

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in 6 main areas: (1) The detailed information about OIA and the student exchange program (2) The definitions of Customer Satisfaction, (3) Satisfaction in Business Service VS Satisfaction in Public Service, (4) The Key Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction, (5) Measurement of Customer Satisfaction, and (6) Previous Similar Studies.

2.1 THE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT OIA AND THE STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Initially, the office was set up as a department under the umbrella of the Office of Rector to take responsibility for welcoming international visitors and taking care of foreign students, and managing scholarships. Subsequently, it was upgraded to the Office of International Affairs in 2005 with the additional task of conducting the student exchange program.

The main objectives of the student exchange program are to introduce their students to an international perspective in all disciplines, broaden their horizons, and prepare them for future intercultural working atmosphere. In addition, the other objective of this program is that the exchange students are able to share their experience with their friends who can not participate in this program when they return to their homeland.

The exchange program comprises six sub-programs:

- The exchange program with partner universities in Australia
- The exchange program with partner universities in Europe
- The exchange program with partner universities in USA
- The exchange program with partner universities in China
- The exchange program with partner universities in Japan; and
- The exchange program with partner universities in Korea.

At present, Thammasat has 107 partner universities (see appendices).

The Office International Affairs has responsibility for services as follows:

1. Information dissemination

The coordinators are in charge of distributing the information about the program through various channels: flyers, telephone calls, electronic mail, website posting, and face to face interactions.

2. Student exchange program application announcement

The coordinators announce the opening of each sub-program as mentioned above and advise students about the application procedure and exchange universities selection.

3. Selection process

The coordinators are responsible for screening candidates with an evaluation based on criteria and information of the application documents provided by the applicant and arranging an interview to select eligible participants.

4. Admission application

The coordinators have to help the qualified participants with the application procedures: preparing application forms and supporting documents, sending the application forms and documents to those universities, coordinating with the partner universities' coordinators, providing additional information about the applicants, being notified of the admission results from host universities, and informing the students of the results.

5. Assistance during studying abroad

Moreover, the coordinators have to take care of those exchange students who encounter problems while abroad and organize a certificate ceremony.

From 2006 – 2008, there are totally 220 students participating in the student exchange program and there has been no research conducted to measure the students' satisfaction with the student exchange program before. Therefore, the researcher

decided to do a study on this topic, focusing on the definition of “customer satisfaction” given below.

2.2 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND RELATED CONCEPTS

2.2.1 The Definitions of Customer Satisfaction

The concepts of customer satisfaction have been studied for decades and there have been many scholars attempting to give the meanings of customer satisfaction. The following definitions are the prominent ones in this field of study.

Customer satisfaction is a function of performance relative to the customer’s expectations. When a lot has been promised and more is being delivered, this will always create satisfied customers (Asian Productivity Organization, 2000).

According to Kolter and Keller (2007), customer satisfaction is a customer’s feelings of pleasure or discontent deriving from comparing a product’s perceived performance in relation to his or her expectations. The customer will be satisfied, if the performance meets his or her expectations; if it surpasses expectations, the customer will be greatly delighted. On the other hand, if the service or products fail to fulfill the customer’s expectation, he or she will be dissatisfied (p. 66).

Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (2003) gave a similar definition in their book, *How to Measure Customer Satisfaction*, that “Customer satisfaction is a measure of how your organization’s ‘total product’ performs in relation to a set of customer requirements” (p. 7).

In this study, ‘customer satisfaction’ refers to the feeling of Thammasat students participating in the Student Exchange Program, either positive or negative, resulting from comparing their expectations with the perceived performance of the Student Exchange Program received from the Office of International Affairs, Thammasat University.

2.2.2 Satisfaction in Business Service VS Satisfaction in Public Service

Although the theories of “customer satisfaction” have been widely studied for decades, 80% of those research studies have been conducted in a marketing business discipline. Therefore, most definitions given on ‘customer satisfaction’ are from the sense of marketing research. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that private sector service differs from public service. (Anyamanee Tabtimsri, 2005, p.11)

According to Longman (2005), public service is defined as a service provided to people because it will help them, and not for profit (p.1324). The definition of ‘public service’ in the online encyclopedia ‘Wikipedia’ stated that public services is a term usually used to mean services provided by a government to its citizens, either directly (through the public sector) or by financing private provision of services. The term is associated with a social consensus (usually expressed through democratic elections) that certain services should be available to all, regardless of income. Even where public services are neither publicly provided nor publicly financed, for social and political reasons they are usually subject to regulation going beyond that applying to most economic sectors.

The private sector focuses on creating customer satisfaction for repurchase; on the contrary, the public service is not conditioned by profit motive. Not driven by fiercely competitive business world, public service offers limited options for service because there is no alternative available to customers. Thus, the public service context must be significantly taken into consideration. (Anyamanee Tabtimsri, 2005, p.12)

2.2.3 The Key Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction

According to Anek Suwanbundit and Passagorn Adulpattanakit (2005), the key factors contributing to customer satisfaction include:

1. Quality of service

Service providers are supposed to attentively and sincerely give service which matches their customers' needs.

2. Service cost

The service price ought to be reasonable since customer satisfaction and willingness to pay also results from comparing perceived quality of service with its cost. However, the concept of fair price varies from person to person, depending on customers' affordability and attitudes towards prices.

3. Location and facilities

The location should be appropriate and easy to access. The building should possess enough space and be equipped with necessary facilities.

4. Service provider

The service provider comprising contact personnel, management, and related staff must be aware of their own responsibilities in creating customer satisfaction. The management should set a customer-oriented policy to respond to customers' needs at a very high level. Similarly, contact personnel and related staff have to perform good service behaviors by providing service to their customer with willingness, care, and service mind.

5. Service management system

Efficient service management system leads to accurate, speedy, high quality service such as applying IT to online accommodation booking, educational consulting via e-mail, and e-commerce.

6. Public relations

The service provider should distribute positive information or advantages of products and/or service through various kinds of media. They also have to create and maintain their good image.

7. Environment /atmosphere

A good environment can increase customers' satisfaction. The service provider should care about cleanness, temperature, light, and decoration.

Moreover, Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990) identified the vital criteria for service quality evaluation, i.e. the ten attributes of service quality leading to customer's service satisfaction as follows:

1. **Access** - Approachability and ease of contact including service hours, location and all service procedures for facilitating customer service
2. **Communication** - Ability to keep customers informed in language they can understand and listen to their opinions, suggestions and complaints
3. **Competence** - Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service
4. **Courtesy** - Politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of staff
5. **Creditability** - Trustworthiness, believability, honesty of staff and organizations
6. **Reliability** – Ability to dependably and accurately perform the promised service
7. **Responsiveness** – Willingness to help and provide service promptly when needed
8. **Security** – Service without danger, risk, or any uncertainty
9. **Tangibles** – Appearance of personnel, equipment, communication tools, and corporal facilities
10. **Understanding** – Attempting to know customers' needs (p. 20-22)

At present, the performance and service resources of OIA has been in line with many attributes of the ten attributes of service quality. However, some attributes (e.g. access, creditability, and competence) have not been completed yet.

Concerning the location and information access, OIA is located at the Dome Building, Thammasat Tha Prachan Campus. Thus, it is convenient for students in international programs who are still studying at Tha Prachan Campus to visit but the students in Thai program who study at Rangsit Campus may find it difficult to contact with the coordinators in person. To ease this problem, OIA now has a plan to set up a coordinating center at Rangsit in order that students can contact them more easily. Students can contact the coordinators via telephone or in person in office hours and they can ask them for information and advice anytime through email. Besides, students can access the information relating the students exchange program anywhere on the website: <http://interaffairs.tu.ac.th>.

About tangible facilities, the office is equipped with necessary office equipment and most of them are in good condition and clean. However, the office space is quite small and there is no enough waiting area.

As discussing with some students who have used service at OIA, the researcher found that most of them agreed that the coordinators were friendly and treated them with courtesy and respect. The coordinators were competent: they had enough skill and knowledge to provide service. They usually gave accurate information and useful advice to the students. The staff usually made sure that the given information was accuracy and when they were not certain they consulted with senior officials. However, the students reported they were still not satisfied with the information relating partner universities the coordinators gave them.

In an emergency, the coordinators were prompt and willing to help them handle problems. In addition, the coordinators seemed to listen to the students' opinions, suggestions or complaints and they also tried to understand what the students said or needed. All the students reported showed that the coordinators' performance is in line with "communication", "competence", "courtesy", "reliability", "responsiveness", "security", and "understanding", though there are some aspects of their performance needed to be improved.

The same group of 15 students stated that they were not satisfied with the interviews as the main selection process because they felt that it was subjective and each student was asked different questions in different level of difficulty. This shows that the students are still not confident in the credibility of OIA.

In the next part, the researcher reviewed the literature regarding the measurement of customer satisfaction to found the suitable measurement tool to measure the students' satisfaction in this study

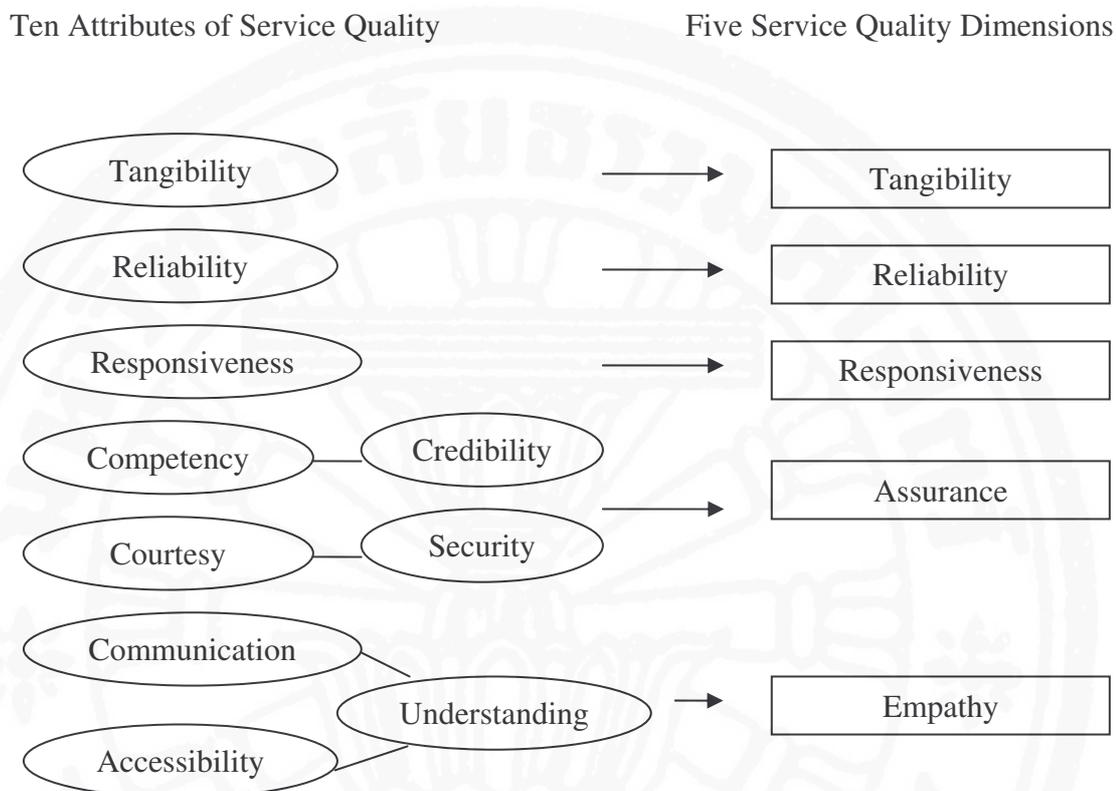
2.2.4 Measurement of Customer Satisfaction

To measure customer satisfaction, several models and tools have been introduced for this purpose. For example, the Common Measurement Tool (CMT) was invented by a group of Canadian researchers. It was first released in 1998 as an easy-to-use client satisfaction survey instrument to understand client expectations, assess levels of satisfaction, and identify priorities for improvement. Researchers who choose to employ CMT to their survey can select the questions that meet the needs of their organization. The CMT assists in this process by identifying a set of "core" questions that measure the key drivers of satisfaction, namely timeliness, knowledge or competence, fairness, courtesy/comfort, and outcome. (Anyamanee Tabtimsri, 2005, p.11)

Another instrument for measuring customers' perceptions of service quality is SERVQUAL model invented by Parasuraman et al. They modified the original ten attributes of service quality as proposed by the same group of researchers in 1985 into five service quality dimensions by correlation analysis. The five service quality dimensions which this model proposes are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. (เกษมชาติ หวังกิจจามร, 2002, น. 19-20)

The following diagram illustrates the ten attributes of service quality and the five service quality dimension to demonstrate their connection.

Diagram 1. Ten Attributes of Service Quality vs. Five Service Quality Dimensions (Anyamanee Tabtimsri, 2005, p.10)



From studying the concepts of customer satisfaction and related concepts, there were many scholars who had studied about the key factors affecting customer satisfaction both in the business sector and the public sector. These key factors are very important in providing service because when a service provider provides service, following the attributes of service quality or these key factors, the service user would be more likely to be satisfied. Therefore, when conducting a survey on customer satisfaction, a researcher has to investigate whether the service is supplied with all these attributes.

In this study, a survey on customer satisfaction was conducted; thus, the researcher created a questionnaire to investigate whether the Office of International Affairs provided the service regarding student exchange program, following the attributes of service quality or the key factors.

The researcher created a questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL model because of its reliability and popularity. Moreover, the nature of service regarding the student exchange program of OIA accorded with the five service quality dimensions; “reliability”, “responsiveness”, “assurance”, and “empathy” were needed to give satisfactory service. However, “tangibility” was excluded since the researcher realized the limitation of its location and facilities. The Office of International Affairs is an office under the umbrella of Thammasat University which is a governmental organization; therefore, a plan to improve its location and facilities mainly depends on the policy of the university and budget derived from the government. Moreover, this study primarily focused on product, service, and staff. Therefore, the questionnaire was invented to measure “reliability”, “responsiveness”, “assurance”, and “empathy” as below:

1. *Reliability* includes the students’ satisfaction in the reputation of the partner universities, the certainty that the coordinators can properly handle their application form and the information given to them is accurate.
2. *Responsiveness* mainly involves prompt action on every stage of the process: public relations system, the application procedure for the student exchange program, participant selection process, the application procedure for admission to a host university, and the assistance while studying abroad.
3. *Assurance* involves the timely, accurate and understandable information the students get, the credibility and reliability of the participant selection process, the coordinators’ ample knowledge, capability to provide accurate, clear, and understandable information, and ability to deal problems, and the coordinators’ manner, friendliness, and punctuality.
4. *Empathy* involves accessibility, communication, and understanding. The students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of

communication channels, the convenience of accessing information sources, the speed of information distribution, the ability to provide the students information in the language they understand and listen to their opinions, comments, and suggestions, and the attempt to know what the students want.

2.3 PREVIOUS SIMILAR STUDIES

This section will present some previous similar studies.

Chidchanok Udomsat (2006) conducted a study named “Client Satisfaction with Overseas Education Consulting Service: A Case Study of Mentor International”. The objectives of the study were to investigate client satisfaction towards Mentor International in terms of their products, service and administration, and service staff, to explore areas of improvement, and to find out the clients’ expectations. The samples were 204 clients who went to study abroad in the UK via the consultant service of Mentor International in the 2004-2005 academic year; however, only 38 completed questionnaires were returned. The findings showed that clients’ satisfaction towards Mentor International’s products and service & administration were at a “satisfied level” while the satisfaction towards service staff was at a “very satisfied level”. Moreover, the researcher also learned from the third part of the questionnaire that some clients needed more variety of represented institutes and some new products or services such as an overseas summer camp or university tour. On the section of service and administration, the participants required a more speedy and efficient application process, more practical advice on studying and living in the UK, and more space for parking. They also suggested a pre-meeting session for students who would go to the same universities. Regarding the service staff, the respondents commented that when the counselor who took care of them was away, other staff were not able to handle their case and that they experienced slow return calls.

Another one was studied by Thanakom Yospolsakul (2004) entitled “A Survey of Learners’ Satisfaction with the Thai Language Course at Berlitz”. The study aimed at finding out the level of learners’ satisfaction in five areas: instructor, course

contents and instructional materials, administration, costs and fee, and overall satisfaction. The samples were 41 foreign learners. The results revealed that the instructors were rated at a “very high” level. The course content, learning materials, administration, and overall satisfaction were at a “high” level, and the costs and fees was at a moderate level. Concerning mean scores, the punctuality of instructions gained the highest while the tuition fee got the lowest. Furthermore, the participants also gave some suggestions and comments; for example, the instruction pace should be adjusted to fit with the learners’ proficiency level and more business topics should be added in the course content. The learners also suggested that the staff improve their manner and that the fees be reduced.

Similar to the two studies above, this study was conducted to measure the degree of service users’ satisfaction; therefore, the researcher used these studies as a guide for reviewing the concepts of customers’ satisfaction and related concepts. Furthermore, the researcher applied the same approach used in “Client Satisfaction with Overseas Education Consulting Service: A Case Study of Mentor International” which was emailing to distribute the questionnaire. The researcher considered emailing the most suitable approach for this study, as some of the samples had already graduated and it was really difficult to meet them in person. Also, the Likert 5-point scale questionnaire was used as a tool to measure the level of service users’ satisfaction, as did the previous similar studies.