

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter was divided into 5 parts: 1) a summary of the study, 2) a summary of the findings, 3) discussions of the satisfaction with AFS exchange program of the participants placed in English speaking and non-English speaking countries, 4) conclusions, and 5) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The quality and effectiveness of the program provided is the key element contributing to successful business of the service providers. To provide the best service to the clientele, at the same time as maintaining their loyalty, the study of satisfaction with AFS exchange program of Thai students placed in English speaking and non-English speaking countries will, therefore, have a significant value. The results of the study will enable the AFS Thailand Management Team to develop a more appropriate action plan for its program improvement. Moreover, a promotion plan can be developed, proposed, and implemented in a timely manner.

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study of satisfaction with AFS exchange program of Thai students placed in English speaking and non-English speaking countries was conducted to examine the program participants' degree of satisfaction with their experience. This study also aimed to identify whether the particular factors including host country, residence in Thailand, and levels of expectations, contributed to the participants' satisfaction. In addition, suggestions for further program improvement were obtained.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials, and Procedures

The study population was 720 Thai high-school-aged students who participated in the AFS year program between 2006-2007. The quota sampling technique was utilized to select the sample units of 150 from each study category, English speaking and non-English speaking host countries. A self-administered pre-

coded questionnaire was employed to collect the data from the respondents at the AFS post-orientations and the Homecoming Party for the AFS returnees of 2006-2007 between October-November 2007.

The questionnaire was divided into 3 parts:

Part 1: General information, including the respondents' gender, host country, residential area in Thailand, levels of expectations and generic AFS background and experience.

Part 2: Satisfaction with the program at the 3 program phases: preparatory stage (the information and documentation arrangement and the orientation programs), during the program (the supports from AFS and the hosting milieu) and at the end of the program (the program achievements).

Part 3: Suggestions on how AFS Thailand could improve the current service provided, what should be included in the AFS current preparatory program and others.

The study exploited both the primary data: the responses to the questionnaires, and the secondary data: information from textbooks, journals, AFS database, and websites. The SPSS program was employed to analyze all the statistical data collected. The statistical devices including frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. All the analytical formats were demonstrated in the forms of tables.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 General Information Results

The study showed that 82% of the respondents were female and 57% lived in Bangkok and its nearby provinces. Overall, the respondents had a high expectation of the program (4.09). Ninety-three percent learned about AFS through their school and 32% applied for similar programs provided by other organizations at the same time. AFS's good reputation and visibility was rated as the most frequent reason why the respondents chose AFS program for their exchange year (92%).

5.2.2 Participants' Satisfaction Results

Research Question 1: *Is the satisfaction with the AFS exchange program between 2006-2007 of the participants placed in English speaking significantly different from those placed in non-English speaking countries?*

The study revealed that the respondents from both host country categories were satisfied with the program in all areas. Nevertheless, the non-English speaking group had a non-significantly higher degree of satisfaction than the English speaking group. Above the neutral point of satisfaction, both groups had the parallel highest satisfaction degrees (strongly satisfied) in the same aspects: program achievements and the hosting milieu. Meanwhile, the similar lowest area was the support from AFS during the program.

Research Question 2: *Is the satisfaction with the AFS exchange program of the participants whose residence is in Bangkok and its nearby provinces significantly different from those whose residence is in other provinces?*

From the study, the respondents from both classifying areas had no difference in the degree of satisfaction with the program in all aspects.

Research Question 3: *Is the satisfaction with AFS Thailand preparatory programs of the participants placed in English speaking countries significantly different from those placed in non-English speaking countries?*

The results of the study indicated that the respondents from both host country categories were satisfied with AFS Thailand preparatory programs.

Research Question 4: *Do the participants with high, medium and low level of expectations differ significantly in the degree of satisfaction with the program?*

According to the study, the respondents only had 2 levels of expectations of the program: **high** and **very high**. In this essence, the data could not be analyzed by

the proposed statistical device, the one-way ANOVA. Subsequently, the answer to this question could not be specified by this study.

5.2.3 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses of this study were 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 degree of satisfaction with the AFS exchange program of 2006-2007 between the participants whose residence is **in Bangkok and its 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 programs** 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.*

After the process of data analysis and the hypotheses test, hypotheses 1-5 were rejected. For hypotheses 1-6, the results showed no significant difference in the degree of satisfaction with the program of the participants either categorized by host

countries or by different residence areas in all program characteristics measured. For hypothesis 6, there was no significant difference in the degree of program achievements of the participants placed in different host country categories.

The results, nevertheless, showed some insignificantly higher degrees of satisfaction with the program of the participants placed in non-English speaking countries than those placed in the English speaking countries in all areas. Similarly, the participants whose residence is in other provinces also had insignificantly higher degrees of satisfaction with the program than those whose residence is Bangkok and its nearby provinces.

Attributable to the data collected, hypothesis 7 couldn't be tested by the proposed statistical device, the one-way ANOVA, as a result of the limited degrees of expectations of the program: high and very high.

5.3 DISCUSSION

This section concerns the interpretation of the findings and how they relate to the theories and the earlier research in the following areas: the respondents' general information, the respondents' satisfaction with the 3 phases of the program, and the suggestions on the AFS current services and the preparatory programs.

5.3.1 Evidently, AFS Thailand's participant records showed recurring statistics of around 15-25 % of male participants at each program cycle. Accordingly, gender was deliberately excluded from the independent variables of the study. In this study, male subjects were almost outnumbered by female subjects by a factor of 5.

The data obtained from the general information part also indicated that schools were the most effective channel where the potential participants could learn about AFS. This finding can unquestionably demonstrate to the AFS management team of the PR focus as well as the promotion plans for the future program cycle. In the meantime, a proper action plan should be developed and implemented in a pro-active manner as one-third of the respondents applied for similar program provided by other organizations. Given that the good reputation and visibility was the most frequent reason why the participants chose AFS, this information sheds light on another focal

point for the business development and promotion team. In addition, in order to maintain the strength of the organization, effective program evaluation is undeniably required as one of the useful information resources for the program improvement.

From the study, the participants' expectations of the program were found at high and very high levels, resulting in a non-supporting testing elements to the analytical device proposed, one-way ANOVA. Despite the test results of whether or not the participants with different levels of expectations had different levels of satisfaction with the program, the statistics gained showed an overall satisfaction with the program at a satisfactory level. As the satisfaction is recognized once the people's expectations are fulfilled (<http://www.target.com>), these findings, thus, indicated the approval of the service performance quality of the organization to a certain extent. Nonetheless, the higher the expectations are formed, the fewer chances the expectations can be fulfilled, resulting in the decline of satisfaction. To ensure the participants' satisfaction with the program, the operation team has to diminish and bridge the gaps between the participants' expectations and the fulfillments. The techniques in creating the participants' realistic expectations of the program must be developed and implemented to minimize the chance of the program participants' possible dissatisfaction.

The findings also showed that almost half of the respondents (44%) expected that they could be able to listen and consider other people's ideas and suggestions willingly (open-mindedness) at a medium level. According to Mortlock (1986), Thai children are expected to show due respect to elders and abide by the decisions the elders make for them. In fact, Thais are taught to be considerate and avoid inconveniencing others. Hence, the respondents might simply consider listening and considering other peoples' ideas and suggestions their already existing characteristic, leading to the medium level of expectation in this area.

5.3.2 The results of the study showed no difference in the degree of satisfaction with the preparatory programs of the participants from both host country categories. Dragonas (1993) and Brislin et al. (1985) considered preparatory sessions or predeparture orientations vital for exchange programs. A well-designed preparation

program can effectively assist the exchange students to overcome difficulties successfully, leading to a high level of satisfaction with the program. The findings suggested that the goals of AFS Thailand's current preparatory programs were well met.

Nonetheless, the results show that the lowest rated area of satisfaction with the information and documentation arrangement was the supply of adequate details about host family, host country, and host school before the participants' departure. Due to the fact that this operational part of the program requires the cooperation from AFS Thailand's hosting partners, chances that the participants depart for their host countries with very brief information about host family and host school are not uncommon. Although communication between AFS Thailand and hosting partners has been attentively done to improve this unfavorable situation, the result of this study implies that the problem remained unsolved. As a result, AFS Thailand management team has to put more effort in to remedy this problem to maximize its participants' satisfaction with the program.

It is noticeable that the activities involving returnees' assistance obtained the highest satisfaction level. Nonetheless, the results revealed a discrepancy in responses with the activities at the General Orientation and the Pre-Departure Camp despite assistance from the returnees at both events. Basically, the activities at each orientation are different in details and the proportion of the returnees' assistance. The General Orientation is a one-day event aimed at getting the participants and their parents to know more about AFS' operational system and the service provided. An exhibition about AFS partners is also incorporated. Returnees are invited to be information providers at the booths according to their host countries. At the three-day-two-night Pre-Departure Camp, the returnees are responsible for most of the activities under the supervision of AFS Thailand staff. The major objective of the camp is to prepare the participants for their experience in their host countries. The event components and different returnees' roles provide dissimilar participating ambience.

Additionally, as 42% of the respondents showed uncertainty of satisfaction with activities organized at the Departure Orientation at the bank, the responsible operation team should take this point into consideration whether the current service requires improvement or further research should be done before more appropriate activities can be introduced. According to AFS Thailand's sending team, this orientation is regularly conducted on the participants' departure date, or a day before their departure. The main function of this event is to get the parents and the students prepared for the departure. Traveling tips, currency exchange, and some additional information about the program are provided. Airport appointments are also made. Apparently, the participants show no interest in this activity as their parents are naturally responsible for all the preparation for them. In addition, Thai children are not brought up to plan for the care of their money (Mortlock, 1986); thus, the respondents might consider the activities at the bank irrelevant to them but a kind of parental responsibility.

5.3.3 Based on the results gained from the respondents, there were no significantly different degrees of satisfaction with the second phase of the program: support from AFS and hosting milieu, between the participants from both groups. However, the participants placed in non-English speaking countries showed, albeit insignificantly, higher degrees of satisfaction in all aspects. This finding helped confirm that different host countries had no effects on the satisfaction of the programs. The results also revealed that the participants from both host country categories had no different degrees of program achievements. The results of this study corresponded with the research conducted by Hansel (1986). According to Hansel's study, although diverse expectations were complied with depending on the regions the AFS participants were placed, the subjects of her study were reported a positive attitude towards their entire exchange program. Unquestionably, the findings of this study will support the AFS recruitment team in terms of selection campaigns and PR work. Furthermore, the confirmation of the equity of benefits and opportunities from participating in an AFS program could be made to assure the natural parents of the tentative program participants.

Although the respondents' overall satisfaction with the second stage of the program including support from AFS and hosting milieu was at a satisfactory level, over 50% of the respondents marked "uncertain" in three AFS support areas: the orientation events in host countries, the contact from local contact persons and regular contact from AFS people during the program. Again, AFS Thailand's communication with the hosting partners on these issues must be emphasized. The support team from both sides, sending and hosting, should work cooperatively. To reduce the degree of uncertainty in these support areas, the standard support system and other relevant elements must be revised and implemented in a more effective way.

5.3.4 From the results of the program achievements, the last phase of the program, despite having a strongly satisfactory level in all aspects measured, the lowest score (4.47) was given to the achievement of independence and responsibility characteristic (the respondents can behave themselves in accordance with the rules and regulations without a need to be controlled or monitored). According to Mortlock (1986), in Thai society, a sense of an individual is an integral part of a network of family relationships and obligations. An individual's achievement means the interweaving of family's relationships, duty to parents, and community bonds. Being supervised or monitored by parents or elder people, to the Thai people, provides a sense of assurance and security rather than a negative connotation. Therefore, being independent and having a sense of responsibility might not be a great achievement in the respondents' opinion.

5.3.5 The most frequent suggestion made by the respondents reflected the area AFS Thailand should concentrate on: the insufficient details of host family, host community and host school before the participants' departure. The unavailability of the adequate residency details repeated the points made by Saranya Tanvanaratskul (2001). In her study, Saranya Tanvanaratskul pointed out that the quality of the information provided by AFS Thailand to its participants including host family and host community should be improved. The similar suggestion for this particular issue implied that the effective remedy to the problem had not yet been established. To improve the current services, this undesirable phenomenon should be well taken care of.

Saranya Tanvanaratskul also mentioned the significance of information from the primary source, the AFS returnees of the previous program cycle, particularly during the pre-departure camp. This remark was also parallel with the suggestion received from the subjects of this study. The proposed idea is not unreasonable except subjective perceptions are hardly avoided. According to AFS research reports on orientation evaluation, certain impressions unintentionally created by the inexperienced informants may well form particular expectations enthusiastically adopted by the new participants who are noticeably overwhelmed with excitement and seeking for the information for their exchange year. Thus, to make the most of this suggestion and at the same time secure the sensible expectations of the new participants, careful preparation for such activity is needed. It is strongly recommended that the staff members at all related events and activities meet for a clear objectives and guidelines for the tasks.

It was also suggested in this study that more language training sessions should be arranged during the preparatory programs. This point, however, was made by few respondents. Noticeably, the findings from the study showed the highest score of the participants' satisfaction with the language appreciation and abilities, which corresponded with the report by Hansel (1986). In her report, the AFS participants, especially placed in the non-English speaking countries, had significantly high post-test scores in the area of language appreciation and abilities.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

From the discussions, the conclusions of the study can be drawn as follows:

5.4.1 The AFS participants of the 2006-2007 program were satisfied with the program in all areas: the preparatory sessions, the support from AFS, the hosting milieu and the program achievements.

5.4.2 The language used in the host country had no effect on the satisfaction with the program.

5.4.3 The participants' residence in Thailand had no effect on their satisfaction with the AFS program.

5.4.4 The area where AFS Thailand should primarily improve was the availability of sufficient details about the host family, host community and host school.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESERACH

Considering the findings and the conclusions of the study, recommendations for further research are as follows:

5.5.1 As no negative score or comments could be seen from the respondents of this study, one probable interpretation is that the respondents might be reluctant to give unpleasant answers. According to Mortlock (1986), Thai people are brought up to be subtle and considerate in their criticism. Evaluations, to the Thai people, sometimes carry a sense of criticisms. This characteristic may reduce an intense degree of disapproval or pessimistic viewpoints from the respondents. Moreover, since the use of a self-report questionnaire survey is limited by the accuracy of the participants' responses (Kerlinger, 1986), more valid results can be attained by incorporating other methods of data collection: interview and observation. Additionally, a non-AFS researcher may relieve the respondents of being reluctant in providing negative responses and/or comments.

5.5.2 The study of the satisfaction with AFS program of the participants' natural parents should be conducted. For student exchange programs, parents are another important stakeholder. Their satisfaction will inevitably influence the program in one way or another. Their attitudes towards the current services of AFS Thailand will conclusively introduce how AFS Thailand can improve the quality of its services to the maximum.