



The Factors Affecting Decisions of Undergraduate Students on Taking Extra English Courses in Tutorial Schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai *

*Tippayapud Chaidaechea*¹

*Dutsadee Roongrattanakool*²

Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to determine eight factors that affect the decision making of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai, namely Product Elements, Price, Place, Promotion, Process, People, Physical Environment, and Productivity and Quality; and 2) to investigate the levels of students' decisions on each factor according to the students' years of study. 385 students taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai during the second semester of the academic year 2014 were drawn to be the sample of the study using accidental sampling. The research instrument, a questionnaire based on Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) model of services marketing and adapted from Yangyuen's questionnaire (2010), was used to collect the data which were analyzed by descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation). The results showed that all factors were very important in affecting the students' decisions on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools. It was found that People was the highest factor ($\bar{X} = 4.42$), followed by Promotion ($\bar{X} = 4.30$), Product Elements ($\bar{X} = 4.25$), Productivity and Quality ($\bar{X} = 4.25$), Place ($\bar{X} = 4.22$), Process ($\bar{X} = 4.08$), Physical Environment ($\bar{X} = 4.07$) and Price ($\bar{X} = 3.92$). This study also revealed that People was the highest factor for the students in the first ($\bar{X} = 4.57$) and second ($\bar{X} = 4.59$) year levels while Product Elements was the highest factor for those in the third and fourth year or higher levels ($\bar{X} = 4.59$). In contrast, Price was considered the lowest factor for the students in all year levels: first, second, third and fourth or higher with the mean score of 3.86, 3.92, and 3.89 respectively. However, these mean scores were at a high level.

Keywords: factors based on Lovelock and Wirtz's model of services marketing, extra English courses, tutorial schools, undergraduate students

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¹ Student in Master of Arts Degree in English Program, Naresuan University, 2015, E-mail: vannisar@hotmail.com

² Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities, English Department, Naresuan University



Introduction

English is the language of commerce, technical innovation, scientific research, and the global community in general. As a result, proficiency in English has become a pre-requisite in the global workforce, in which English language is one of the foreign languages necessary for economy communication, and the demand for English proficiency in Thailand is increasing, especially within the government workforce since they seek employees with a good command of the language to attract more foreign investors for economic development. With the opening of AEC in 2015, it can be assumed that the number of foreign workers will drastically increase. To be able to compete and excel in the foreseeable competition in the ASEAN workforce, Thai students must be proficient in English communication and have technical knowledge in various fields. However, it is considered that English language education seems to be rather deficient, many Thai students feel it is necessary to take extra language classes in tutorial schools. According to Sarnsonthed (2014), there were 2,342 tutorial schools in Thailand in 2013 (Updated 5 November 2014), which is double the number in 2009. This demonstrates the extraordinary growth rate in the number of tutorial schools in Thailand, presumably to meet the demand. As stated in Napompech (2011), the administrators of tutorial schools usually focus on students' satisfaction as customers. She also shows that the factors influencing students in choosing tutorial schools include the expertise of the instructors, the provision of learning materials, the variety of courses on offer, free consultation, the instructors attention to the wellbeing of the students, such as replying to questions outside of the classroom, a comfortable classroom with air conditioning, convenient and safe entrances and exits, convenience to transportation (bus, train, taxi), provision of car parking facilities, and a policy of guaranteeing success (money back guarantee in case of failure). The above factors are consistent with the marketing mix proposed by some researchers. In 1960, an American Professor of Marketing, Jerome McCarthy (1960), proposed the four P's mix theory. This theory proposed four marketing mix factors; Price, Place, Product and Promotion. The marketing mix can be applied in various forms to meet the changing needs of a target group. In 1981, Booms and Bitner suggested an extended marketing mix or services marketing mix. This services marketing mix is called the 7 P's model, but is better referred to as the Services Marketing Mix. This model is an extension of McCarthy's original 4 P's marketing mix, and is more relevant and applicable to service companies and knowledge intensive environments, not only product marketing. The Services Marketing

Mix thus subsumes the traditional 4 P's plus Process, People and Physical Evidence (Booms and Bitner, 1981). In 2007, Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) added Productivity and Quality, creating the 8 Ps services marketing. The factors comprising the 8 Ps of services marketing are Price, Place, Product Elements, Promotion, Process, People, Physical Environment, and Productivity and Quality which is the latest in the series of marketing models. Nevertheless, there has not been previous research conducted on the marketing factors outlined by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), the 8 Ps of services marketing, particularly in their applicability to undergraduate students who will compete in the ASEAN workforce. The popularity of attending tutorial schools by undergraduate students in Chiang Mai is obvious in the different advertising strategies undertaken by tutorial school owners (Insightenglish, 2014; Tutoring and Education School-Thailand, 2014). Furthermore, Chiang Mai holds the record of the highest number of tutorial schools (59 tutorial schools) in northern Thailand (Thaipublica, 2013). Many university students have decided to take extra English courses at tutorial schools (Insightenglish, 2014; Tutoring and Education School-Thailand, 2014), while their universities provide English classes for students. Therefore, the researcher investigates what influences university students to take extra English courses at tutorial schools, which leads to the problem that the researcher needs to find out about factors affecting the decisions of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools.

Research Objectives

Many university students have decided to take extra English courses at tutorial schools (Insightenglish, 2014; Tutoring and Education School-Thailand, 2014), while their universities provide English classes for them. It is interesting to know what influences university students to take extra English courses in tutorial schools. This study therefore was conducted for the following purposes:

1. To investigate the factors affecting the decisions of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai. The factors were based on Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) model of services marketing which comprises the marketing elements: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Process, People, Physical Environment, and Productivity and Quality.
2. To investigate the level of importance of each factor according to the year levels of the undergraduate students taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai.



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework inspired by McCarthy (1960) proposed the services marketing mix, which included 4Ps (Product, Place, Price, Promotion). Later, Booms and Bitner (1981) added 3Ps (People, Process, Physical evidence) that expands the number of controllable variables from the four in the original services marketing mix to seven. In 2007, Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) added Productivity and Quality, creating the 8 Ps of services marketing. As these 8 factors are relevant to those that can affect students on taking extra courses, they are used to explore the undergraduate students' decision making on taking extra English courses at tutorial schools. Lovelock and Wirtz's model of services marketing (2007, pp. 22-23) is then applied and defined according to how they are used in this study as follows:

- **Product Elements** refers to the curriculum. This curriculum includes improving academic results, helping learners gain confidence in taking exams, offering a variety of English language courses, providing an appropriate duration of the course, and providing adequate learning materials and facilities.

- **Price** refers to the mode of payment whether installment or full payment. It also means the reasonable price and detailed disclosure of the costs for each course.

- **Place** is the convenient and accessible location of the tutorial schools; physical proximity to usual places such as home and regular school. It also includes the accessibility of enrollment procedures, by remote enrollment on the Internet or physical presence at the school for enrollment.

- **Promotion** refers to the advertising strategies of tutorial schools such as leaflets, free textbooks, English Camps, free trial, fee discounts.

- **Process** refers to the inquiry system, systematized admission service, provision of advance schedules, pre-test before studying, and post-test after studying.

- **People** refers to the quality of teachers and staff. It also includes the influence of friends and parents.

- **Physical Environment** refers to the physical appearance of the tutorial schools. This includes convenient parking, comfortable waiting areas, reading room, internet services, air conditioned rooms, properly ventilated rooms and snack rooms.

- **Productivity and Quality** refers to the fame and credibility of the tutorial schools based on the number of successful students, the number of school branches, and their accreditation from the Ministry of Education.

Research Methodology

Research Instrument

To identify the factors affecting the decisions of the students, a questionnaire was developed based on Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) model of services marketing and adapted from Yangyuen's questionnaire (2010).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was sent to 385 undergraduate students who were taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai during the second semester of the academic year 2014.

Data Analysis

After the questionnaires were collected, the raw data were put into the statistical program for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) were used for describing the data. The criteria for the rating scale were divided into five levels of importance based on Srisa-ard (2010) as shown below:

| Level of Importance | Value |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Very low | 1.00 - 1.50 |
| Low | 1.51 - 2.50 |
| Moderate | 2.51 - 3.50 |
| High | 3.51 - 4.50 |
| Very high | 4.51 - 5.00 |

Research Conclusion and Discussion

In this section, the results of the study were discussed as follows:

Conclusion and Discussion of finding one

Overall, the results of the study revealed that all eight factors were at a high level of importance in affecting the decisions of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in



Muang District, Chiang Mai. People factor ($\bar{X} = 4.42$) was found to be highly related to their decisions, and the sub-factor “instructors’ profiles” got the highest mean score of 4.77. These findings were consistent with the studies of Panthong (2004), Borommarit (2005), Duangjan (2006), Manorueang (2008), Nilket (2008), Senapa (2008), Viranuwat (2010), and Charoenchaiwong (2011) because they also found that (People) was the most influential factor motivating the respondents to take extra English courses in tutorial schools. According to Ramsden, et al. (1995), good teacher is a very crucial factor in teaching and learning process, and consequently can affect the decision making of students as well as their successfulness. This may explain why the respondents ranked the “instructors’ profiles” the highest. On the contrary, the result indicating that the factor Price got the lowest mean score of 3.58 was similar to the studies of Borommarit (2005), Manorueang (2008), Charoenchaiwong (2011), and Yangyuen (2010) as Price was also found to be the lowest influential factor in their studies. Although the factor (Price) contained lower mean score than the factor People, the mean score of Price was at a high level, which means that Price still affected the decisions of the students. These results can lead to recognition of the importance of teachers in both tutorial schools and universities. Also the findings of the study can be used as information for teacher and curriculum development as well as price consideration by existing language schools and tutorial schools.

Conclusion and Discussion of finding two

The findings revealed that the first and second year students agreed that “friends and parents”, a sub-factor from People, had the highest influence ($\bar{X} = 4.77$) on their decision making on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai. This was consistent with the research of Tahaineh (2013). Her study revealed that 81.8% of the undergraduate university students were encouraged by their parents to take English class exceeding the regular school curriculum. According to Erikson (1999), parents require a decisive say in the career choice of their teenage children; consequently, the teenagers will acquiesce to internal wishes effectively forcing him to foreclose on true self-discovery. Therefore, the reason that the first and second year students highly agreed with the sub-factor People “friends and parents” may be that the first and second year students, probably 18 or 19 years old, are in the transition period between adolescent and early adulthood, so the parents’ role is an important factor influencing their decision making. As for friends, Kirk (2000) states that friends significantly influence all facets of adolescents’ lives, including academic achievement. This is similar



to the results obtained from the present study that friends play an important role on students' decisions. Several students who were from the same major reflected that they decided to take the same extra class as their friends.

The findings showed that the most important factor for the third and fourth year students was "Product Elements" which contained sub-factor "offering a variety of English language courses" with the highest mean score. This was consistent with the study by Yangyuen (2010). Her study showed that Product (general English courses which included listening, speaking, reading, and writing development, as well as specific courses such as English for Examinations and English for Business) got the highest mean score among the influential factors motivating the respondents to take extra English courses at language schools in Phatthalung. However, these findings were different from those of the first and second year students. This may be because the third and fourth year students are going to graduate and get a job or obtain higher education, which requires high proficiency of English. For higher education, there are many universities in Thailand and abroad that require the score of English tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and CU-TEP (Insightenglish, 2014; Tutoring and Education School-Thailand, 2014). According to Jyothi (2012), the reality is that the companies consider the candidate's ability or inability to speak fluently in English as one of the major selection criterion, as we have multi-cultural and multi-linguistic work force in the companies, English is the language which connects people by default. The students probably realized the importance of English, and were interested in the curriculum that focuses on the academic content and responds to their needs. They thus "ranked offering a variety of English language courses" the highest sub-factor.

In this study, the factor found as the lowest influential one for all year levels of study was Price. This finding may be explained by the reason that the students are financially supported by their parents, as a result, they consider Price the least important factor among the others. This is because it is not necessary for them to pay for the charges for their tutoring. However, Price was ranked in a high level, which means that it also highly influenced the decision making of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools.



Recommendations

The current study explored the opinions of undergraduate students on factors affecting decisions on taking extra English courses in tutorial schools in Muang District, Chiang Mai. It would be interesting to recommend the following for further studies.

1. Qualitative techniques such as in-depth interview should be used in future research so that the result could be verified more accurately since this study used only quantitative research to analyze the factors affecting decisions of undergraduate students on taking extra English courses at tutorial schools.
2. A further study should be conducted on the satisfaction of students towards tutorial schools that they have already attended.

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