

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Since modern technology was developed to serve people's lives, different alternatives and various opportunities have been widely granted throughout every corner of the world. Nowadays we seem to live in a shrinking world which provides more comfort to all of us. In the same way, the world of education has also been continuously developed to serve people's academic requirements. Nowadays, the opportunities to participate in education have been considerably increased beyond the traditional classroom setting. Advancements in computer technology and public access to the Internet have provided a venue that supports distance learning. Many mainstream institutions of higher learning have adopted distance learning as the next logical step in educational delivery systems. Innovations in educational technology, coupled with the desire to serve increasing numbers of students and meet their diverse needs, have challenged many institutions to rethink and expand their delivery systems.

Not surprisingly, in the world of distance learning, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is considered one of the powerful tools driving us toward a knowledge-based society. Development of technology has changed the means of communication and made it more accessible and available, and its application is increasingly widespread throughout the country in every field, especially training and education.

In distance learning, communication technology really plays a significant role in improving and enhancing academic achievement. Multimedia communication channels have the ability to control and manage a wide variety of media and learning materials, film, videos, animations, slides, audio, and printed materials. Their applications have empowered the world of learning endlessly. According to Criswell (cited in Gros, 2001), computer-based instruction has assisted students in raising their achievement test scores by 10 to 18 percentage points when compared with conventional instruction. With the power of multimedia, the use of computer

technology in education increases learners' motivation, and students can progress at their own pace. As a result, it assists slow learners in problem solving. Moreover, the world of Internet provides unlimited learning potential (Gros, 2001, p. 440).

However, there are many terms that are similar to distance learning (Clark, 2004). These include online learning, e-learning, computer-based learning, blended learning, learning objects, learning resources, distributed learning, interactive learning materials, computer-mediated learning, computer-mediated communication, and web-based training. All these terms imply that the learners can improve their skills at a distance, with or without a tutor or an instructor. The learners usually use a computer or other modern communication channels to access the learning materials, or interact with the tutor or instructor. In accordance with Clark's definition (2004), Wikipedia defines distance learning as an approach to facilitate and enhance learning, through both computer and communications technology (Wikipedia, 2007). Such devices can include: personal computers, CD-ROMS, televisions, PDAs, MP3 players, telephones, and mobile phones.

“Online learning is the new buzzword in education today. It's become shorthand for what is actually part of a bigger picture—distance learning,” (Gilbert, 2001, p. xv). So distance education is such an exciting new area of education which seems to have something to offer to almost everyone. Based on this fact, there are many private and public, non-profit and for-profit institutes offering courses and degree programs through distance education. Therefore, many academic institutions are currently and continuously adopting distance learning or e-learning and any modern communications channels in their business because this innovative way of learning is one form of educational and training systems that allows flexibility and access from anywhere and at anytime.

JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd. is also a language institute using this new style of learning in teaching English, an international language used worldwide. With over 5 years experience in the development and use of multimedia language courses in business and education, JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd. was a language advisor that provides language assessments, and distance and blending learning solutions plus a personal tutor to its language learners or its customers.

However, JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd. has had a decrease in business due to slowing demand. The current customers are due to the monopolization of some teaching services and styles. Therefore, it is very important for JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd. to find out the degree of learners' satisfaction because their satisfaction is important. Satisfied customers usually return and buy more; they tell other people about their experiences; they may well pay a premium for the privilege of doing business with a supplier they trust. It is less expensive and more rewarding to do what it takes to satisfy and retrain current customers than to acquire new ones. Customer base is a firm's most valuable asset and well deserves cultivating to ensure future growth.

A company which focuses on a customer oriented policy should make a continuous survey for its customer satisfaction since direct contact with customers will help indicate what he/she is doing right or where he/she is going wrong with the customers. This will not only help the company know the degree of customers' satisfaction with it, but also help to ascertain the influential factors that contribute to the customers' satisfaction and eventually, the problem they have been facing as well as their suggestions for improvement.

According to Boettcher (1999), students and learners are becoming a discerning group of consumers of education. Students or learners have come to expect efficient learning resources and access to support for all their educational needs. Given the adaptation of new technologies in educational settings, student satisfaction in online courses is likely to determine whether the student takes additional courses in this format. Distance education requires the institutions to review the quality and uniqueness of their distance learning offerings. For the educational institution, being able to meet the requirements and expectations of the student and knowing what the student wants from the course is fundamental in providing a high quality course.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Customer satisfaction is a major concern of JPM Multimedia Co, Ltd. To compete with other language institutes and maintain the company's position in the market, this satisfaction survey was conducted. The survey measured learners'

satisfaction toward distance English learning through multimedia teaching materials plus a personal tutor as well as to study learners' needs and expectations. Consequently, the learners' satisfaction survey aims to answer the following questions:

Main question

- Are the learners satisfied with the distance English learning course provided by JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd.?

Sub-questions

1. To what degree are the learners satisfied with the distance English learning course?
2. What demographic factors contribute to their satisfaction with the distance English learning course?
3. What are learners' problems throughout the course?
4. What are learners' suggestions for further improvement of the course?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Objectives of this survey are as follows:

Main objective:

- To evaluate learners' satisfaction with JPM Multimedia's Distance English learning course.

Sub-Objectives:

1. To find out the degree of learners' satisfaction with 1) the course content, 2) the textbooks and supplementary teaching materials, 3) the personal tutor, 4) the evaluation and testing, 5) the distance teaching approach, and 6) the application of knowledge.
2. To identify the relationships between the learners' demographic factors and their satisfaction with the course.
3. To investigate the problems that the learners face when learning English through distance learning approach.

4. To seek the learners' suggestions on how to improve JPM's distance English learning course.

1.4 VARIABLES AND DEFINITIONS

This research studied the concept of distance learning as well as the concept of satisfaction. Besides, the research was conducted in order to find relationships among a set of independent variables towards the dependent variable which are presented below.

1.4.1 Variables

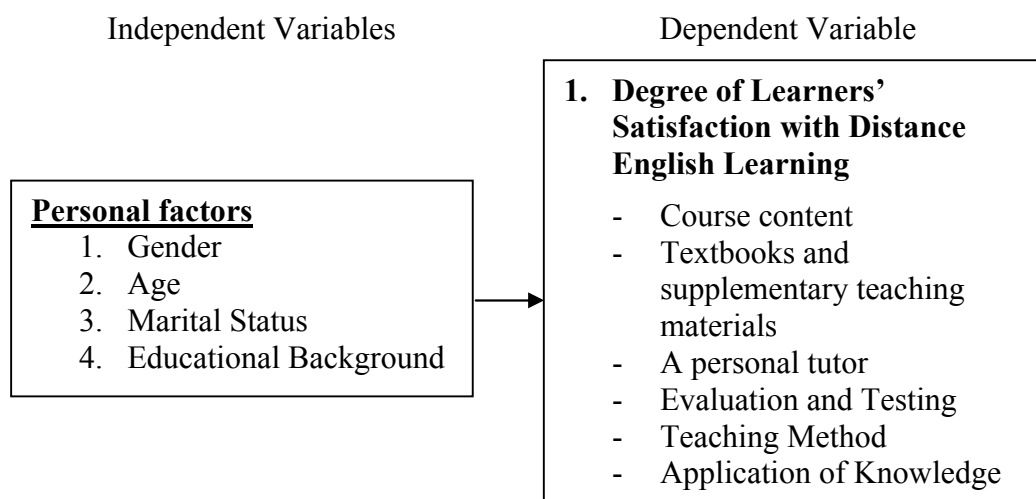


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the relationship between independent and dependent variables

1.4.2 Definitions

In order to understand the terms used in this survey, the researcher provided the definitions of terms as follows:

Satisfaction with Distance English Learning

A state of mind in which learners' needs, wants, and expectations throughout distance English learning through computers, telephones, mobile phones, CD-ROMs,

FAX machines, e-mails, the Internet, printed materials, and a personal instructor provided by JPM Multimedia, have been met or exceeded.

Consequently, satisfaction with distance English learning refers to the attitude or feelings toward the following components of satisfaction:

- Satisfaction with the course content which can be evaluated by the following indicators:
 - Usefulness of the course content
 - Language improvement gained from the content after taking the course.
 - Interest of the course content
 - Appropriateness of the course content.
 - Satisfaction with the content in the course.
- Satisfaction with the textbooks and supplementary teaching materials which can be evaluated by the following indicators:
 - The content in the textbooks and supplementary teaching materials matches the course objectives.
 - Appropriateness of textbooks.
 - Practicability and appropriateness of the CD-ROMs.
 - Appropriateness of other supplementary teaching materials.
- Satisfaction with the personal tutor which can be evaluated by the following indicators:
 - Preparation before teaching.
 - Competence in the subject matter.
 - Covered topics listed in the assignments.
 - Opportunity provision in English practicing to learners.
 - Ability to organize language activities to promote the learner's learning and thinking.
 - Good relationship with the learner.
 - Ability to explain difficult class material and assignments clearly.
 - Ability to provide meaningful and timely feedback.
 - Calling to teach on time.

- Satisfaction with the evaluation and testing which can be evaluated by the following indicators:
 - Appropriateness of the evaluation and testing methods.
 - Evaluations of learners' performance have been done in class at a time.
- Satisfaction with the distance teaching approach which can be evaluated by the following indicators:
 - Whether the knowledge gained from the course meets the learners' needs.
 - Capacity to apply knowledge to his/her work/career/routine life.
 - Academic benefits for further studies.
 - Advantages for career advancement.
- Satisfaction with application of knowledge which can be measured by the following indicators:
 - A flexible time of learning.
 - A flexible place of learning.
 - Convenience to ask for tutor's advice during office and post-office hours.
 - Relaxation in talking in English when compared to face-to-face communication.
 - Comprehension in learning when compared to face-to-face learning.

These mentioned components can be measured by using the 5-point Likert scale: 1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Undecided 4) Disagree 5) Strongly Disagree.

Learners

Male and female learners who are government officials working nationwide at Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO) in the Department of Local Administration of Thailand (DLA), and enrolled in Distance English course between 2006 and 2007 with JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd.

1.4.3 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this survey are as follows:

There is a relationship between learners' demographics and the degree of satisfaction with the distance English learning course.

- Hypothesis 1: Female learners are more satisfied with distance English learning than male learners.
- Hypothesis 2: Older learners are more satisfied with distance English learning than younger learners.
- Hypothesis 3: Married learners are more satisfied with distance English learning than single learners.
- Hypothesis 4: Learners with higher education are more satisfied with English learning than learners with lower education.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The customer satisfaction survey focuses on only the learners who have been working at Sub-district Administrative Organizations in the Department of Local Administration, and who have been studying English with the JPM Multimedia Co, Ltd. from January 2006 until present. The survey aims to measure the level of learners' satisfaction, and their suggestions for further course improvement.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This survey is necessary to measure and track learner's satisfaction. Developing a learner satisfaction program is not just about carrying out a survey. The survey helps provide the findings that show where immediate attention is required. As well, very often, major long lasting improvements need a fundamental transformation in the company, probably involving training of the staff or company's development. The result should be at least financially beneficial with less customer churn, higher market shares, premium prices, stronger reputation, including more effective services. Consequently, the result of this study can be used to further improve the level of learners' satisfaction with distance English learning courses provided by JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd or to find out some ways to maintain it. Other benefits of this survey are as follows:

- The results of this survey will be presented to the Executive Director of JPM Multimedia so that the organization will realize the causes of learners' dissatisfaction and to find some ways to satisfy the learners.
- The personal tutors can use the results to improve their teaching styles.
- The results of the survey can be used as a guideline for those who plan to establish a distance language learning course.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The survey of learners' satisfaction is divided into five chapters. Chapter One includes the background of JPM Multimedia Co., Ltd. and statement of the problem, which led to the objectives, the scope of the study, the definitions of terms, and the significance of the study, respectively. Chapter Two is designed to review the related literature concerning customer satisfaction and the key indicators contributing to the satisfaction, as well as distance learning. Chapter Three provides a descriptive picture of procedures concerning subjects, materials, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings of the survey. Chapter Five includes a summary of the survey, its findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

In the appendix, the questionnaire, which was used for data collection from the sample group, is also included.