A Study on Flight Attendants' Perceptions towards Airline Careers: The Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

การศึกษาการรับรู้ของพนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินที่มีต่ออาชีพด้านการบิน : ผลกระทบจากการระบาดของโรคโควิด 19

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the problems experienced by Thai flight attendants and understand how they perceive the careers in airlines based on the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study employed a qualitative approach to identify the problems Thai flight attendants experienced during the pandemic and understand how those problems have contributed to their perceptions towards airline careers. Thirty Thai flight attendants both employed and unemployed were selected as participants. To collect in-depth data, the semi-structured individual interview was employed. Thematic analysis was utilised to organise data while interpretive analysis was employed to interpret the data. The findings showed that the participants faced with five main problems; namely, physical and mental health problems, pay and benefit loss, struggles for future plans, job insecurity, and loss of trust in organisations. As influenced by these problems, the findings revealed three different types of perception that the participants had towards airline careers, which were stable, quite stable, and unstable. The study also contributes to the understanding of relationship between the problems and Thai flight attendants' perceptions and its significance which could be beneficial for both educational and business contexts. For the educational context, educational practitioners might consider including contents regarding impacts of COVID-19 on the airline business in their airline-related courses so that it could benefit students who want to work in this business. For the business, those who work in human resources departments might use the findings of this study in future staff planning and risk management.

Keywords: perceptions, Thai flight attendants, airline careers, effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

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บทคัดย่อ

      งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ศึกษาปัญหาที่พนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทยประสบและการรับรู้ต่ออาชีพด้านการบิน ในช่วงการระบาดของโรคโควิด 19 โดยใช้กระบวนการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพเพื่อระบุปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นและเข้าใจความเชื่อมโยง ต่อการรับรู้ของพนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทยที่มีต่ออาชีพด้านการบิน ผู้เข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้ประกอบด้วย พนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทยจำนวน 30 คน ทั้งที่ถูกจ้างอยู่และถูกเลิกจ้างจากบริษัท งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ แบบสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างในการเก็บข้อมูลเชิงลึก ใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงแก่นสาระเพื่อจัดระเบียบข้อมูล และ ใช้การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยการตีความข้อมูลเพื่อตีความข้อมูลที่ได้ ผลการวิจัยพบว่าพนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบิน ชาวไทยประสบปัญหาหลัก 5 ประการ คือ ปัญหาสุขภาพกายและสุขภาพจิต การสูญเสียรายได้และผลประโยชน์ ความยากลำบากต่อการวางแผนในอนาคต ความไม่มั่นคงทางอาชีพ และการสูญเสียความเชื่อมั่นต่อองค์กร ปัญหา ข้างต้นส่งผลต่อการรับรู้ของพนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทยที่มีต่อความมั่นคงของอาชีพด้านการบิน โดยมี การรับรู้ที่แตกต่างกัน 3 รูปแบบ คือ อาชีพด้านการบินมั่นคง อาชีพด้านการบินค่อนข้างมั่นคง และ อาชีพด้านการบิน ไม่มั่นคง งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ก่อให้เกิดความรู้ความเข้าใจเรื่องความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นและการรับรู้ของพนักงาน ต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทยที่มีต่ออาชีพด้านการบิน โดยผลการวิจัยนี้สามารถเป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้นำไปใช้ทั้งในบริบท ด้านการศึกษาและด้านธุรกิจ ในบริบทด้านการศึกษา ผู้สอนในรายวิชาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับด้านสายการบินสามารถเพิ่มเติม เนื้อหาเรื่องผลกระทบจากการระบาดของโรคโควิด 19 ที่มีต่อธุรกิจการบินเพื่อเป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้เรียนที่จะเข้า สู่การทำงานด้านสายการบิน และในบริบทธุรกิจ ฝ่ายทรัพยากรบุคคลสามารถนำไปใช้ในการบริหารบุคลากรและ วางแผนจัดการความเสี่ยงที่อาจเกิดขึ้นในอนาคต

คำสำคัญ   การรับรู้ พนักงานต้อนรับบนเครื่องบินชาวไทย อาชีพด้านการบิน
                   ผลกระทบจากการระบาดของโรคโควิด 19

Introduction

      Due to the emergence of COVID-19, Lange (2020) states that in 2020 businesses in the airline industry collapsed. Two-thirds of the aircrafts around the world were grounded and nearly 98% of global flight operations were suspended especially for international operations. Never before has the airline industry experienced such a sudden and dramatic decline in air travel demands. The extreme decrease in air travel demands has caused many challenges for the industry. Lange (2020) adds that while the main focus is on how the industry survives the current crisis, how the industry handles the recovery period cannot be ignored. In Thailand, the pandemic of COVID-19 also has had disastrous effects on the airline industry. Both domestic and international flights have dramatically decreased or stopped altogether. There are a considerable number of laid-off flight attendants and airline staff leaving without pay. The THAI Airways' State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation reports that 2,600 employees were laid off due to the suspension of THAI flights in 2020. Even though there are

employees who are still employed by airline companies, the study from Charernnit (2021) shows that many of them are still hesitant and frustrated about their career in the airline industry.

Given the situation of the pandemic in Thailand, the impacts of COVID-19 have worried those in airline businesses since they are getting direct effects from the pandemic causing flight cancellation and suspension. Many Thai airlines have been losing incomes for a few years now and are seeking financial support immediately. In the meantime, they have to reduce the workforce resulting in an early retirement scheme of 5,000 employees, a leaving without pay scheme and, in the worst-case scenario, a laid-off scheme (Charernnit, 2021). Even though previous studies from Charernnit (2021), Laovoravit et al. (2021), and Thongmeensuk and Rojsirikulchai (2020) shed light on impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on air transport industry in Thailand, they suggest that there is still a particular need to focus on airline staff's perceptions towards the pandemic as well. Therefore, these situations have led the researcher to concerns and investigations of the flight attendants' perceptions towards airlines careers as affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it could create the original contribution of this present study.

Objectives and Research Questions

Based on the statement of problems presented earlier, the main objectives of the research are

1) to investigate Thai flight attendants' perceptions of airlines careers in the period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic, and

2) to explore the problems experienced by Thai flight attendants and understand how they perceive the careers in airlines based on those problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are formulated into two research questions.

1) What are the problems that Thai flight attendants experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2) How do Thai flight attendants perceive the airline careers in association with the emergence of COVID-19?

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature and studies related to this study. The chapter discusses three main perspectives related to the study including 1) definitions and descriptions of airline careers, 2) the impacts of COVID-19 on both global and Thai airline businesses and related studies, and 3) the concepts of perceptions and related studies on perceptions.

1. Airline Careers

Ford et al. (2013) state that airline careers involve rendering services to passengers on domestic and international departures and arrivals at the airport. In other words, the airline staff and the passengers are personally engaged in the service transaction which shows hospitality relationship between them. There are various definitions of a flight attendant. The word flight attendant has been explained by English dictionaries and aviation authorities as follows; Oxford's Learners Dictionaries Dictionary defines a flight attendant as a person whose job is to serve and take care of passengers on an aircraft. Cambridge dictionary states that a flight attendant is a person in an aircraft whose job is to serve passengers and to make sure they obey safety rules. The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (2016) defines that a flight attendant is a crew member who performs duties in the interest of comfort, convenience and safety of passengers and tasks as assigned by the pilot-in-command of the aircraft. Therefore, it can be said that generally a flight attendant is an airline staff who works directly with passengers and whose main jobs are to serve food and drinks to passengers and to ensure their convenience on a plane.

However, the significant responsibilities of the flight attendant are to maintain safe conditions in the airplane cabin, to teach passengers safety procedures and to assist passengers during emergency situations. Flight attendants are required to complete training courses focusing on safety procedures since it is important that they must be equipped with the knowledge about flight systems, basic components, and configuration of aircrafts in order to provide passengers with comfort and safety throughout the flight.

2. The Impacts of COVID-19 on Global Airline Businesses

Lange (2020) reports that, in 2020, two-thirds of airline fleets around the world were grounded. While 90% of domestic fleets were not happening, 98% of international fleets could not be operated. International Air Transport Association or IATA (2020) estimates that global airline businesses would end up around 60% down for the next few years since the airline industry has never seen such a dramatic and sustained decline in air passenger demand before. Although the industry experienced previous crises such as SARS pandemic in 2003 and the 911 terrorist attacks in 2001, they were geographically limited and occurred in a short period of time (Lange 2020). Therefore, the pandemic of COVID-19 has become more challenging to the industry because they are not any certain solutions when airlines will be able to operate their flights and passenger demands will return.

For airline businesses in Thailand, Amornpipat (2020) reports that domestic flights are grounded and will be grounded until the COVID-19 outbreak can be controlled. During the pandemic many airlines in Thailand have made the painful decision to suspend all of their flights although some airlines continue to operate limited domestic flights. Passenger demands have declined since the first lockdown of cities was announced and people's movements were restricted. This has led to big financial challenges for many airlines in Thailand. Charernnit

(2021) notes that the adverse effects of the pandemic on Thailand's aviation industry are just a tip of the iceberg to what is happening all over the entire national economy. The halting of flights not only affected the airline companies but also their employees. Laovoravit et al. (2021) report that nearly 2,600 employees of Wingspan, a subsidiary company of Thai Airways, had been laid off because their flights had been suspended since the end of March in 2020. In some airlines, they report that employees would lose vacation time and leave and many of them were asked to leave without pay. It is obvious that COVID-19 has largely affected both airline companies and their employees in terms of finance, flight operations, and unemployment in Thai airline businesses.

There are studies conducted about the impacts of COVID-19 on Thai airline industries. The study of Amornpipat (2020) presents the impacts of COVID-19 on aviation industry in Thailand. Similarly, the study of Thongmeensuk and Rojsirikulchai (2020) shows that, as a consequence of the dramatic decrease in air travel demands, the majority of airline companies in Thailand were encountering a significant fall in their revenues. The study of Charernnit (2021) focuses on Thai airline employees. Her study shows that the COVID-19 pandemic put many Thai airlines employees' financial and emotional instability. The result shows that participants mostly adopt Buddhism beliefs to develop emotional intelligence to cope with their financial and emotional instability. Another study focusing on flight attendants was conducted by Laovoravit et al. (2021). The study mainly discusses the impact of COVID-19 on mental health of Thai flight attendants. The result shows that psychological strains from COVID-19 caused by perpetuated stress that can cause ineffective safety-related performance when flight attendants need to perform safety roles in emergency situations during their flights. Therefore, the flight attendants' mental health should be checked up before they return to work when regular commercial flights operate.

3. The Concepts of Perception

Investigating perceptions is one of the most widely adopted approaches to explore issues in emerging situations. According to Jalilah (2010), perception refers to someone's understanding, beliefs, feeling about persons, situations and events as his/her learning experience which will be the major determiner of the stimuli to which he/she responses. Démuth (2013) argues that human assumptions are behind perceptions and influence these in a relatively consistent way. Perceptions are regarded as objects that form the "content and diversity of the world" and as "the source of sensual and intellectual cognition" will form the subject of human thoughts (Démuth, 2013, p.13). Moreover, perception is significant in understanding human behaviour, as individuals might perceive the world differently. Therefore, exploring perceptions could help to understand phenomena in the social context. In terms of this study, the investigation of perceptions reflects how Thai flight attendants perceive airline careers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The importance of perception has been discussed in many studies. From the concepts presented earlier, it seems clear that it would be useful to take into consideration flight

attendants' perceptions in reflecting their views towards airline careers and their experiences during the pandemic. Murphy (2013) and O'Connor et al. (2014) state that it is essential to know how airline staff feel about the issues they have been dealing with during the pandemic and understand how they make sense of airline careers as airline staff's perceptions, in this case, flight attendants can give feedback, provide information about what happens to them during the suspension of flights, and provide recommendation to human resource departments about whether or not employee welfare and benefits have been appropriately managed. Ford et al. (2014) note that it might be useful for airline companies if airline staff provided data from their actual situations, as inputs for human resource management, in order to ensure that an improvement meets the majority of airline staff's needs. In addition to the importance of perceptions, Ming et al. (2019) comment that it appears that airline staff's perceptions are also worth investigating, not least because understanding their perceptions is an asset to quality work and service because the intention clearly is that they should be reflecting how their companies have treated them and what they have experienced. That is to say, their feedback could usefully feed into airline companies' adaptations of their human resources management.

Research Methodology

1. Research Instrument

Interview was the main research instrument employed in this research to collect in-depth information from the participants. Semi-structured interview approach was administered during the interviews. This approach incorporates conversational aspects between researchers and participants (Creswell, 2012). However, the order of prepared questions and wordings were not fixed. Follow-up questions connected to participants' previous answers were also used to keep the conversation flowing.

2. Research Participants

This study adopted a qualitative approach which usually requires a small number of participants so that researchers could explore their perspectives in depth and produce detailed findings. Creswell (2012) mentions that, in conducting a qualitative study, five to twenty-five participants could provide data adequacy while Munhall (2010) suggests that two to ten participants are sufficient to reach data saturation. Following the notion of data adequacy, this study included thirty participants. All of them worked for Thai airline companies based in Bangkok, Thailand. They worked as flight attendants whose flights were operated in both domestic and international routes. These participants were accessible through snowballing sampling so that the researcher could draw samples for this study. They were purposively selected from an initial pool of five participants, as the researcher's acquaintances, before the number of research participants expanded to thirty. All of them were selected because they had particular experiences and characteristics that could contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon studied, in this case their perceptions towards the airline career based on the impact of COVID-19. Although they shared some similarities such as job responsibilities,

workplaces, and their nationality, there were some differences such as their genders, their challenges they experienced during the pandemic, and their current job status, employed and unemployed.

3. Data Collection Procedure

Initially, the participants were directly contacted by phone, explained their rights as research participants, and asked to have individual interviews by phone. The participants were also informed that the interview would be audio recorded. After all of them agreed, the information sheets and consent forms were given to the participants. All the interviews were scheduled following participants' convenience. All the interviews were conducted in Thai since the participants could understand the interview questions easily and express their opinions fully and freely through Thai. The interview duration was expected to be not over thirty minutes in order not to exhaust both the participants and the researcher. However, the duration was flexible and they could extend it. Each participant took approximately 25 – 35 minutes, to finish the interview. The interview was mainly about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions towards airline careers. The prepared questions mentioned in the previous section (Research Instrument) were used at this stage.

In every interview, the researcher started by talking about the participants' backgrounds, not only to obtain some data relevant to the study, but also to break the ice and create good rapport with them. During the interviews, the researcher attempted to avoid asking multiple questions and leading questions. The researcher always gave them time to think and respond and encouraged them to share their stories. More importantly, the researcher avoided giving his own ideas or correcting their answers. All these interviews were also audio recorded through the researcher's phone and later transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interview when the researcher found some particular interesting issues. Although some participants shared their bad experiences which the researcher deeply felt for them, the researcher tried to control his emotions and focus on the interviews. They were also advised to stop in case they were unhappy and uncomfortable to talk about sensitive topics. The data from the interviews were hoped to show evidence of problems they experienced in during the pandemic (RQ1) and their perceptions towards the airline careers based on the emergence of COVID-19 (RQ2).

For qualitative research, which involves human sensitivities, ethical consideration must be taken into account. Throughout this study, ethical guidelines provided by Forum for Ethical Review Committees in Thailand (FERCIT) were followed. This study was also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Thaksin University (COA No.TSU 2022_175, REC No.0383)

4. Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis was used as a tool to analyse the interview data. The interpretation involves understanding the meaning of the participants' experiences in order to provide a thick description or an in-depth narrative story of the phenomenon under the investigation which can explain why participants perceived or behaved the way they did (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This study also adopted thematic analysis. Although this analysis takes time and depends on the interpretation of each researcher, it is a widely used qualitative analysis method due to its flexibility, easy implementation, and potential to provide richness of data (Guest et al., 2012). The thematic analysis process includes six main steps, including 1) Familiarising with data, 2) Producing initial codes, 3) Looking for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Labelling themes, and 6) Writing a report. Verbatim transcription was used with the interview recordings. In the process of transcription, translation, and data analysis, the researcher ensured the participants that their names were completely anonymised. Pseudonyms were given to all participants in reporting of findings so that they would not be identifiable. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher then began following steps of thematic analysis. As the study progressed, the codes were created, organised, and grouped into themes. Also, interpretive analysis was used as a way of interpreting meanings and understanding the orientation to the identified themes.

Figure 1
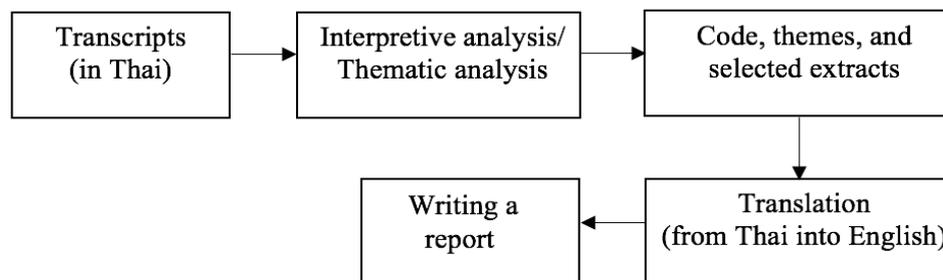*The Procedures of Interview Data Analysis*

Figure 1 shows the procedures of how interview data was analysed. As the analysis progressed, the codes were created, organised, and grouped into themes. The codes, themes, and selected extracts were translated from Thai into English before they were presented in the report.

Findings

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, they offered answers to the main research questions of this study.

1. What are the problems that Thai flight attendants experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do Thai flight attendants perceive the airline careers in association with the emergence of COVID-19?

In relation to RQ 1, the findings showed that the participants of this study experienced various problems during the pandemic. There were five main problems that can be identified which are physical and mental health problems, pay and benefit loss, struggles for future plans, job insecurity, and loss of trust in organisations.

Below are example excerpts showing that participants reported they experienced physical and mental health problems, pay and benefit loss, struggles for future plans, job insecurity, and loss of trust in organisations.

Extract 1: Physical and mental health problems

"I was shocked when I discovered that my result of COVID-19 test was positive. I didn't know what to do. I cried a lot. My family and friends were worried about me. My health was not the same. At that time I completely lost my sense of smell. I couldn't breathe. I thought I was going to die."

(Sam, personal communication, November 20, 2022)

Extract 2: Pay and benefit loss

"It was a nightmare that one day I got high salary but the next day I was stony broke. I was shocked not knowing what to do next. I talked to my friends who were also asked to leave when we all agree that it was our financial crisis. We lost income and other benefits that we used to receive."

(Anne, personal communication, November 18, 2022)

Extract 3: Struggles for future plans

"I had no idea about what to do next, about finding a new job. I worked as a flight attendant for many years and I only had one job. I was blank. The moment I knew that I was laid off, I collapsed. I was quite old to start a new job in this industry."

(Watt, personal communication, December 1, 2022)

Extract 4: Job insecurity

"I've been thinking about job insecurity. Although I'm still employed, I feel stressful. My salary was reduced. My benefits were cut off. Some of my friends were laid off. I don't know when my turn is. I work but I also question about job insecurity. Is it really secure?"

(Krit, personal communication, November 20, 2022)

Extract 5: Loss of trust in organisations

"I felt that the company treated me and my colleagues unfairly. They cut off all benefits that we deserved to have. They focused only on the business but they seemed to ignore employees' needs. I've been working here for over 10 years. I've come to the point that I'm having doubts about the company's risk management. And I don't blame if the colleagues who got laid off would get mad and criticised the company for their poor management."

(Araya, personal communication, November 25, 2022)

Table 1
Problems During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Problems	Employed	Unemployed	Total	%
Physical and mental health problems	15	15	30	100
Pay and benefit loss	15	15	30	100
Struggles for future plans	5	10	15	50
Job insecurity	3	9	12	40
Loss of trust in organisations	2	8	10	33.3

Table 1 reveals that physical and mental health problems and pay and benefit loss are the most frequently reported problems which are mentioned by all participants (100%). This is followed by struggles for future plans which is reported by 15 participants (50%) consisting of five employed participants and ten unemployed participants. Job insecurity is reported by 12 participants (40%) consisting of three employed participants and nine unemployed participants. Finally, loss of trust in organisations is the least frequently reported by ten participants (33.3%) consisting of two employed participants and eight unemployed participants. It can be seen that participants experienced different problems. However, based on the frequency of reported problems, it is obvious that the unemployed participants faced up to more problems than the employed participants.

In relation to RQ 2, the findings unfolded the participants' perceptions and showed how those problems reported in RQ1 affected their perceptions towards the airline careers in three main aspects. These include stable, quite stable, and unstable.

Below are example excerpts showing that participants reported their perceptions towards the airline careers including stable, quite stable, and unstable.

Extract 6: Stable

"I've been working in this career for a long time. I've been through many problems and crises and here I am. I'm still working here. I strongly believe that airline careers are still stable. The pandemic is new to all airlines but it depends on how companies deal with it. My company handled it well. I think those who feel that these careers are not stable are the people who got laid off and they just got mad. I feel that you should have prepared for the future. In my case, I studied for Master's degree. So, I'm not relying on one job. I could do more jobs. I'm now a guest lecturer at many universities."

(Veena, personal communication, November 19, 2022)

Extract 7: Quite stable

"Although I got laid off, I still feel that airline careers are quite stable. I guess it depends on how airline companies deal with the situation. I'm not happy with the compensation that I received from the company. I think they could do more to help the employees who got laid off. My friends work for another airline and they're still employed. I'm going to apply for a job at their company. But I think this time I'll be more careful with spending money and I have to have a backup plan."

(Wanda, personal communication, November 23, 2022)

Extract 8: Unstable

"Although I haven't been kicked out yet, I feel that airline careers are unstable. I feel like I'm hanging by a thread. I feel terrible about this career. As you can see there're many employees getting laid off. The company haven't done much to help those employees. I feel that they focus on their business more than employees' job security and well-being. I'm thinking about resigning and I'm now doing my own small business. I feel better that way. At least I can manage future risk in my own way."

(Nalin, personal communication, November 27, 2022)

Table 2

Perceptions Towards Airline Careers

| Perceptions	Employed	Unemployed	Total	%
Stable	3	0	3	10
Quite stable	11	5	16	53.3
Unstable	1	10	11	36.7

Table 2 presents three main perceptions towards airline careers mutually reported by the participants. The table reveals that although the participants were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants perceived that airline careers were quite stable. It is reported by 16 participants (53.3%) consisting of eleven employed participants and five unemployed participants. This is followed by eleven participants (36.7%) consisting of one employed participant and ten unemployed participants who perceived that airline careers were unstable. Finally, there are only three participants (10%) consisting of three employed participant and none of unemployed participants who perceived that airline careers were still stable. It can be seen that the employed participants mostly perceived that airlines careers were quite stable while the unemployed participants mostly perceived that these careers were unstable.

Analysis and Discussion

This section discusses the role of problems experienced by the participants during COVID-19 and their perceptions towards airline careers. It revealed the relationship between the problems based on the pandemic of COVID-19 which are physical and mental health problems, pay and benefit loss, struggles for future plans, job insecurity, and loss of trust in organisations and Thai flight attendants' perceptions which are stable, quite stable, and unstable. It also revealed how those problems were engaged and how they contributed to the Thai flight attendants' perceptions towards airline careers. That is to say, the reported problems playing significant roles in affecting the participants' perceptions. There were connections between the reported problems and perceptions of the participants. It can be said that each problem played its role differently depending on the participants' employment situations. Different problems were engaged in the participants' perceptions. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of how the problems experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic are related to the Thai flight attendants' perceptions towards the airline careers.

Figure 2

Relationship Between the Problems and Thai Flight Attendants' Perceptions
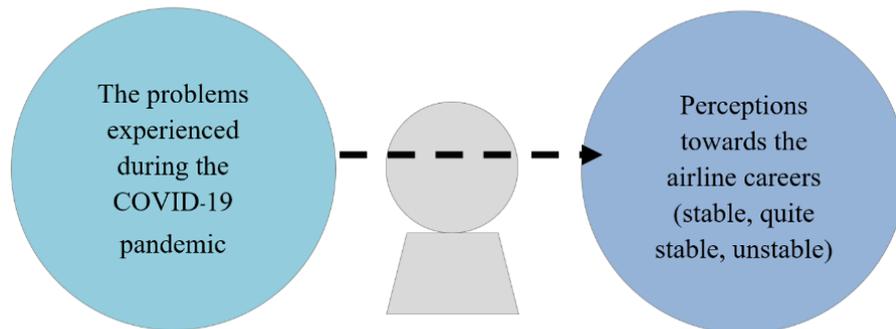
In the discussion of Thai flight attendants' perceptions towards the airline careers, it shows that the engagement of different problems contributed to different perceptions towards airline careers including stable, quite stable, and unstable. For participants who perceived that airline careers were stable, it shows that job security played an important role in these participants' perceptions. They shared the similar perception on job security since they felt that their airline companies showed them that they could manage change effectively, handling the pandemic situations in a way that keeps them safe. For participants who perceived that airline careers were quite stable, it shows that job security and trust in organisations played important roles in the participants' perception. They mutually shared the similar perceptions that they still received some benefits from the companies such as compensation after getting laid off and regular income during lockdown. Finally, for participants who perceived that airline careers were unstable, it shows that job insecurity, loss of trust in organisations, and struggles for future plans played an important role in the participants' perceptions. They reported that they were treated unfairly by the companies. As they experienced laying off they felt that working for airline business is like hanging by a thread.

However, it should be noted that this study focused on thirty participants including employed and unemployed Thai flight attendants. With a larger number of participants, the problems and the perceptions identified in this study may or may not be associated.

Conclusion

This study has fulfilled its objective to investigate the problems experienced by Thai flight attendants and understand how they perceive the careers in airlines based on those problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The problems experienced by Thai flight attendants during the pandemic were found to be various including physical and mental health problems, pay and benefit loss, struggles for future plans, job insecurity, and loss of trust in organisations. The study also revealed the relationship between those problems and Thai flight attendants' perceptions which include stable, quite stable, and unstable. That is to say, there

were connections between the reported problems and perceptions of the participants. Job security played an important role in the stable perception towards airline careers. For the quite stable perception, job security and trust in organisations had an impact on the participants' perceptions. For the unstable perception, job insecurity, loss of trust in organisations, and struggles for future plans mainly played an important role in the participants' perceptions. However, it should be noted that problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, perceptions towards airline careers, and connections between them could be different and emergent in different groups of participants such as ground service agents, HR staff, and even pilots since an individual could have experienced and perceived things differently.

Although generalisability does not fit the results of this study, the notion of transferability may be more appropriate. This study might provide educational practitioners with useful ideas in implementing and designing appropriate contents for airlines-related courses and benefit students in higher education for their job training in airline businesses and related fields. That is to say, educational practitioners might consider including reported problems in this study in their courses so that students can understand negative impacts regarding COVID-19 airline staff have had experienced and see another aspect of this career. Also, the depth of the data and findings is hoped to provide other researchers and those who work in human resources department with information or perspectives that may be relevant to their contexts. Based on the findings of the study, this should be taken into consideration by human resources departments from not only airlines but those who have been affected by the pandemic. It is important to seriously focus on the existing problems and understand perceptions of their employees so that the departments can prepare for unexpected situations, help their employees in case that similar situations occur in the future, and support airline employees' mental health, welfare, and benefits. Struggles for future plans and loss of trust in organisations were new categories emerging from this study which has expanded from the previous studies on perceptions conducted by Amornpipat (2020), Thongmeensuk and Rojsirikulchai (2020), Charernnit (2021), and Laovoravit et al. (2021). This represents the original contribution of this research. These problems have been suggested as constructive findings since they might be beneficial for the human resources departments in airline businesses and related fields to gain the feedback from their employees, both employed and unemployed. Also, those emerging problems were reported to have connections with attitudes of the participants towards the companies. Therefore, they should not be neglected.

In conclusion, this study has made contributions towards understanding the problems and perceptions reported by Thai flight attendants. It is also hoped that the discussion of the concepts and findings of this study will contribute to relevant contexts and reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on airline businesses.

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