (Siemens & Tittenberger, 2009). ICT enables people of all ages, ethnic groups, socio-economic levels, on campus or off, vocational institutions, fully or partly employed, geographically dispersed, and living in urban or rural areas to access education equally (William, 2004). Also using ICT for education, can make a choice of how, when, where and at what rate of study to persons of all levels and provide access to more remote parts of the world and encourage non-traditional learners to acquire the new knowledge (Jesus, 2003). Using ICT to deliver instructions helps students to get a deeper understanding of the content, build their own knowledge and to widen the complex analytical abilities (Mary & Margaret, 2004; Daniel, 2009). Further ICT can surpass the time and space where learner can access materials 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Also it helps access materials from distant locations. Moreover ICT can increase the quality of education by increasing the motivation to learn with rich media contents (Victoria, 2003).

As a consequence of ICT in education, the term e-learning was coined in. E-learning is considered as a cost effective method of transferring knowledge as it can be used to deliver knowledge to a large number of people at once. With increased pressure from globalization, universities and other tertiary level institutes are forced to introduce e-learning initiatives as it can reach many individuals in the world.

The advantages of e-learning can be fully achieved with the postgraduate studies. Majority of postgraduate students are engaged in learning while they are working and thus physically appearing in a class room is rather difficult to them. Also it was found that working adults who entered higher education is from the most underserved niche and this group is the best group to be served by the educational institutes by electronics means (Veeramani, 2010). This is also supported by Lee (2001) that e-learning method is more popular among postgraduate students than undergraduates since they are matured and motivated enough to undertake self-study as necessitated in most online courses. Majority of the students who entered postgraduate education are matured students. Since they are adult learners, they need more independence in their studies as they are more committed towards their personal life, work life and social life beside the academic life. Engelbrecht (2003) found that the students enrolled for e-learning Master’s programme in Taxation of the University of South Africa are full-time employees and many of them are in the process of building a career and family and students indicated that work pressure and family commitment as reasons for not completing the studies.

In view of the fact that the postgraduate studies are mainly followed by the individuals who are working fulltime, geographically dispersed than undergraduates and with other obligations to fulfill such as commitment to families and social lives, and also as they possess a different set of characteristics, there is a requirement for more flexible postgraduate
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