

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In recent years, as the world in its globalization era is more interconnected, English has been being served as a lingua franca among speakers for whom no other language is mutually known. In Thailand, English has been established as a compulsory subject in school for decades. Evidently, most Thai people usually prioritize English as the first foreign language one should master. Furthermore, statistics from several legitimate student exchange programs in Thailand show that once going abroad is accessible, the students, as well as their parents, will positively mark English speaking countries as their first priority. Thus, it is interesting to find out if exchange students to English speaking and non-English speaking countries have different levels of satisfaction from their experience.

AFS, formerly called American Field Service, is an international, voluntary, non-government, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge and understanding to create a more just and peaceful world. A major focus of AFS is “intercultural learning” -- a process that uses a well-planned immersion in another culture as a tool to move people mentally, emotionally, and physically to a deeper awareness of their own culture’s norms, behaviors, relationships, and visions. AFS encouraged respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or social status (Broch & Amdam 1997).

In 1962, AFS Intercultural Programs Thailand was established by the Thai Cabinet under the Thai Ministry of Education. AFS Thailand was initially supported by The United States Information Service (USIS) which granted scholarships for Thai high school students to the United States of America on a year program. Later in 1983, AFS Thailand started to send Thai students on a one year exchange program to New Zealand and Australia (<http://www.afsthailand.org>). At present, AFS Thailand regularly sends approximately 750 Thai high school students, aged between 15-18, to more than 40 AFS hosting partners and hosts students from almost 30 AFS sending

partners. The latter area of AFS Thailand as a hosting country is beyond the scope of this study, and is consequently not being discussed here. The number of students from AFS Thailand to each hosting partner from 1997-2006 is shown in the following table.

Table 1: AFS Participant Numbers from 1997-2006

Year Country	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
English Speaking Countries	201	207	203	185	198	293	342	325	337	337	2,628
Non-English Speaking Countries	197	207	<u>207</u>	<u>205</u>	<u>270</u>	273	324	323	301	<u>383</u>	2,690
Total	398	414	410	390	468	566	666	648	638	720	5,318

From AFS Intercultural Programs Thailand. (2007). Report on sending participants. *Warehouse on AFS Thailand*. Retrieved 17 August 2007 from AFS Thailand database.

As shown in the table, about half of the total participants were regularly placed in English speaking countries: Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and USA. This is, however, unable to comply with the high demand of the participants. From the record of the AFS recruitment team, about 90% of the applicants usually choose English speaking countries as their first priority of preferred destinations. According to AFS network operation, the number of students sent depends on the host country's allotment. As a result, not all participants can be allotted the country they have selected during the selection process. Nonetheless, the students can still join the program in other countries they stated as their second and third priorities. AFS Thailand's selection process, which is constantly done one year prior to the participants' departure to their host countries, is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

According to the recruitment team, host countries are categorized into two major groups: English speaking, or high demanding destinations, and non-English speaking, or less demanding destinations. Noticeably, after the selection announcement, the team has to deal with similar questions from parents about the

program achievement equity or program satisfaction between the students whose sojourns were in the high demanding countries and those in the less demanding category.

In order to give the best service to its clientele at the same time as maintaining their loyalty, AFS Thailand needs to focus on the quality and effectiveness of the program provided. The results of the study will impart useful information to AFS Thailand Management Team, who will develop the operational plan to provide the best service for its participants, the ultimate strategic goal. Moreover, a proper promoting method of the non-English speaking or less demanding country destinations can be designed and implemented. Meanwhile, the future AFS participants who will be allocated to any of the AFS hosting countries can be assured of the same quality service as well as the equity of benefits and opportunities from participating in an AFS program.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This survey was conducted to answer the following questions:

Main question

- Is the satisfaction with the AFS exchange program during 2006-2007 of the participants placed in English speaking countries significantly different from those placed in non-English speaking countries?

Sub-Questions

1. Is the satisfaction with the AFS exchange program of the student whose residence is in Bangkok and its nearby provinces significantly different from those whose residence is in other provinces?

2. Is the satisfaction with AFS Thailand's preparatory program of the participants placed in English speaking countries significantly different from those placed in non-English speaking countries?

3. Do the participants with high, low and medium level of expectations have a significant difference in the degree of satisfaction with the program?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main objective:

- To evaluate the degree of satisfaction with the AFS exchange program between 2006-2007 of the participants placed in English-speaking countries and those placed in non-English speaking countries.

Sub-Objectives:

1. To measure the satisfaction with the AFS exchange program between 2006-2007 of the participants from Bangkok and its nearby provinces and those from other provinces.

2. To find out the difference in the satisfaction with AFS Thailand's reparatory program between the participants placed in English-speaking countries and those placed in non-English speaking countries.

3. To compare the degree of program satisfaction among the participants with high, medium, and low expectations of the program.

1.4 VARIABLES AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.4.1 Variables

Independent Variables

The independent variables of this study were hosting countries, students' residence in Thailand, and the levels of expectations. The latter variable was measured by using Likert's 5-point scale in 9 attributes: opportunities, self-confidence, adaptabilities, personal growth and maturity, open-mindedness, foreign language appreciation and ability, independence & responsibility, awareness and appreciation of home country, and awareness and appreciation of host country.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable of this study is the satisfaction of the exchange students placed in English Speaking and Non-English Speaking Countries in the

measured by Likert 5-point scale: Very high = 5, High = 4, Medium = 3, Low = 2, Very low = 1

○ **Host countries** refer to AFS partner countries where AFS Thailand regularly sends its participants to and which are classified into two categories as follows:

1. English speaking countries:

Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand and the United States

2. Non-English speaking countries:

Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Venezuela

○ **Program achievements** refer to the participants' success in getting what they want from the program in the following areas:

1. Opportunities
2. Self-confidence
3. Adaptabilities
4. Personal growth and Maturity
5. Open-mindedness
6. Foreign Language Appreciation and Ability
7. Independence & Responsibility
8. Awareness and Appreciation of Home country
9. Awareness and Appreciation of Host country

measured by Likert 5-point scale: Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1

○ **Satisfaction with AFS Exchange Program** refers to the feelings or attitudes towards the following components of satisfaction:

1. Preparation Program
2. Supports from AFS
3. Hosting Milieu
4. Program Achievements

measured by Likert's 5-point scale: Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1

1.4.3 Research Hypotheses

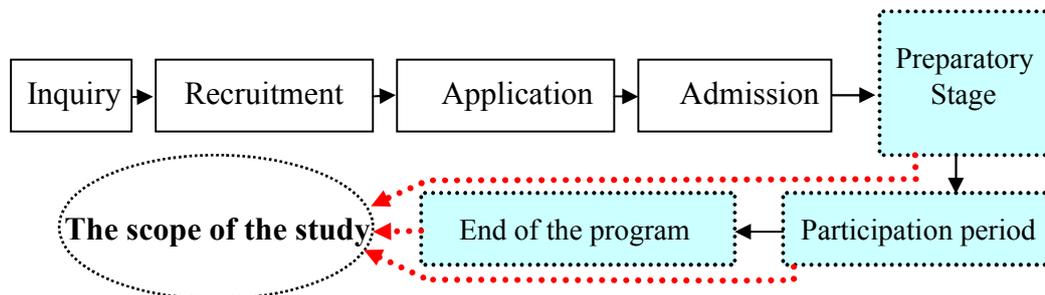
The hypotheses are established to prove the research study as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: The participants placed in *English speaking countries* are more satisfied with the AFS exchange program of 2006-2007 than those placed in *non-English speaking countries*.
- Hypothesis 2: There is a difference in the degree of satisfaction with the AFS exchange program of 2006-2007 between the participants whose residence is in *Bangkok and nearby provinces* and those whose residence is in *other provinces*.
- Hypothesis 3: The participants placed in English speaking countries are more satisfied with the AFS *preparatory program* than those placed in non-English speaking countries.
- Hypothesis 4: The participants placed in English speaking countries are more satisfied with the *support* from AFS than those placed in non-English speaking countries.
- Hypothesis 5: The participants placed in English-speaking countries are more satisfied with the *hosting milieu* than those placed in non-English speaking countries.
- Hypothesis 6: The participants placed in English speaking countries have a higher degree of program *achievements* than those placed in non-English speaking countries.
- Hypothesis 7: The participants with different levels of expectations have different degrees of *satisfaction* with the program.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research study was a survey to investigate the degree of satisfaction with the 2006-2007 AFS program of the 300 participants whose sojourns were in two different host country categories: English-speaking and non-English speaking countries, covering three consecutive phases of the operational procedure.

Figure 2 Illustration of AFS Intercultural Programs Thailand's operational procedure and the scope of the study.



The participants who were granted scholarships from private companies and organizations, so called corporate scholarships and funds, financial aid scholarships, and the US Department of State funds for Muslim students, were excluded.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As a service provider, the program evaluation to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the organization is an undoubtedly task AFS Thailand needs to focus on. The benefits of this study are as follows:

1.6.1 The degree of satisfaction with AFS intercultural year program the two groups of participants placed in different host country categories is indicated.

1.6.2 Specific areas where improvements are required can be pointed out.

1.6.3 An appropriate operation and promotion plan can be introduced for future implementation.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of satisfaction with AFS exchange program of the Thai students placed in English Speaking and non-English Speaking countries is divided into five

chapters. Chapter One consists of the background of AFS Intercultural Program Thailand, statement of the problem, the objectives, the scope of the study, the definition of terms, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two contains the review of the literature involving customer satisfaction and the key elements contributing to the satisfaction. Chapter Three describes the study methodology including subjects, materials, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five comprises the summary, the findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

The questionnaire used for data collection is presented in the appendix.