

PASSENGERS' SATISFACTION WITH SERVICE QUALITY:
A CASE STUDY OF THAI AIRWAYS INTERNATIONAL'S DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

A MASTER'S PROJECT
BY
WILAS MANKONGVANICHKUL

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication
at Srinakharinwirot University

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AN ABSTRACT

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May 2010

Wilas Mankongvanichkul. (2010). *Passengers' Satisfaction with Service Quality: A Case Study of Thai Airways International's Domestic Flights*. Master's Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Project Advisor: Assistant Professor Sirinna Boonyasaquan.

This study aimed at exploring passengers' satisfaction on service quality in the airline business and examining the connection of their satisfaction with their demographic profiles. The data were gained from the questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL instrument, which is a tool used to assess the service quality. The research participants were 150 passengers of TG's domestic flights on Bangkok – Chiangmai route. The results showed that the passengers' were moderately satisfied with TG's in-flight service in all the five dimensions. The highest satisfaction level was placed on the assurance dimension, followed by tangibles, empathy, reliability and responsiveness respectively.

The demographic data were analyzed in relationship with passengers' satisfaction. It was revealed that among the five SERVQUAL dimensions, the assurance dimension was also rated at the highest level in terms of all the five demographic profiles: age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and frequency of travel. Passengers who were at the age range of 20 -40 years, those whose occupations were not identified, those whose monthly income were about 60,001 or higher, those whose purpose of travel was for holiday trips and lastly those who traveled via TG more than ten times in the past 12 months were satisfied with the service quality in terms of the assurance dimension at the highest level at the mean scores of 3.78, 3.48, 3.50, 3.53 and 3.60 respectively.

ความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารที่มีต่อคุณภาพงานบริการ:

กรณีศึกษาเที่ยวบินภายในประเทศของการบินไทย

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

วิลาศ มั่นคงวณิชกุล

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ

พฤษภาคม 2553

วิลาศ มั่นคงวณิชกุล. (2553). ความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารที่มีต่อคุณภาพงานบริการ: กรณีศึกษา
เที่ยวบินภายในประเทศของการบินไทย. สารนิพนธ์ ศศ.ม. (ภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการ
สื่อสารนานาชาติ). กรุงเทพฯ: บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ
อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์: ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ศิริินนา บุญยสงวน

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อการประเมินความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารที่มีต่อคุณภาพ
ของสายการบิน และศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ของข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลกับความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสาร
การศึกษานี้ใช้แบบสอบถามที่อ้างอิงหลักการของเครื่องมือสำรวจคุณภาพของงานบริการ
SERVQUAL กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือผู้โดยสารของเที่ยวบินภายในประเทศ เส้นทางกรุงเทพ – เชียงใหม่
จำนวน 150 คน ผลจากการศึกษาพบว่า ผู้โดยสารมีความพึงพอใจต่อการบริการทั้ง 5 ด้าน
ในระดับปานกลาง ทั้งนี้พบว่า ด้านความเชื่อมั่น ได้รับความพึงพอใจจากผู้โดยสารมากที่สุด
รองลงมาคือ ด้านการบริการที่เป็นรูปธรรม การเข้าถึงจิตใจ ความเชื่อถือได้ และการตอบสนอง
ตามลำดับ

การศึกษานี้ยังสามารถสรุปได้ว่าข้อมูลส่วนตัวของผู้โดยสารมีความสัมพันธ์กับระดับ
ความพึงพอใจดังนี้ ในการบริการทั้ง 5 ด้าน ด้านความเชื่อมั่นได้รับการจัดอันดับสูงสุด ในแต่ละด้าน
ของข้อมูลส่วนบุคคลทั้ง 5 ประการ ได้แก่ อายุ อาชีพ รายได้ต่อเดือน จุดประสงค์ในการเดินทาง
และความถี่ในการเดินทาง โดยที่ผู้โดยสารกลุ่มอายุระหว่าง 20-40 ปี กลุ่มที่ไม่ได้ระบุอาชีพ
กลุ่มที่มีรายได้ต่อเดือนมากกว่า 60,000 บาท กลุ่มที่เดินทางท่องเที่ยว และกลุ่มที่เดินทาง
กับการบินไทยมากกว่า 10 ครั้งต่อปี มีความพอใจด้านบริการในด้านความเชื่อมั่น ในระดับสูงสุด
ที่ค่าเฉลี่ย 3.78, 3.48, 3.50, 3.53 และ 3.60 ตามลำดับ

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of Business English for International Communication Program, and Oral Defense Committee have approved this Master's Project, *Passengers' Satisfaction with Service Quality: A Case Study of Thai Airways International's Domestic Flights* by Mr. Wilas Mankongvanichkul as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

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This Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

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May ..., 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Assistant Professor Sirinna Boonyasaquan, my master's project advisor, for her dedication in giving helpful advice, constructive comments and encouragement throughout the research. Her valuable guidance and comments made this research project possible.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Dr. Wanlapa Thaijinda, Dr. Saengchan Hemchua and Dr. Phnita Kulsirisawad my project committee as well as Ms. Sopin Chantakloi my questionnaire advisor for their valuable comments and recommendations which add greatly to my research.

I am very grateful to Mr. Surachart Suvikapakornkul, Air Purser, for his full support and suggestions to the questionnaire.

Lastly, special thanks go to my classmates for their encouragement and good support during the precious time at Srinakarinwirot University.

Wilas Mankongvanichkul

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The entry of low cost airlines in Thailand has rapidly increased in number. There are some reasons why the low cost airlines take this position. One of them is that the full-fare airlines have insufficient flights to cover all the destinations and another is that the commercial promotions of low cost airlines are successful. At the same time, this has posed a heavy challenge to existing airlines that run full-priced service. Thai Airways International (TG), the national airline of Thailand, is no exception even though it has been recognized as a provider of better service and more convenience to passengers (“THAI AIRWAYS INT'L : Official 4-Star Ranking of Product and Service Quality,” 2009). Still, the company has to compete against those low cost airlines which fly to similar destinations.

Being a national airline, TG has to overcome its competitors not by reducing the ticket prices, but by increasing their service quality to enhance passengers' satisfaction level. In order to do that, TG needs to understand the importance of how to make the passengers satisfied with a high quality service.

Regardless of the size of your business and whether it is product-based or service-based (Rueangthanakiet, 2008), to be successful depends on a high level of customer satisfaction. As customer satisfaction strategies are proven to enhance service quality of the business, knowing how to provide passengers with satisfaction is very useful to TG to increase its competitive advantages.

Customer satisfaction service arises when a company can provide customers with benefits that exceed customers' expectation and this is considered value-added. If customers are satisfied with a product or service, they will buy more, and do so more often (Griffin, 1995). All businesses always try to find ways to make customers happy by all means to meet and even exceed their expectations in order to win their loyalty.

TG has focused on service quality to increase passengers' satisfaction and the company's market share for years. TG's current motto, "Service from the Heart" clearly indicates that the company has placed paramount importance to service. The findings from a study (Ostrowski, O'Brien, & Gordon, 1993) revealed that airlines could acquire and retain customer loyalty by offering high quality service. Providing a superior service quality should, therefore, be the main agenda for all airlines in order to remain competitive in the market.

However, there are various factors affecting customers' satisfaction with a company's service. Service provided can be tangible or intangible. The service-related equipment, brochures, magazines or even service operators' uniforms are considered tangible factors which can enhance customer's satisfaction with the company's service. The quality of the tangibles is easier to improve since the tangibles are concrete. On the contrary, it is difficult to evaluate the quality of service when taking the intangible factors into account (Heesawat, 2005). The intangibles such as personal needs and expectations are abstract. Expectation of a person differs from one to another. Consumers' expectations can be influenced by word of mouth, past experience, etc. The best way is to provide the best service. Research and development projects should be more frequently carried out in a service organization to keep pace with how customers feel towards the service. The SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman, Zeithamal, & Berry, 1985) has been considered one of the effective tools used to assess a company's service

quality so as to see if the company needs to better serve the customers and what service areas need to be improved.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were first to explore the level of passengers' satisfaction with the service quality on Thai Airways International's domestic flights in terms of five dimensions of SERVQUAL instrument: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Second, the relationship of the satisfaction with the research participants' demographic profile, i.e. age, occupation, income, purpose of travel and frequency of travel were investigated.

1.3 Significance of the study

The outcomes of this study would help TG's customer service managers and other practitioners to better understand the overall picture of TG service delivery and also of their passengers' satisfaction level. Moreover, the results from this research would assist airline managers to better serve their customers, monitor and develop service quality to achieve the highest level of their passengers' satisfaction. It was hoped that the findings could help TG increase its competence to compete with other airline companies. In addition, the findings would enhance other airlines to improve their customer relations management as well as their brand loyalty.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research was focused on a sample group of 150 Thai passengers, 75 males and 75 females who traveled with ten TG's domestic flights on the route from Bangkok to Chiangmai. The Bangkok - Chiangmai route was chosen for the study because TG had

the highest number of domestic passengers traveling on this route as Chiangmai has served as both domestic and international airline hub (THAI, 2008).

The questionnaire employed in the study was based on the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman et al., 1985). It was used to reflect the company's service in five dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness.

1.5 Definition of Terms

SERVQUAL is a tool, developed by Parasuraman et al., (1985) and is used to measure service quality via five dimensions (RATER):

Reliability is the ability to perform the service in an accurate and dependable manner.

Assurance involves the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

Tangibles present the appearance of physical factors such as equipment, facilities and personnel.

Empathy indicates providing individual attention and care to customers.

Responsiveness refers to the willingness to provide help and prompt service to customers.

Service quality is a customer's perception that occurs when the need of service is met above average, more than just adequate. In other words, service quality is the ability of service that meets a customer's expectations for that service. It represents the properties of the service valued by the customer. According to Parasuraman et al., (1985), service quality is measured by five dimensions (RATER): reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness.

Customer satisfaction is a measure of how a product and service supplied by a company meets or surpasses customer expectation. It is seen as a key performance indicator within business and is an indication of how successful the company is at providing products and/or services to the market. Customer satisfaction is an abstract concept and the actual happening of the state of satisfaction will vary from person to person and product/service to product/service. In a competitive market where businesses compete for customers, customer satisfaction is considered a key element of business strategy (Gitman & McDaniel, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of literature and research which is related to the study. It comprises six topics: the aviation industry in Thailand, customer satisfaction, service quality, SERVQUAL instrument, demographic variables and previous related studies.

2.1 The Aviation Industry in Thailand

The world economic crisis and the uncertainty of Thai political situations have directly affected customer purchasing power of all kinds of businesses including the airline industry. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has tried to boost the domestic travel in several ways including an offer of promotional traveling packages. This is a tactic of turning a crisis to an opportunity as well as enhancing domestic airlines' sales.

To provide a detailed picture on this topic, two issues are discussed: domestic airline operators and the nature of airline business: onboard services.

Domestic Airline Operators

In terms of fare, the domestic airlines that are currently operating in Thailand are low-cost airlines and full-fare airlines.

A low-cost airline is an airline which charges relatively lower fares. To generate more revenue from loss of decreasing margin of ticket prices, the low-cost airline may ask for extra charges for such as food, priority boarding, seat allocating, and baggage

privileges, etc. This type of airlines includes Bangkok Airways, Nok Air, Orient Thai Airlines, and Air Asia.

Meanwhile, a full-fare airline sells tickets at full prices and traditionally offers three travel classes, namely first, business and economy classes. Thai Airways International is the sole operator in Thailand who operates this type of airline service. TG is serving 10 airports domestically and providing sufficient capacity to serve local demands. During the festive season, extra flights are provided in a greater number to meet peak demands, particularly those to Chiangmai and Phuket (THAI, 2009).

TG flies to two destinations in the North, i.e. Chiangmai and Chiangrai, three destinations in the Northeast, i.e. Khonkaen, Udonthani and Ubolratchathani and five destinations in the South, i.e. Phuket, Hatyai, Suratthani, Krabi and Samui.

To recap, there are two major groups of domestic airlines in terms of airfare which are low cost and full-fare airlines. TG is the only full-fare airline operator in Thailand.

The Nature of Airline Business: On-board Services

The airline business has become more competitive and most airlines, in considering their competitive edge, take into account the quality of service to be offered to customers (Palin, 1996). Typically, a service package includes ‘tangibles’ which refer to goods provided for customers and ‘intangibles’ which are those related to the quality of service offered to the customers. The in-flight service-package includes both tangibles and intangibles. The problem to be addressed is the need to ensure that all the flights are fully stocked with the physical items in the service package, together with hygienic and functional equipment requested by cabin crew for providing service. These goods fall into four categories:

1. Food items, including beverages to be consumed on board.

2. Non-food items, comprising an extensive list which may include newspapers, blankets, toilet bags, headsets for aircraft audio-visual systems.
3. Duty-free goods for passengers to purchase on the aircraft.
4. Equipment required by cabin crew for providing service. The service equipment includes tea and coffee-making equipment, first aid kits, etc.

Nevertheless, the quality of a service package not only depends on food, drinks and facilities on the aircraft such as newspapers, blankets, toilet bags, headsets, etc. but it also depends on the skills and knowledge of cabin crew who serve passengers to create positive attitudes toward the airline and to enhance the brand loyalty.

In conclusion, the aviation industry in Thailand is very competitive. Low-cost airlines have increasingly become more popular because of the economic crisis. To compete with those budget airlines, TG needs to find ways to retain and attract passengers.

2.2 Customer Satisfaction

It is impossible for any business to sustain itself without customers. Accordingly, factors contributing to any successful business mainly result from customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention. One important factor in determining the likelihood of success and profits of an organization is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction results in customer loyalty. When there is customer loyalty, the customer retention rate is high and good business results tend to follow.

Customer satisfaction, a business term, is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass customers' expectation. In a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for gaining more customers, customer satisfaction

is seen as a key performance indicator within a business and has increasingly become a key element of business strategy (Gitman & Carl, 2005).

Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) state that customer satisfaction with a company's products or services is often regarded as the key to the company's success and long-term competitiveness. Customer satisfaction is also often viewed as a central determinant of customer retention. A high customer satisfaction level yields several benefits. It heightens customers' loyalty and prevents customers' complaints, lowers customers' price sensitivity, reduces the costs of failed marketing and of new customer creation, reduces operating costs due to an increase in number of customers, improves the effectiveness of advertising, and enhances business reputation (Fornell, 1992). However, specialists on satisfaction indicate that the main factors determining customer satisfaction are the customers' own perceptions and expectations of service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000).

Customers' expectation and perception

Customers' perception of service quality depends on the degree of the service that meets the customers' expectations; service providers must know how to shape those expectations. The messages from service providers contribute significantly to expectation development because the service is mostly regarded as intangible and people cannot readily observe for themselves what to expect. It is critical that the service provider gives information to customers as clearly and accurately as possible before the customers make a purchase. Organizations that create unrealistic expectations in an effort to sell a service are likely to find their customers' satisfaction low. Those unhappy customers will tell others, and the credibility of the business will be damaged (Gilbert, 1999).

To ensure highly perceived quality and to maintain loyal customer base, service providers need to be accurate and reasonable about what they lead customers to expect. They also need to do a good job in the areas of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. It is difficult for companies to get ahead of the competition and the nature of competition in the service industry is more difficult to protect from imitation. Competitors are increasingly forced to imitate the best features of one another. Therefore, any competitors who try to invest more energy and resources in building strong service quality are most likely to be winners (Gilbert, 1999).

Factors Affecting Consumers Expectation

The key factors influencing consumers' view on service quality include word of mouth, personal needs, customers' past experience, and external communication (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Word of mouth is particularly important because when consumers are satisfied or dissatisfied with the service, they are likely to share it with their friends. Service is generally classified as intangible. Customers cannot actually "see" the service until they experience it. Before making a purchase, customers need to find out as much information as possible so as to make a good decision. Word of mouth is a means to make a consumer feel interested or uninterested in the service.

Personal needs are considered another important factor. They deal with the motives that determine the nature and strength of what a consumer expects from a service.

Meanwhile, past experience refers to what consumers have learned through their personal interaction with a service provider. It is particularly important in shaping customers' expectations.

The last factor is external communication comprising such as direct sale and advertisement in order to communicate and position a service through messages which can influence consumer perceptions.

In summary, each factor can individually or harmoniously affect consumers' purchasing decision. Customer satisfaction is a key to business success. In order to make customers satisfied, a company needs to understand their expectations and perception by studying the factors that affect their purchasing decision.

2.3 Service Quality

A search for the definition of “quality” has yielded inconsistent results. Quality has been variously defined as fitness for use in the product which successfully serves the purpose of the user during usage (Juran, & Gryna 1974). In addition, Zeithaml, et al (1990) state that “quality” is what exceeds the customers' expectation of the service.

On the other hand, quality is a characteristic of thoughts and statements believed to be taken for granted if an explanation of quality is going to be both false and true precisely (Pirsig, 1987). Pirsig also says that since definitions derive from abstract and formal thinking, quality cannot be defined, it is impossible to define quality because quality can never be considered independently, but only in relation to what is perceived.

Measuring Quality in Service

Parasuraman, et al. (1985) point out that service quality is more difficult for the consumers to evaluate than the product quality. Perception of service quality results from a comparison of customer expectations with actual service performance. Quality evaluations are made not only from the outcome of a service but also from the “process”

of service delivery and the customers have fewer tangible characters to be measured physically when purchasing services than when purchasing products (Gronroos, 1978).

Service quality is the degree of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations. Delivering quality service means that the service provider needs to follow customer expectations on a consistent basis (Lewis & Booms, 1983).

To conclude, three underlying service quality themes can be drawn from the discussion as follows:

Service quality is more difficult for the customer to evaluate than product quality.

Service quality perceptions result from a comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance.

Quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcome of a service. They involve evaluations of the process of service delivery.

The Benefits of Service Quality

The benefits of service quality comprise four areas as follows (Kotler, 2000):

Customers Retention: High quality builds loyal customers and creates positive word of mouth which is an important factor in purchase decision. This can determine customer satisfaction which affects repeat business. If a customer is happy with an existing firm, it is difficult to convince him or her to move to another.

Avoidance of Price Competition: A firm with a reputation for high quality has a much stronger competitive position than one with a reputation for poor quality. Price-cutting by a competitor will not be enough to encourage a client to switch. Good quality is more powerful to remain competitive.

Retention of Good Employees: Employees appreciate working in operations that are well run and produce quality products. They do not enjoy receiving customer complaints. Also turnover and loss of employee morale are listed as costs of poor quality manpower. When an operation has good quality, it can retain good employees. And at the time business expansion is needed, recruiting is easier and training cost is reduced.

Reduction of Costs: The quality cost includes internal costs, external costs and quality system costs. Internal costs are those associated with correcting problems discovered by the firm before products reached customers. External costs are related to errors that the customers experience. They can be very expensive when the customers decide not to return because of a service problem. Then, the promotional and advertising costs or external costs are necessary to be spent to create the company image in order to make customers come back and win brand loyalty for the company in the end. However, the company needs to check the service quality through customers' feedback periodically to avoid problems.

Although the quality service system does not come without costs, it is usually less than those internal and external costs resulting from poor quality service. Some examples of the costs of a quality system include customer service audits, trainings, management meetings with employees and customers, and introduction of a new technology (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1999).

To sum up, it is necessary for a service company to know the service quality level. The quality needs to be evaluated by comparing customer experience with service performance. Once a service company reaches a good quality level, a company will retain its customers easily, be away from price wars, keep and get good employees and reduce some operation costs.

Thai Airways: In-flight Service Quality

The latest airline evaluation in 2009 by Skytrax from United Kingdom which is a research organization focused on in-flight services revealed that TG got the official 4-star ranking for its product and service quality. This honor is awarded to airlines which deliver a good quality performance.

Skytrax also disclosed that for short travels or domestic routes, two traveling classes are business class and economy class. The overall evaluation of the domestic route showed that TG's business class was rated excellent (5-star) in two articles which are "washroom cleanliness" and "newspaper & magazine" in terms of "onboard product" category. Meanwhile, TG also got the highest rank in terms of "service efficiency" and "responding to requests" in "cabin staff service" categories. In addition, in the economy class, TG could do superbly in three articles of cabin staff service which were "service efficiency", "enthusiasm and attitude" and "friendliness and hospitality" ("THAI AIRWAYS INT'L : Official 4-Star Ranking of Product and Service Quality," 2009).

In conclusion, TG has been recognized internationally, however, it still needs to move ahead. The quality ranking is useful for TG to realize that the company needs to develop its products and services in all categories in order to step up and well-prepared for competitions in the future.

2.4 SERVQUAL Model

SERVQUAL is an instrument used for measuring how customers perceive the quality of the service. This instrument is based on five dimensions and on a comparison between customers' expectations of how the service should be performed and their experiences of how the service is actually performed. Usually 20 attributes are used to describe the five dimensions and participants are asked to state what they expect from the

service and how they perceive the service on a five-point scale from “excellent” to “poor”. Based on the difference between expectations and experiences over the 20 attributes, an overall quality score can be calculated. The higher the score shows that experiences are below expectation, the lower the perceived quality (Parasuraman & Berry, 1991).

SERVQUAL consists of five dimensions (RATER) as follows (Parasuraman et al., 1985):

Reliability: This means that a service firm provides its customers with accurate service the first time without making any mistakes and delivers what it has promised to do by the time that has been committed.

Assurance: This means that employees’ behaviors give customers confidence in the firm and that the firm makes customers feel safe. It also means that the employees are always courteous and have the necessary knowledge to respond to customers questions.

Tangibles: This dimension relates to the appeal of facilities, equipment and materials used by a service firm as well as to the appearance of service employees.

Empathy: This means that the firm understands the customers’ problems and performs in their best interests as well as giving customers individual personal attention and having convenient operating hours.

Responsiveness: This means that employees of a service firm are willing to help customers and respond to their requests as well as to inform customers when service will be provided, and give prompt service.

Application of SERVQUAL Model in Hospitality Business

The SERVQUAL instrument has been used to assess the quality of a wide range of services in the United States such as financial service operations, telephone services, repair and maintenance services (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and other professional services (Bojanic, 1991). Fick and Ritchie (1991) have employed the SERVQUAL instrument to compare services provided by various types of organizations within the travel and tourism industry. Oberoi and Hales (1990) have examined the SERVQUAL approach as a basis for measuring the quality of the conference hotel products. Many researchers of other service businesses believed that “SERVQUAL” is a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and validity (Buttle, 1996; Lages & Fernandes, 2005).

In Thailand, Boontaganon (2002) studied the service quality of fast food restaurants in Bangkok by using SERVQUAL. The study examined the differences in service quality expectations and perceptions based on demographic characteristics including gender, age, occupation, education and income level. 360 questionnaires were distributed to people who had just exited from fast food outlets in Bangkok. The results showed significant differences in service quality of customer expectations and perceptions which indicated the unacceptable service quality delivered by fast food restaurants in Bangkok.

Suthirungkul (2003) studied the customer expectations and perceptions of service quality of the Clark Hatch Fitness Center at Silom Road Branch, Bangkok. The objectives of the study were to identify the SERVQUAL dimensions that customers, both local and foreign, used to evaluate The Clark Hatch Fitness Center, to study the customer expectations towards the services quality that should be provided and to evaluate the perceptions of service quality that customers obtained after using service. The questionnaire was used as a tool for collecting the data. 277 Thai and foreign members of

the Clark Hatch Fitness Center at Silom Road Branch were the research participants. The results of the study were that there existed gaps between expectations and perceptions in terms of the five SERVQUAL dimensions and the demographic characteristics had influenced the gap scores.

In short, SERVQUAL is an effective measuring tool. This tool has widely been used in many previous studies in hospitality business both domestically and internationally.

2.5 Demographic Variables

In general business sector, market segmentation is often based on demographic profiles (Reid & Bojanic, 2001) in order that marketers can choose the proper service segmentation strategies to satisfy different target market segments. Demographics are the variables about consumers' wants, preferences, and usage rates are often associated with demographic variables. Moreover, the demographic variables are easier to measure (Kotler, 2000). Important demographics are as follows:

1. Gender: There is no logical reason to expect biology to account for this difference between the sexes. The explanation may be in socialization differences and personality disposition. Feminine gender identity is characterized by traits such as expensiveness and emotionalism and other orientation, while masculine gender identity is characterized by independence, activity and self orientation. (Kotler & Scheff, 1997)

2. Age: Consumers' wants and abilities change with age. People buy different goods and services over their lifetime. People's tastes in different products and services are also related to age (Kotler, 2000).

3. Occupation: This variable reflects values, attitudes, taste and lifestyle.

Occupation and income tended to be closely correlation on almost cause-and-effect relationship (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994).

4. Income: Consumers form a purchase intention based on such factors and expected family income, price and expected benefits from the product and services (Kotler, 1997).

5. Purpose of Travel: The purpose of travel measure the frequent distribution. The purposes of travel are for such as business, holiday, visiting friends and relative and others (“Travel Planning,” 2010).

6. Frequency of Travel: A critical factor in predicting the demand for tourism within a certain period of time is the number of trips individuals take. New tourists’ behavior shows a tendency toward more frequent travel (Alegre & Pou, 2006).

To recap, the demographic profiles play a significant role in planning service to meet passengers’ satisfaction. In airline business, six features of the demographics were included in this study.

2.6 Previous Studies on Airline Passengers’ Satisfaction

In an airline business, the major revenue of a company comes from the number of passengers rather than a total sum of cargo service, aircraft maintenance or catering supply all together. Studies on airline passengers’ satisfaction are numerous as the following examples:

Gilbert and Wong (2003) identified the service dimensions that matter most to current airline passengers. The study measured and compared differences in passengers’ expectations of the desired airline service quality in terms of reliability, assurance,

facilities, employees, flight patterns, customization and responsiveness. The primary data were collected from passengers departing from Hong Kong airport. Regarding the service dimension expectations, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences between passengers who made their own airline choice (decision makers) and those who did not (non-decision makers). However, there were significant differences among passengers of different ethnic groups / nationalities as well as among passengers who traveled for different purposes, such as business, holiday and visiting friends or relatives.

The findings also indicated that passengers consistently ranked 'assurance' as the most important service dimension. It showed that the passengers were concerned about the safety and security aspects and this also indicated why there had been such a downturn in demand as this study was conducted just prior to the World Trade Center incident on September 11, 2001.

In Thailand, Somwang (2008) assessed the passengers' views of service quality in Thai low cost airlines. The research was based on the principle that passengers evaluated airline service quality through a comparison between their experiences and expectations, over a number of quality attributes. The study evaluated passengers' perceived service quality of Thai low cost carriers based on the SERVQUAL instrument. The findings indicated that the passengers' expectations on service quality were higher than what they had actually experienced. Further analysis showed that female passengers had lower perceived service quality than male passengers. The findings also revealed that higher monthly income had greater differences with respect to expectations and perceptions than lower income respondents. Furthermore, passengers usually traveled with low cost carriers for three main purposes which were for leisure, visiting friends or relatives and business.

In brief, the previous studies explored the satisfaction of airline passengers by using SERVQUAL instrument to measure the service quality. The results above found out the differences between customers' expectations and perceptions. The findings of a study in Hong Kong revealed the passengers' satisfaction on the dimensions of the service quality. Meanwhile, a study in Thailand implied some findings about the demographic profiles resulting in service quality. Studies on service quality help improve business organizations, retain customers and attract new customers.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter consists of four sections: participants of the study, research instrument, procedures of the study and data analysis.

3.1 Participants of the Study

One hundred and fifty Thai passengers, 75 males and 75 females, who took the TG Bangkok - Chiangmai route were randomly chosen as participants for the study. Since there are about 150 passenger seats in each flight, the researcher randomly acquired a sample size of 10 percent of the overall passengers from the ten flights, totaling 150. Thai people are the main group of passengers who travel domestically over the year. The researcher, therefore, decided to select only the Thai passengers as the participants for the study. Also, so as to cover various types of passengers, the researcher included flights of different time within a day (as shown in a following part of this chapter) for a reason that passengers with some specific purposes chose to travel at some specific time. For example, business people might prefer an early morning flight, rather than a later-in-the-day one.

TG's Bangkok – Chiangmai route has been considered one of the most frequent domestic routes (THAI, 2009). TG operates ten flights daily from Bangkok to Chiangmai. The researcher, consequently, chose this route for this research work to assess the passengers' satisfaction with TG's service quality.

The study was conducted in early March when it was still in the high season for travels to the northern province of Thailand. Fifteen passengers from each of the ten flights of the Bangkok - Chiangmai route were asked to fill out the questionnaire at the

end of the on-board service, while the plane was approaching Chiangmai, its destination. All the 150 completed questionnaires were obtained as planned.

3.2 Research Instrument

A questionnaire, in Thai, was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part was about the respondents' demographic profile since consumers' needs, preferences and personalization are often associated with demographic factors (Kotler, 2000). Six demographic characteristics related to in-flight service (Cheosakul, 2004) consisting of gender, age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and travel frequency with THAI were demographic issues of the survey. The second part comprised questions about passengers' satisfaction with the service during the flight. This part of the questionnaire was based on the SERVQUAL instrument for measuring customers' satisfaction in five dimensions of service: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The last part comprised a question and a blank space provided for suggestions on TG's service quality.

3.3 Procedures of the Study

The questionnaire was initially approved by the researcher's master's project advisor and two specialists, a TG in-flight service manager and a SWU lecturer. Then a pilot study was conducted to ten passengers to check for content reliability, the appropriateness of the number of questions and language used in the questionnaire. As the researcher included all the ten flights of TG's Bangkok - Chiangmai route in the study, the tried-out questionnaire was randomly distributed to ten TG passengers (5 males and 5 females) on each flight of the aforementioned route on the same day in February

2010. Also, since this study was about onboard service, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants after the in-flight service was completed and before the plane landed. After that, the questionnaire was adjusted and prepared for the actual survey.

The revised questionnaire was eventually distributed to 150 participants in ten consecutive days in early March 2010. Fifteen passengers, in each Bangkok - Chiangmai flight per day, were randomly asked to fill out the questionnaire after the completion of in-flight service.

The plan below showed the ten flights of for the survey, each flight for a day, to make sure that the data gained were reliable.

BKK-CNX Flight (TG)	Flight Schedule (Departure-Arrival)
TG100	06.15-07.25
TG102	07.50-09.10
TG104	09.10-10.30
TG106	10.20-11.40
TG110	12.50-14.00
TG112	14.00-15.10
TG114	15.40-16.50
TG116	17.15-18.25
TG120	19.00-20.10
TG122	21.30-22.40

3.4 Data Analysis

The data acquired from the questionnaires were analyzed in three sections: demographic profile of passengers, level of passengers' satisfaction with TG's service and the relationship between demographic profile and passengers' satisfaction based on

Likert scale. The 5-point Likert scales were used to rate the level of satisfaction as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Intervals of Satisfaction Level (Poonlarbtawee: 1987)

The interpretation of the scales in this study is as follows:

Rating Scale	Level of Agreement / Disagreement	Satisfaction Level	Mean Score
5	Strongly agree	Excellent	4.51-5.00
4	Agree	Good	3.51-4.50
3	Uncertain	Average	2.51-3.50
2	Disagree	Fair	1.51-2.50
1	Strongly disagree	Poor	1.00-1.50

The researcher picked up ‘the high group’ and ‘the low group’ of each SERVQUAL dimension to present the relationship between the participants’ demographic profile and their satisfaction. As the data gained from the highest number of the participants, or the high group, was the major point that the researcher relied on, focus was on the majority opinion. At the same time, the data gathered from the lowest number of the participants, or the low group, should not be overlooked because each and all passengers are important for TG and in the high competitive airline market, it is necessary to retain each and every passenger so as to grow far in the aviation business.

The results were presented in terms of percentages and mean scores in the form of tables and a bar chart. These fundamental statistic methods were proper in this study

because percentages and mean scores are considered the basic statistics used for data analysis and presentation. Also, the general public can easily understand the interpretation of the data. Another reason was that the sample group of this study comprised only 150 TG passengers. The researcher, therefore, decided to apply the aforementioned statistics in this research. Discussion of the results was also offered.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings of the study, consisting of the demographic data of the participants, level of their satisfaction with TG's service quality, relationship between the demographic data and five dimensions of SERVQUAL instrument and the uncovers to the last question on the questionnaire including suggestion.

4.1 Demographic Data

The demographic data of TG's research participants in terms of age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and frequency of travel are presented in Tables 2- 6 below:

Table 2 Participants' Age

Age:	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Under 20 years	8	5.3
21-40 years	85	56.7
41-60 years	45	30.0
Above 60 years	12	8.0
Total	150	100

Regarding the age group, the highest number of the passengers was 20-40 years old or 56.7%. 30% of them were 46-60 years old and 8% were above 60 years old. Only 5.3% were under 20 years old.

Table 3 Participants' Occupation

Occupation:	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Government official / State enterprise employee	22	14.7
Business employee	63	42.0
Business owner	37	24.7
Student	13	8.6
Retiree	9	6.0
Others	6	4.0
Total	150	100

In terms of occupation, the highest number of the participants was business employees (42%), followed by business owners (24.7%), government officials or state enterprise employees (14.7%), students (8.6%), retirees (6%) and other occupations (4%) respectively.

Table 4 Monthly Income

Monthly income (baht):	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Up to 20,000	58	38.6
20,001- 40,000	72	48.0
40,001 - 60,000	11	7.4
60,001 and above	9	6.0
Total	150	100

For the income, the highest number of the participants earned 20,001-40,000 baht monthly (48%), followed by those with a monthly income of up to 20,000 baht (38.6%),

of 40,001-60,000 baht monthly (6.4%) and of 60,001 baht and above monthly was the lowest (6%).

Table 5 Purpose of Travel

Purpose of travel:	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Business trips	41	27.3
Holidays	79	52.7
Visits	27	18.0
Others	3	2.0
Total	150	100

Regarding the purpose of travel, the highest number of the passengers traveled via TG on holidays (52.7%), followed by those who traveled on business trips (27.3%). Meanwhile those who made a visit were at 18.0% and who traveled with other purposes were at 2%.

Table 6 Frequency of Travel

Frequency in traveling with THAI: (during the last 12 months)	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
First time	39	26.0
2-3 times	99	66.0
4-10 times	10	6.7
More than 10 times	2	1.3
Total	150	100

The last demographic data derive from the frequency in traveling with THAI. 66% of the participants indicated that they traveled 2-3 times during the last 12 months, 26% traveled for the first time while 6.7% for 4-10 times and 1.3% for more than 10 times during the last 12 months.

In conclusion, the demographic data shown in the tables above indicated that ‘the high group’ comprised the following characteristics. The age group of the majority number of the participants ranged from 21-40 years (56.7%). Most of them were business employees (42%). The highest number of the passengers’ monthly income was around 20,000 – 40,000 baht per month (48%). The majority of the passengers traveled on holidays (52.7%) by TG 2-3 times in the past 12 months (66%).

Meanwhile, ‘the low group’ was found having the following characteristics. The lowest number of the research participants was under 20 years old or 5.3%. Only 4.7% of the participants had other kinds of occupation which were not indicated on the questionnaire while only 6% of the participants earned 60,001 baht or above monthly. 2% of the participants traveled on other purposes, besides those shown on the questionnaire. Lastly, 1.3% of the passengers were those who traveled by TG more than 10 times in the past 12 months.

4.2 Level of Passengers’ Satisfaction

Figure 1 below is the conclusion from the second part of the questionnaire. The 150 participants were asked to rate the level of service quality that they perceived from the TG’s domestic flights on Bangkok - Chiangmai route. The questionnaire was divided into five dimensions of SERVQUAL’s (Parasuraman et al., 1985) service quality, which comprised reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. The scales 1 to 5 ranged from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

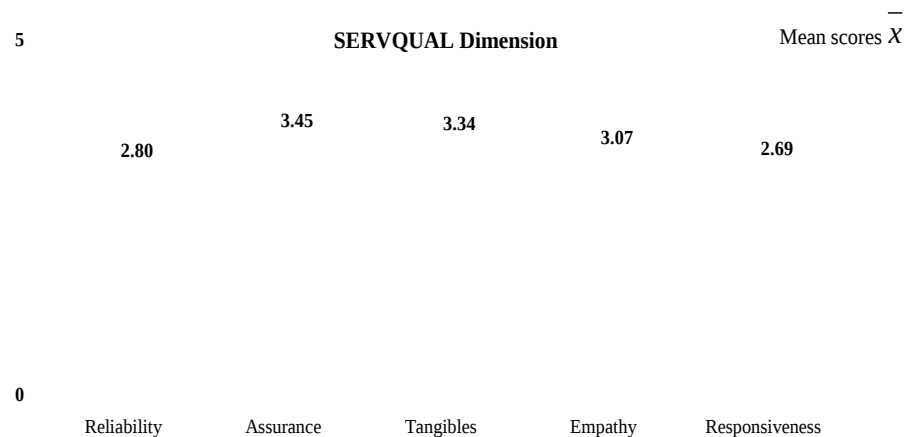


Figure 1: Overall Level of Participant's Satisfaction

Figure 1 shows the average mean score of all 150 passengers' satisfaction on five dimensions of service quality ranging from the mean scores of 3.45 to 2.69. The results revealed that the most important service quality dimension for the whole samples group of passengers was assurance ($\bar{x}$ 3.45), followed by tangibles ($\bar{x}$ 3.34), empathy ($\bar{x}$ 3.07), reliability ($\bar{x}$ 2.8), and responsiveness ($\bar{x}$ 2.69) respectively. The overall average mean was 3.07.

4.3 Passengers' Satisfaction Level in Relationship with Their Demographic Data

This section shows the relationship between the demographic data (age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and travel frequency) of the participants and their satisfaction with the service quality of TG's in-flight service.

The researcher focused on each category of demographic characteristics of two major groups: a group with the highest score and the other with the lowest score. In fact, the most important data were the majority opinion of the sample group. In other words, for this study, it was 'the high group'. However, the researcher, as a TG cabin crew, gave importance to the low group as well since each and every passenger is significant to TG

business, particularly in the high competitive market of airline business. The researcher was interested to know what the passengers in the ‘low group’ thought about the in-flight service and what their feedback was.

The following tables (Tables 7-11) illustrate the relationship between each dimension of the demographic data and the SERVQUAL service assessment tool and the following symbols are applied in the tables below:

‘N’ means the number of the participants

$\bar{x}$ means the mean score

‘The high group’ means the group that comprises the highest number of participants.

‘The low group’ means the group that comprises the lowest number of participants.

Table 7 Relationship between the Participants’ Age and their Satisfaction with In-flight Service

SERVQUAL’S	Average	The High Group	The Low Group
RATER	Mean Score	(Age: 20-40 Yrs Old)	(Age: Under 20 Yrs Old)
	of All Groups	<u>N = 85/56.7%</u>	<u>N = 8/5.3%</u>
		Mean Score of Each Group	
Reliability	2.80	2.78	2.70
Assurance	3.45	3.78	3.35
Tangibles	3.34	3.31	3.28
Empathy	3.07	3.09	3.14
Responsiveness	2.69	2.67	2.90

Table 7 reveals the connection between the participants’ age and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument. The high group had higher mean scores for

three dimensions than the low group. In other words, the participants with an age range of 20-40 years were more satisfied with TG's service quality in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles than those who were under 20 years old. Meanwhile, the low group had higher mean scores for two dimensions than the high group. This means the participants who were lower than 20 years old were more satisfied with the in-flight service in terms of empathy and responsiveness than those whose ages ranged from 20-40 years.

Interestingly, it was found that both groups have a lower mean score for the reliability dimension ($\bar{x}$ 2.78 and 2.70) than the average mean score of all the age groups in this study ($\bar{x}$ 2.8).

Table 8 Relationship between the Participants' Occupation and their Satisfaction with In-flight Service

SERVQUAL'S	Average	The High Group	The Low Group
RATER	Mean Score	(Business Employee)	(Others)
	of All Groups	<u>N = 63/42.0%</u>	<u>N = 6/4.0%</u>
	Mean Score of Each Group		
Reliability	2.80	2.75	2.84
Assurance	3.45	3.47	3.48
Tangibles	3.34	3.31	3.36
Empathy	3.07	3.10	3.05
Responsiveness	2.69	2.64	2.77

Table 8 illustrates the connection between the participants' occupations and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument. The low group had higher mean scores

for almost all the dimensions of SERVQUAL's RATER than the high group, except for one dimension. In other words, the participants who worked as business employees were less satisfied with TG's service quality in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles and responsiveness than those whose occupations were not specified in the questionnaire. Empathy was the only dimension of service quality that the participants who were in the high group were satisfied with.

Table 9 Relationship between the Participants' Income and their Satisfaction with In-flight Service

SERVQUAL'S	Average	The High Group	The Low Group
RATER	Mean Score	(20,001-40,000)	(60,001 and above)
	of All Groups	<u>N = 72/48.0%</u>	<u>N = 9/6.0%</u>
	Mean Score of Each Group		
Reliability	2.80	2.73	2.85
Assurance	3.45	3.49	3.50
Tangibles	3.34	3.32	3.21
Empathy	3.07	3.01	3.25
Responsiveness	2.69	2.62	2.73

Table 9 indicates the connection between the participants' monthly income and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument. The low group had higher mean scores for almost all the dimensions of RATER than the high group, except for one dimension. In other words, the participants who earned monthly income of 20,001 – 40,000 baht were less satisfied with TG's service quality in terms of reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness than those who earned monthly income of 60,001 baht and

above. The tangibles dimension was the only service quality issue that the participants who were in the high group were satisfied with.

Table 10 Relationship between the Participants' Purpose of Travel and their Satisfaction with In-flight Service

SERVQUAL'S	Average	The High Group	The Low Group
RATER	Mean Score	(Holidays)	(Others)
	of All Groups	<u>N = 79/52.7%</u>	<u>N = 3/2.0%</u>
	Mean Score of Each Group		
Reliability	2.80	2.79	2.85
Assurance	3.45	3.53	3.49
Tangibles	3.34	3.35	3.38
Empathy	3.07	3.08	3.12
Responsiveness	2.69	2.70	2.75

Table 10 reflects the connection between the participants' purpose of travel and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument. The low group had higher mean scores for almost all the dimensions than the high group, except for one dimension. In other words, the participants who traveled on holidays were less satisfied with TG's service quality in terms of reliability, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness than those whose purpose of travel were not specified in the questionnaire. Assurance was the only dimension of service quality that the participants who were in the high group were satisfied with.

Interestingly, it was found that both groups has a higher satisfaction level for the assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness dimensions than the average mean scores of the whole sample group.

Table 11 Relationship between the Participants' Frequency of Travel with THAI and their Satisfaction with In-flight Service

SERVQUAL'S	Average Mean	The High	The Low Group
RATER	Score of All	Group	(more than 10
	Groups	(2-3 times/year)	times/year)
		<u>N = 99/66.0%</u>	<u>N = 2/1.3%</u>
Mean Score of Each Group			
Reliability	2.80	2.81	2.95
Assurance	3.45	3.46	3.60
Tangibles	3.34	3.35	3.43
Empathy	3.07	3.08	3.21
Responsiveness	2.69	2.70	2.92

Table 11 presents the connection between the participants' frequency of travel with THAI and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument. The low group had higher mean scores for all the dimensions of RATER than the high group. In other words, the participants who traveled 2-3 times in the last 12 months were less satisfied with TG's service quality in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness than those whose frequency of travel were more than 10 times in the last 12 months.

Interestingly, it was found that both groups has a higher satisfaction level for all the five RATER dimensions than the average mean scores of the whole sample group in this study.

4.4 Other Comments

The last part of the questionnaire was designed to ask whether the participants would continue using TG's service. The findings disclosed that 142 participants or 94.6% indicated that they would while 8 of them or 5.4% declined.

Also at the end of the questionnaire, there was a blank space for the participants to freely express their own ideas and suggestions on TG's service. However, only 7 participants or 4.6% gave suggestions regarding the in-flight service. Four of the participants were dissatisfied with the flavor of the snacks provided on board. One complained that it was not cool enough in the cabin while one was upset for not being granted for a request for a blanket. The last one commented that the passenger's seat was not comfortable.

In summary, the passengers' satisfaction level of the service quality in connection with their demographic data was introduced. Five out of the six demographic characteristics: the participants' age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and frequency of travel were analyzed in connection with the five dimensions of SERVQUAL instrument; reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. It was observed that there were some connection between these two matters in various ways as earlier discussed. Lastly, it was found that one hundred and forty-two participants would continue using TG's service while the rest refused. Only seven of all the participants or 4.6% gave some comments on the open-ended suggestion part.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the conclusion, discussion, limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies.

5.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the service quality provided by Thai Airways International on its domestic flights. One hundred and fifty passengers who traveled by TG on the Bangkok - Chiang Mai route were the research participants. The SERVQUAL instrument was used as an instrument for data collection in the survey. This instrument was based on five determinants proposed by Parasuraman et.al (1985), in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. This research was also conducted on the demographic characteristics comprising gender, age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and frequency in traveling and the relationship of these characteristics, except the gender, with the passengers' satisfaction with TG's in-flight service quality. The questionnaires were distributed in early March 2010.

The results showed that all the participants' satisfaction based on the five dimensions was at the average level. The highest level of passengers' satisfaction was placed on the assurance dimension, followed by tangibles and empathy dimensions accordingly. The two lowest levels of the passengers' satisfaction were placed on the responsiveness and reliability dimensions.

In addition, a summary of the demographic characteristics showed that the high group or the group with the highest number of participants was business employees. The highest number of the participants was between 21-40 years old. The highest number of

the participants' income ranged from 20,000 – 40,000 baht monthly. Also, the high group's purpose of travel was to go on holiday. Lastly, the highest number of the participants traveled via TG only 2-3 times during the past 12 months.

Meanwhile, the low group or the group with the lowest number of participants was passengers with other kinds of occupations which were not specified on the questionnaire. The low group of the participants was under 20 years old. The low group of the participants' income ranged from 60,001 baht monthly or higher. Also, the low group revealed that they traveled via TG for other purposes which were not indicated on the questionnaire. Lastly, the passengers who traveled via TG more than 10 times during the past 12 months belonged in the low group.

It has also been discovered that, as a whole, both groups, the high and low groups were in the same direction in their satisfaction with the five dimensions of service quality. The two groups were satisfied with the service quality dimensions in terms of assurance at the highest level, followed by tangibles, empathy, reliability and responsiveness respectively.

However, when analyzing each demographic characteristic, the participants who were under 20 years old, rated the responsiveness dimension higher than the reliability dimension. Also, for those participants whose income was around 60,001 or higher, the empathy dimension was rated higher than the tangibles. Regarding the occupation, business people were satisfied with the reliability and responsiveness dimensions at a very low level. Meanwhile, the participants who traveled via TG on their holidays rated the assurance dimension at a very high level. Lastly, frequent fliers who traveled by THAI more than 10 times were most satisfied with TG's service since they rated all RATER aspects highly.

5.2 Discussion

The findings have revealed the answers to the research questions. First, the demographic data of the participants: gender, age, occupation, monthly income, purpose of travel and frequency of travel were shown. Second, the level of the passengers' satisfaction toward the service quality on Thai Airways International's domestic flights in terms of the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman et al., 1985): reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness was disclosed. Also, the results about the relationship between the passengers' satisfaction and their demographic data were pointed out.

The results of the survey indicated that out of the five dimensions, assurance was rated at the highest level ($\bar{x}$ 3.45), followed by tangibles ($\bar{x}$ 3.34), and empathy ($\bar{x}$ 3.07) (See Figure 1). In addition, passengers rated their highest satisfaction with the assurance dimension which included cabin crew's job knowledge, their courtesy, confidence in their service ability and safety while traveling. It may be because TG cabin crew are well-trained prior to their actual service work on board. This can also ensure passengers' safety. Particularly, the safety and security features have been the most concerns of airline passengers since the 9-11 incidents in New York, USA. This is why most customers rated their highest satisfaction with the assurance dimension (Carman, 1990).

The findings of this study are also consistent with those of Fick and Ritchie (1991) who studied the operation of the SERVQUAL instrument in three major tourism sectors: airlines, restaurants, and ski area services. It was revealed that the most important dimensions of the service were assurance and tangibles. If companies were unable to inspire trust and confidence in their customers and the tangibles are not impressive, it would be difficult for them to achieve a high level of customer's satisfaction (Sachukorn, 2000).

Responsiveness is often found as the lowest level of satisfaction among customers in the service industry. It is plausible that the staff were too busy to provide prompt and good service (Kholthanasep, 2001). In this study, the results revealed that the responsiveness dimension was rated at the lowest score ($\bar{x}$ 2.69) among the five dimensions, followed by the reliability ($\bar{x}$ 2.80) dimension. It was highly possible that the passengers' dissatisfaction occurred when passengers did not receive prompt service from TG when they needed help.

Prompt service is an important factor of customers' expectation. Customers generally rate the service as poor when the speed of service does not meet their expectations (Kholthanasep, 2001). Bojanic and Rosen (1994) examined the nature of the association between service quality as perceived by consumers and its determinants by applying SERVQUAL in a restaurant setting. They found that customers rated responsiveness as the lowest satisfaction in their studies. Zeithaml et al. (1990) explained that the responsiveness dimension in the SERVQUAL was willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. As the responsiveness dimension in this research comprised prompt service, willingness, on-time service and quick response; therefore, it will be beneficial to TG if the company can ensure that the service provided by its cabin crew, especially the willingness to help passengers and to provide prompt service, meet passengers' satisfaction.

Regarding the relationship between the participants' demographic data and their satisfaction with the service quality, there are many points of interests to be discussed as follows:

Firstly, regarding the relationship of the passengers' satisfaction with the service and their age, those who were under 20 years old rated satisfaction with the responsiveness dimension ($\bar{x}$ 2.90) higher than the reliability dimension ($\bar{x}$ 2.70) (See

Table 7). It was possible that young passengers usually gave priority to the dimension of care and service when compared with that of the service providers' accurate and dependable manner (Panittumrong, 2003). In addition, young customers had less experience in a service and it was difficult to compare the current service with the past experience, consequently, they were more satisfied with the service provided than senior customers.

Another point was raised about the participants' age. The study revealed that the number of the high group with the age range of 21- 40 was at 56.7%. However, that of the second highest group of the participants with the age range of 41-60 was at 30%, which was rather high. This latter group's level of satisfaction on the service quality was also close to the average mean score. It was found that the average mean score of the reliability dimension was 2.80 while that of the second highest group was 2.81, the average mean score of the assurance dimension was 3.45 while that of the second highest group was 3.47, the average mean score of the tangibles dimension was 3.34 while that of the second highest group was 3.35, the average mean score of the empathy dimension and that of the second highest group was rated at 3.07 equally and the average mean score of the responsiveness was 2.69 while that of the second highest group was 2.71. In sum, if consider the two groups in terms of the participants' age, one of the high group and the other with the second high group, the results confirmed that the satisfaction level of the majority of passengers was at the above average level.

Secondly, regarding the relationship between the participants' satisfaction and their occupation, business employees who were found at the highest number (42%) had very low satisfaction with the service quality in terms of reliability ($\bar{x}$ 2.75) and responsiveness ($\bar{x}$ 2.64) while the mean scores of the whole sample group for these two dimensions were at 2.80 and 2.69 respectively (See Table 8). The findings strongly

correlated with that of Cheaosakul (2004) who studied the consumers' perception of airline service quality with a focus on occupations. It was found that the group of business employees had the highest score on expectations. Cheaosakul (2004)'s study also revealed that business employees did not frequently travel, compared with people of other occupations such as tourists. It was found in this particular study that the number of the participants' purpose of travel with TG for business trips was only at 27.3% (See Table 5) while the highest number of the participants went on holiday was at 52%. Cheaosakul (2004) indicated that business people, therefore, had high expectations than the other group who traveled more frequently.

Thirdly, an even more interesting point was raised when comparing the level of satisfaction of the passengers who were government officials or state enterprise employees and business owners. Although passengers who were government officials or state enterprise employees came third in terms of participants, they are considered valuable customers of TG since according to the government's policy, they are required to take only TG, which is a national airline, whenever they travel by air. There are few exceptions, though. However, it is almost impossible for Thai government officials, who travel on business trip and are funded by the government's budget, to fly with other airlines. It was found from this study that government officials were less satisfied with TG quality service in terms of reliability ($\bar{x}$ 2.77) and responsiveness ($\bar{x}$ 2.64) than the average level of which the mean scores of the two dimensions were at 2.80 and 2.69 respectively.

Another issue of discussion regarding the participants' occupation, business owners came second. It was observed that business owners rated the reliability ($\bar{x}$ 2.82) and responsiveness dimensions ($\bar{x}$ 2.70) higher than the average scores of all groups (See Table 8). It is possible that business owners had more positive attitude with TG's service

than the other groups. TG seemed popular among business owners and they were the most important group of customers. This was supported by Suriya (2005) who studied airline market segments after the launch of the low cost airlines in Thailand. Suriya (2005) identified that merchants or business owners were the major group of customers in the full-service airline market.

Fourthly, regarding the monthly income of the research participants of the low group, passengers who earned an income of around 60,001 or higher rated the empathy ($\bar{x}$ 3.25) dimension higher than tangibles ($\bar{x}$ 3.21) dimension (See Table 9). This may be because the high income passengers sensitively felt that the facilities and equipment found on their domestic route looked quite old-fashioned due to TG's cost reduction. The company saved costs after the Suvannabhumi airport was closed in the 2008 crisis. The result is similar to the findings of Wangpen and Inthornma (2007) in that high income customers had higher expectations towards the service. It was possible that they had more tendencies to be dissatisfied with the service failures. The two researchers concluded that passengers with different incomes were satisfied with the services at different levels because they had different attitudes, expectations and abilities to pay for the service.

Fifthly, as it was found from this study that the highest score for the purpose of travel was going on holiday (52.7%) and the participants who were tourists rated the assurance dimension at the highest level or the mean score of 3.53 (See Table 10), much higher than the mean score of the whole group which was at 3.45. It was rather surprising that the highest score for the travel purpose was not for business trips. It is possible to explain that this group spent for the travel cost on their own and they might want to make sure that they chose the best service for themselves. The result is parallel with Gabbie and O'Neill (1997) who examined customer satisfaction in the hotel sector using the

SERVQUAL tool. This study showed that the holiday guests who paid for accommodation on their own rated assurance much higher than other dimensions. It is plausible to explain that passengers traveling on their own budget must make sure that they already chose the service that was worth the money spent.

However, when analyzing the satisfaction on service quality of the participants whose purpose of travel via TG was for business, it was also found that this business participants rated the high score for the tangibles dimension at the mean score of 3.40, compared with the average mean score of all groups of 3.34. Passengers who traveled on business included government officials and state enterprise employees were major customers of TG. It was, therefore, interesting to find out from this study that their satisfaction score in terms of tangibles, or the appearance of physical factors such as equipment, facilities and personnel, was above the average score of all groups. Although the score was not much higher, the gap was bigger than that of the other RATER dimensions as seen from the following information: the passengers who traveled on business trip showed their satisfaction on the reliability dimension at the mean score of 2.81, the assurance dimension at 3.47, the empathy dimension at 3.09 and the responsiveness dimension at 2.70 while the average of all groups was at 2.80, 3.45, 3.07 and 2.69 respectively.

The last point that the researcher wanted to point out is that this study revealed that the participants who traveled more than 10 times for the last 12 months were lowest in number (1.3%). However, it was interesting that these frequent flyers showed the high rate of satisfaction with TG's in-flight service quality. The mean scores in all dimensions showed the high rate of satisfaction (See Table 11). It is possible that passengers who traveled very often via TG had high loyalty. The brand loyalty made passengers happy in every feature of service. This result, however, contrasts with Ostrowski et al. (1993) who

investigated service quality and customer loyalty in the commercial airline industry. The study examined whether the high levels of service quality existed in the US commercial airline industry and how service quality could potentially lead to customer loyalty. The main results indicated that the levels of perceived service quality were below potential and that customer loyalty to airlines was low. It is plausible to say that the data of the two studies were different. The data collected on two air carriers in USA might have different characteristics from the demographic information of Thai people and the number of the participants in the two studies might differ. However, TG still needs to listen to the voice of all passengers, especially the frequent flyers. Even if the number of this sample group was few, every customer is valuable for any firm. Also, it would be valuable to implement a relevant strategy to expand this group of passengers since they had a positive attitude for TG.

Interestingly, the findings from the last part of the questionnaire also showed that the majority of the participants (94.6%) showed their willingness to use TG's service in the future. It can plausibly be explained that the participants were satisfied with TG's service quality at the moderate level ($\bar{x}$ 3.07). Their satisfaction with the five dimensions of SERVQUAL was also moderate. They might think that TG is a reliable airline that they can depend on. Thai passengers have confidence and trust in the service of Thai cabin crew in terms of courtesy. Also, it is possible that they might not trust the low cost airlines' service of the crew.

There were only seven remarks on the in-flight service when the participants were asked to freely give suggestions. The tangible dimension problematic. Passengers pointed out about the small size of passengers' seats and the quality of the air-conditioning system. One problem was on the responsiveness dimension which happened when a passenger asked for a blanket but s/he was not offered, indicating that some of the

cabin crew's promptness to provide service was still not up to a standard. Another comment was on the flavor of the snacks. Although this issue is not directly relevant to the service, it is worthwhile for TG to consider this problem.

In conclusion, the researcher found both strengths and weaknesses in TG's service quality. Assurance was found the highest satisfaction in the participants' opinion. TG should maintain the service quality with a focus on this dimension. On the other hand, the responsiveness and reliability dimensions were at the lowest satisfaction level among the five dimensions. The company should improve its service quality on these two dimensions, especially with regards to TG's 'prompt service' and 'problem solving' service to retain its passengers.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations as follows:

1. This study was limited to only one domestic route (Bangkok – Chiangmai).

Therefore, the participants in this study were passengers who traveled only between these two provinces. The results of the study might differ if the study covered another route or many more routes at the same time. Consequently, further studies can be conducted for other domestic destinations, such as Phuket and other big cities.

2. The research participants were all Thai passengers. It would be interesting to study foreign passengers' satisfaction on TG's in-flight service quality.

3. This study focused only on Parasuraman et al., (1985)'s SERVQUAL Instrument used to assess the service quality. The results might differ if other instruments were used.

5.4 Recommendations for further studies

Further research should be undertaken to validate the results of this study. The researcher has found several opportunities to extend this study as follows:

Survey on the ‘responsiveness’ dimensions

Responsiveness concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service, such as timelines of service and prompt service. This dimension was what the passengers in this study were most concerned about because it was rated as the lowest level of satisfaction. Thus, TG should find the countermeasure of how to increase the level of passengers’ satisfaction in the responsiveness dimension.

Assessment of the ground service quality

Since this research was conducted on on-board service quality, further studies on ground services such as a reservation or check-in service should be investigated in order to integrate the results, covering every sector of the airline service.

Study on passengers’ attitude towards the service quality in other airlines

A study on the service quality of other airlines should be conducted in order to obtain comparative data and find out reasons for their passengers’ behavior and attitude, consequently, allowing TG to remedy any weak points and increase the number of new passengers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

แบบทดสอบความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารการบินไทย

เรียนท่านผู้โดยสารที่เคารพ

กระผม นาย วิลาศ มั่นคงวณิชกุล พนักงานต้อนรับสายการบินไทย และนักศึกษาปริญญาโท หลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ ได้จัดทำแบบสอบถามนี้เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการสำรวจความพึงพอใจของผู้โดยสารที่มีต่อคุณภาพงานบริการ เพื่อยืนยันภายในประเทศของการบินไทย โดยมุ่งหวังที่จะนำข้อมูลที่ได้รับจากการสำรวจมาเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการส่งเสริมสนับสนุนการปฏิบัติงานให้เกิดประสิทธิภาพ จึงขอความกรุณาจากท่านในการตอบแบบสอบถามทุกข้อตามข้อเท็จจริงและความเห็นของท่าน ข้อมูลทั้งหมดเป็นความลับ จะใช้เพื่อการวิจัยเท่านั้น และขอขอบคุณในความร่วมมือของท่าน

คำชี้แจง โปรดทำเครื่องหมาย (x) ลงในช่องว่าง ที่ตรงกับคำตอบของท่าน

ตอนที่ 1 ข้อมูลทั่วไป

1. เพศ

() ชาย

() หญิง

2. อายุ

() ต่ำกว่า 20 ปี

() 21-40 ปี

() 41-60 ปี

() 60 ปีขึ้นไป

3. อาชีพ

() ข้าราชการ / รัฐวิสาหกิจ

() พนักงานบริษัท

() ธุรกิจส่วนตัว

() นักเรียน / นักศึกษา

() เกษียณ

() อื่นๆ

4. รายได้ : เดือน

() ต่ำกว่า 20,000

() 20,001- 40,000 บาท

() 40,001- 60,000 บาท

() 60,001 บาท ขึ้นไป

5. จุดประสงค์การเดินทาง

() ธุรกิจ

() พักผ่อน

() เยี่ยมเยียนญาติมิตร เพื่อนฝูง

() อื่นๆ

6. ความถี่ในการเดินทางกับการบินไทย (ในรอบ 12 เดือน)

() ครั้งแรก

() 2-3 ครั้ง

() 4-10 ครั้ง

() 10 ครั้งขึ้นไป

ตอนที่ 2 ความพึงพอใจของท่านต่อการบริการ

(5 = เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง, 4= เห็นด้วย, 3= ปานกลาง, 2=ไม่เห็นด้วย, 1=ไม่เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง)

	ระดับความพึงพอใจ					
	5	4	3	2	1	
การบริการของการบินไทย						
1. เมื่อเจ้าหน้าที่สัญญาที่จะให้บริการท่านในเรื่องใด จะทำตามนั้นเสมอ	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
2. การให้บริการของเจ้าหน้าที่ สร้างความเชื่อมั่นให้กับท่าน	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
3. อุปกรณ์บนเครื่องบินมีรูปแบบที่ทันสมัย (เช่น จอทีวี ที่นั่ง)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
4. บริษัทกำหนดเวลาการให้บริการบนเครื่องเหมาะสม	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
5. เจ้าหน้าที่ให้บริการที่ดีนับตั้งแต่ก้าวแรกบนเครื่อง	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
6. เจ้าหน้าที่มีความตั้งใจที่จะช่วยเหลือท่าน เมื่อท่านมีปัญหา	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
7. ท่านรู้สึกปลอดภัยเมื่ออยู่บนเครื่องบิน	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
8. สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกต่าง ๆ บนเครื่อง มีรูปลักษณะที่ดึงดูดใจ (เช่น กล้องอาหาร)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
9. เจ้าหน้าที่ไม่เข้าใจความต้องการของท่าน ในบางกรณี	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
10. เจ้าหน้าที่ไม่ไ้ระยะเวลาในการให้บริการผู้โดยสารบนเครื่องที่แน่นอน	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
11. เจ้าหน้าที่พยายามทำงานโดยไม่ให้เกิดข้อผิดพลาด	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
12. เจ้าหน้าที่ปฏิบัติงานด้วยความสุภาพเสมอ	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
13. เจ้าหน้าที่แต่งกายเรียบร้อยและดูดี	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
14. บริษัทให้ความเอาใจใส่กับผู้โดยสารเป็นรายบุคคล	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
15. บางครั้งเจ้าหน้าที่ไม่เต็มใจที่จะให้บริการผู้โดยสาร	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
16. บริษัทให้บริการท่านตรงเวลาที่กำหนด	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
17. เจ้าหน้าที่สามารถให้ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับการเดินทางได้อย่างถูกต้อง	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
18. เอกสารของบริษัทที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการบริการ (เช่น แผ่นพับ นิตยสาร) มีข้อมูลครบถ้วน และรูปแบบสวยงาม	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
19. เจ้าหน้าที่ให้บริการท่านด้วยสัมปัสความเป็นไทย	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
20. เจ้าหน้าที่ให้บริการผู้โดยสารอย่างรวดเร็ว	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
***ท่านจะกลับมาใช้บริการของการบินไทยต่อไป	☐	จะใช้บริการต่อไป			☐	ไม่ใช้บริการ

ข้อเสนอแนะ _____

ขอบพระคุณอย่างสูงในความร่วมมือของท่าน

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

Dear: Honorable Passengers

My name is Wilas Mankongvanichkul -- a THAI cabin crew and master's student of business English for international communication program, Srinakharinwirot University. This questionnaire is about an exploration of passengers' satisfaction with service quality of Thai Airways International (TG)'s domestic flights. Data gained will be utilized for THAI service operation. Please kindly complete the questionnaire. The data gained will be kept confidential and used for the research study only. Your kind cooperation is greatly appreciated.

.....

Direction Please mark (x) your answer in the space provided.

Part 1 Personal Information

1. Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Age

☐ Under 20 years

☐ 21-40 years

☐ 41-60 years

☐ Above 60 years

3. Occupation

☐ Government official / State enterprise employee

☐ Business employee

☐ Business owner

☐ Student

☐ Retiree

☐ Others

4. Monthly income

☐ Up to 20,000 baht

☐ 20,001- 40,000 baht

☐ 40,001 – 60,000 baht

☐ 60,001 baht and above

5. Purpose of travel

☐ Business trips

☐ Holidays

☐ Visits

☐ Others

6. Frequency in traveling with THAI (during the last 12 months)

☐ First time

☐ 2-3 times

☐ 4-10 times

☐ More than 10 times

Part 2 Your satisfaction with the service

(5=Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3=Uncertain, 2=Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree)

	<u>Level of Satisfaction</u>				
<i>The Service of THAI</i>	5	4	3	2	1
1. When cabin crew promise to do something by a certain time, they do so.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. You can trust THAI cabin crew.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. TG has modern on board equipment (such as TV screen, passengers' seats).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. TG has operating hours on board convenient to all passengers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Cabin crew offer good services upon boarding.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. When passengers have a problem, cabin crew show a sincere interest in solving it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Passengers feel safe on-board.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. The physical facilities of TG are visually appealing (such as meal boxes).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Cabin crew do not understand your special needs in some cases.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Cabin crew do not tell passengers exactly when services will be offered.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Cabin crew insist on error-free records.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Cabin crew are consistently courteous to passengers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Cabin crew are well-dressed and neat in appearance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. TG gives passengers individual attention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Cabin crew are not always willing to help passengers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. TG provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. Cabin crew are knowledgeable to answer passengers travel-related questions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. Documents about service are informative and appealing (such as pamphlets and magazines).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Services provided have a "Thai Touch"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. Cabin crew are quick to respond to passengers' requests.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
***Will you come back for TG's service?	☐	Yes	☐	No	

Suggestions: _____

 Thank you very much for your kind cooperation

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire Specification Based on SERVQUAL measurement (Parasuraman et al., 1985)

Passengers' satisfaction level toward service quality factors

No.	Service Quality Features (RATER)	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1	When cabin crew promise to do something by a certain time, they do so.	Reliability				
2	You can trust THAI cabin crew.	Assurance				
3	TG has modern on board equipment (such as TV screen, passengers' seats).	Tangibles				
4	TG has operating hours on board convenient to all passengers.	Empathy				
5	Cabin crew offer good services upon boarding.	Responsiveness				
6	When passengers have a problem, cabin crew show a sincere interest in solving it.	Reliability				
7	Passengers feel safe on-board.	Assurance				
8	The physical facilities of TG are visually appealing (such as meal boxes).	Tangibles				
9	Cabin crew do not always understand your special needs in some cases.	Empathy				
10	Cabin crew do not tell passengers exactly when services will be offered.	Responsiveness				
11	Cabin crew insist on error-free records.	Reliability				
12	Cabin crew are consistently courteous to passengers.	Assurance				
13	Cabin crew are well-dressed and neat in appearance.	Tangibles				
14	TG gives passengers individual attention.	Empathy				
15	Cabin crew are not always willing to help passengers.	Responsiveness				
16	TG provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	Reliability				
17	Cabin crew are knowledgeable to answer passengers travel-related questions.	Assurance				
18	TG's documents associated with services are informative and appealing (such as pamphlets and magazines).	Tangibles				
19	Services provided have a "Thai Touch".	Empathy				
20	Cabin crew are quick to respond to passengers' requests.	Responsiveness				

VITAE

VITAE

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1997	High School, Saint Dominic School