

The Readiness of U-Tapao International Airport toward EEC

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Abstract—This study figure out passenger satisfaction by using eight primary determinants. A sample 241 passengers arriving and departing at U-Tapao international airport was surveyed with questionnaire at the beginning of year 2019. Author found that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, comfort, and readiness for proving service have a positive relation with passenger satisfaction.

Keywords— Airport, service quality, customer satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the growth of the world population is increasing every year. This cause more demand for travelling while the available resources are limited. Some businesses have to expand to meet the needs of consumers. As the business has expanded, transportation has therefore increased accordingly. And clearly, transportation is a very important mode at the present time. It is found that air transportation is convenient, faster and safer than other transportation mode and can meet the needs of consumers as well. Thailand has many international airports that support passengers around the world, however; the largest airport in Thailand is Suvarnabhumi airport, which has the 3rd largest single passenger terminal in the world (563,000 square meters). In 2016, Suvarnabhumi Airport is considered as top 20 of the most congestion airports in the world. In 2018 the number 20 in the world, (Suvarnabhumi airport quick fact, 2019). It can be said that the number of passengers still keep going. As a result of this, Suvarnabhumi airport faces to passenger congestion problem and affects to the service quality. Thai government therefore must seek for other airports to reduce the congestion passengers who use the service at Suvarnabhumi airport. In addition, the government now has a policy to strengthen Thailand as a regional hub for air transportation in this region. Also, Thailand is an important strategic area in term of economy in Asian since this route connects with China, India, Southeast Asia, Korea and Japan. Because of 3.5 billion people as total population, this can generates more than 32% of the world's GDP. Fortunately, Thailand is one of the countries that are located in this zone which connects to

neighboring countries and passes through mainland China as well. As a result of this, the Eastern Economic Corridor, the EEC (Eastern Economic Corridor) project will happen to serve this vast economic opportunity and upgrade business in Thailand to become a global economic zone (eeco.or.th, 2019). Furthermore, Thailand has developed various modern aviation businesses to support the increasing air transportation in Asia every year and serve the tendency of passenger demand for travel services.

According to the opening of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, it also creates another supporting factor for the aviation business by allowing more flights and expanding routes to ASEAN and more flight routes between ASEAN member countries (CNN INNOVATIVE CITIES: ASIAN METROPOLIS EMBRACE THE FUTURE, 2016). Because of the airport development, additional commercial airport to accommodate more passengers, opening up the ASEAN Free Trade Area, Thai government sees the great need for developing international airport. For those reasons, U-Tapao Airport is an alternative way developed to be the 3rd Commercial Airport in Thailand,

U-Tapao international airport under the supervision by the Thai Navy was initiated in 1961. (Wikipedia, 2019). After the closing of Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports, Thai government has seen the need to increase the capacity to accommodate passengers at U-Tapao International Airport. Therefore, Thai government allocates budgets to build a new passenger terminal by using the format similar to Phitsanulok airport to accommodate tourists who will travel to Eastern part of Thailand such as Chon Buri Rayong, Chanthaburi and Trat Province .These buildings constructed in 2015 and are completed in 2020 (Wikipedia, 2019).

In eastern part of Thailand, Pataya is considered as gold coast city to travel for both local and foreign people. Obviously, airport is the main actor to play major role to support tourism and industrial sector. No question about that airport is so important because airport is the first place where the visitors see when plane lands. If they have a good experience with service provided by airport, this will generate a positive word of mouth and country's image. As a result of this, airport should put the best effort on people who first come to destination.

Researcher decides to choose this topic because of many reasons. First, Thai government under military plan to revamp and turn U-Tapao into as third destination for airline service, maintenance, repair and overhaul center: MRO based on

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national strategy known as Eastern Economic Seaboard: EEC. EEC is represented as the largest investment projects in ASEAN in the sense of budget and area. Secondly, the research's outcome will be helpful to understanding what kind of factor impact to U-Tapao international airport and use them to evaluate facilities and service level U-Tapao airport. Finally, the result can lead to continuously improve appropriate programs to enhance the visitors' future journey experience. The objectives of this research are: (1) to study the satisfaction of service users towards the services of U-Tapao Airport, Ban Chang District, Rayong Province. (2) to study the relationship between the satisfaction of users with the services of U-Tapao Airport Classified by SERVEPERF concept and industry-specific dimensions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Today air transportation has been changed so fast, continuously improving air travelling industry is able to elevate passengers' expectation regarding to airport experience. Traveler always expose to various and complicate service attributes that help them to perceive service performance, top management level therefore must measure passenger perception and satisfaction from the service provider. . A framework was used to investigate the factors that influenced overall customer perceptions of service quality of a passenger air transport service, using a case study of U-Tapao international airport, based on previous literature on service quality in a range of relevant contexts. For example, Young, Cunningham Lee (1992, 1994) tried to assess customer perceptions of service quality in the airline industry by using the "SERVPERF" scale combined with specific industry-based attributes such as connection, safety, and baggage claims. Furthermore, airport ground service and in flight service, flight timeliness, information, convenient, security, check in procedure and terminal amenities (Chen and Chang, 2005, Corriea et al., 2008 De Boross at al., 2007, Fodness and Murray,2007).

The concept of customer satisfaction was grounded by (Woodruff & Gardial 1996). Satisfaction is defined as a global evaluative judgement about product usage and consumption (Westbrook 1987, p. 260), or a customer's positive or negative feelings about the value of using a business service in a specific situation (Woodruff & Gardial 1996). This feeling can be a reaction to an immediate-use situation or an overall reaction to a series of use situation experiences (Woodruff & Gardial 1996). Quality results from a comparison of perceived and expected performance (Gronroos 1982, 1984).

Tangibility refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communications materials (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trustworthiness and confidence (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised

service dependably and accurately (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Responsiveness refers to a willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Empathy refers to the caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) proposed that service quality is a function of the difference between expectation and performance along the quality dimension. Shelley (Shelly, 1975: 252-268) states that contentment is two kinds of human senses: positive and negative feelings. Every kind of human feeling must fall into these two types of feelings. Positive feelings are feelings that cause people's happiness. It is found that happiness is a complex feeling and this happiness affects more people than any other positive feelings. Negative feelings, positive feelings and happiness are intricate relationships and the relationship system of these 3 feelings called satisfaction. In which, satisfaction occurs when there are more positive feelings than negative ones. Satisfaction can be expressed in various forms of positive feelings, and this positive feeling can also help increase satisfaction.

Andersen and Aday, 1975: 6 states that meaning of satisfaction is the feeling that users receive from services, including the satisfaction under convenience, service coordination, product and service price, service quality, good information, friendly attention from service when using the service. From the above, it can be concluded that satisfaction means happiness, value, and goal achievement in order to meet their own needs in service. It is based on the recognition of values and experiences that each person is served.

Providing quality services is the result of successful service, especially for organizations with similar services. Because the quality of service has become a requirement to be considered in the selection of services of various organizations. There are many scholars who have given meaning about the quality of service.

Lewis and Bloom (1983: 238) propose that the quality of service can indicate the level of service that service providers send to customers or clients matching their needs whether or not. Delivering quality service means delivering responses to clients based on clients' expectations. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990: 89). Service quality refers to the assessment or evaluation of overall service performance. Customer makes comparison between their expectations and service quality what they actually receive. Gronroos (1991: 10) has defined the quality of service as 2 types: technical quality, which is related to the service receive from that service. Functional quality is related to the evaluation process. Kotler (2000) states that service quality is a service business competition. Service providers must create a service quality that is equal to or greater than the customer expectation. Normally, the service quality come from experience after used service or goods, and compare the services received with their expectation.

Service quality cannot be seen therefore it is more difficult to measure when compared to product quality (Chen & Lee

2006). Service quality is defined as the ability of a company to meet or exceed the customers' expectations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Customer satisfaction results from service being greater than customer expectations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). The definition proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1980) is the same as the idea of Gronroos (1984). They defined service quality as the difference between a customer's expectation and the experience of a product or the performance of a product. Service quality can be seen as the difference between the service provided by the service provider and the quality of performance the client hopes to receive from the service provider, before the encounter takes place (Gronroos 1988; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Sasser, Olsen & Wyckoff 1978). From these definitions, service quality is closely connected to customer expectation because customer expectation is viewed as a line or point that service performance must go beyond, due to the concept of disconfirmation (Dedeke 2003). In other words, if the product performance matches customer expectations, the level of service quality must be zero (Dedeke 2003).

While SERVPERF appears to be partly useful in measuring airport service quality, it clearly has some limitations. Firstly, the nature of the scale is not specific enough to the transportation service sector (Ostrowski, O'Brien & Gordon, 1993). Although the scale of SERVPERF is widely used to measure the perceived quality of various services, it does not address all of the industry-specific dimensions that need to be considered in context. Secondly, SERVPERF looks closely at the quality of the service process, but it does not give adequate attention to the service outcome. Finally, the SERVPERF method was originally created for use in western countries. Because of cultural differences, customers from different cultures will assess service quality and their satisfaction differently (Furrer et al. 2000; Smith & Reynolds 2001). Therefore, it is reasonable that SERVPERF measures alone may not be an adequate approach to measure service quality in the context of studying perceptions of passenger who use airport in Thailand (Gerrard & Cunningham 2001; Sureshchandar et al. 2002; Zhao et al. 2002) Therefore, to obtain an optimum assessment of overall perceptions of service quality for the U-Tapao service, this study should incorporate additional, industry-specific dimensions such as safety, comfort into the service quality assessment tool in order to tap into the broad range of relevant issues in this industry context.

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

A framework was used to investigate the factors that influenced overall customer perceptions of service quality of a passenger airport transport service, using a case study of the U-Tapao international airport, based on previous literature on service quality in a range of relevant contexts. For example,

Young, Cunningham Lee (1992, 1994) tried to assess customer perceptions of service quality in the airline industry by using the "SERVPERF" scale combined with specific industry-based attributes such as connection, safety, and baggage claims.

Based on theoretical concept, the questionnaire was developed and distributed to passenger who used U-Tapao international airport to examine the passenger satisfaction. The questionnaire consisted two different parts: first part comprised demographic variables such as age, sex, education level, income level, purpose of trip and times of visiting. Furthermore, the second part of questionnaire was designed to determine passenger satisfaction under service quality concept and industry-specific dimensions of U-Tapao airport through a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Finally, it is noted that customer satisfaction have significance relation with customer loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Liljander and Strandvik, 1995; Anderson, 1998). Similarly, customer loyalty was influenced by customer satisfaction (Bitner, 1990).

Author attempted to use many kinds of data analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics analysis, multiple regression technique to assess passenger satisfaction. In addition, this research is mainly based on quantitative approach to investigate passenger satisfaction who employ U-Tapao international airport. According to limitation of time and strict rule and regulation of airport, a convenience sampling technique was chosen (Kozek and Rimmington, 2000). The sample was taken at arriving and departure building from October, 2018. After distributed a total of 300 questionnaire, 241 were collected, there are 59 non-participants. Therefore, usable and effective questionnaire for this paper were 241, accounted 80.33 % as a response rate.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent demographics

The usable questionnaire was distributed to 241 respondents, representing 50.2% male and 49.8% female of the surveyed passengers respectively. Most of clients were in the age group of 18-20 and 31-40 years, representing 17.4% of the respondents. Furthermore, respondents older than 60 years were a minority group, accounting for only 15.8%. Furthermore, the research outcome revealed that the education level of passenger used the service of U-Tapao international airport was high with 83.5% having earned college degrees including Bachelor, Master and Doctoral program. Only 16.6% of respondents were either secondary school educated or below. It is seen in Table 2 that 57.3% of passengers came to U-Tapao international airport for the first time, meanwhile, of the respondents visited U-Tapao international airport for two times. The result outcome reveal that passenger visit U-Tapao international airport are mainly travelling, business, and other reason respectively accounting for 67.2%, and 32.8%. (see Table 1).

TABLE I: GENERAL INFORMATION OF PASSENGER

Information sought	Responses	Frequency (N=241)	%
Gender	Male	121	50.2
	Female	120	49.8
Age	18-20 years old	42	15.8
	21-30 years old	38	31.1
	31-40 years old	42	9.5
	41-50 years old	40	13.3
	51-61 years old	41	14.1
	Greater than 61 years old	38	15.8
Education level	High school or below	40	16.6
	Bachelor degree	104	43.2
	Master degree	60	24.9
	Doctoral degree	37	15.4
Times of visiting	Once	138	57.3
	Twice	56	23.2
	Thrice	29	12.0
	Four times and above	18	7.5
Purpose of Trip	Travelling	162	67.2
	School	26	10.8
	Working	20	8.3
	Go Home	16	6.6
	Business reasons	8	3.3
	Visiting Person	6	2.5
	Working	2	0.8
	Party	1	0.4

TABLE II: RESPONDENTS' SATISFACTION OF SERVICE QUALITY IN SENSE OF MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

Satisfaction	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1. Assurance	4.02	0.72	High
2. Responsiveness	3.98	0.73	High
3. Safety	3.97	0.77	High
4. Reliability	3.84	0.66	High
5. Empathy	3.77	0.78	High
6. Comfort	3.62	0.85	High
7. Readiness for providing service	3.53	0.89	High
8. Tangibility	3.52	0.78	High
Total	3.76	0.65	High

Scale: 1-5 (1= Strongly dissatisfied, 2= Dissatisfied, 3= Neither, 4= Satisfied, 5= Strongly satisfied)

Table 2 portrays that the Mean and standard deviation results of eight independent variables as indicated passengers' satisfaction with the overall service was at a high level (= 3.76) and a high level in all aspects, the highest mean was assurance (= 4.02), followed by responsiveness (=3.98), safety (=3.97), reliability (=3.84), empathy (= 3.77), comfort (= 3.62), readiness (= 3.53) and tangibility (= 3.52) respectively.

V. MULTIPLE REGRESSION RESULTS RELATING TO THE SERVEPERF AND INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS

The regression model for analyzing the relationship between passenger satisfaction and personal information has been

employed using passenger satisfaction as dependent variable and SERVEPERF and industry-specific dimensions as independent variables.

TABLE III: REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS MULTIPLE SATISFACTION BY USING MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	101.936	7	14.562	19480.554	.000*
Residual	.174	233	.001		
Total	102.110	240			

*significant at the 0.05 level

From Table 3, the results show that overall satisfaction has a linear relationship with independent variable group with statistical significance at the level of 0.05 and able to create linear prediction equations, which from multiple regression analysis and can calculate the multiple correlation coefficient as follows.

TABLE IV: ANALYSIS OVERALL PASSENGER SATISFACTION BY USING STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

variable	B	SE	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.019	.011	1.664	.097*
Empathy (X_1)	.157	.004	36.112	.000*
Tangibility (X_2)	.145	.004	39.282	.000*
Reliability (x_3)	.138	.004	31.936	.000*
Readiness for providing service (X_4)	.156	.003	44.749	.000*
Assurance (X_5)	.166	.004	38.739	.000*
Comfort (X_6)	.123	.004	33.310	.000*
Responsiveness (X_7)	.112	.004	26.141	.000*
		$r=.999$	$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = .998$	
		$R^2=.998$	$SE = .027$	

*significant at the 0.05 level

Comparison of customer satisfaction with services of U-Tapao Airport Classified by SERVEPERF and industry-specific dimensions. Variables that have a positive relationship with overall passenger satisfaction (Y) with statistical significance at the level of 0.05 is the highest level of Empathy (X_1), Tangibility (X_2), Reliability (X_3), Readiness for providing service (X_4), Assurance (X_5), Comfort (X_6) and responsiveness (X_7) respectively. All 7 variables can predict the overall satisfaction (Y) by 99.8%

Overall satisfaction (Y) which is written as an equation to predict total satisfaction (Y) as follows:

$$Y = .019 + .157 X_1 + .145 X_2 + .138 X_3 + .156 X_4 + .166 X_5 + .123 X_6 + .112 X_7$$

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Passengers' satisfaction with the service quality of U-Tapao international airport, Ban Chang District, Rayong Province, it is revealed that the majority of passengers satisfied with the overall level of performance and service quality. This was probably because most of the users come to use the service 1

time; therefore, they are kind of lack of enough experience. Furthermore, U-Tapao international airport is a state enterprise which are mainly controlled by Navy army, therefore customer satisfaction in sense of service readiness and tangibility aspect come up with low score. Airport passenger mostly satisfied with this service in aspect of assurance. Especially, the airport staff are polite. This may be because most airport passenger contact the staff directly and staff politeness is considered as the image of U-Tapao Airport. As a result of this, the airport should focus on more courteous communication with passenger than other areas.

An issues of service quality impact on service performance, production and operation costs, customer satisfaction and loyalty and company profits (Huang, Wu & Hsu 2006). Furthermore, it is recognized that customer satisfaction will lead to long term relationship with place (Mcintyre, 1989) and repeat purchase (Chioveanu, 2008). As a consequence, executive management should concerned with customer satisfaction (Gustafsson & Johnson 2004; Wirtz & Lee 2003) and not only uses customer perceptions but also customer satisfaction levels to develop company performance (Agus & Abdullah 2000). Companies often evaluate customer satisfaction and then offer better products and services than customers require, a strategy which leads to greater customer satisfaction (Agus & Abdullah, 2000). Cronin and Taylor (1992) note that consumers do not always make purchasing decisions based purely on their satisfaction levels, but that they also do so based on their perceptions of service quality. Jones & Sasser (1995) noted the importance of achieving customer satisfaction by providing high levels of service quality by demonstrating that customers who are absolutely satisfied are likely to repurchase six times more than those who are merely satisfied with a service. Furthermore, customer satisfaction leads to greater customer loyalty (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Boulding, Ajay, Richard & Zeithaml, 1993; Yi 1990) which in turn results in increased company revenue (Fornell 1992).

For a further understanding of passenger satisfaction and customer loyalty which lead to repeating visit. The value and mean and standard deviation were found. The measurement was based on the mean score on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 to measure the passenger satisfaction. As the result revealed that the respondents gave rating in proportion as high as 80.33% and passengers' satisfaction with the overall service was at a high level (= 3.76) and a high level in all aspects.

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study adapted a model to find an empirical understanding of passenger satisfaction at U-Tapao international airport as case study. The literature review the questionnaire survey and the statistical analysis provide support for the framework including dependent variable identified by SERVEPERF and industry-specific dimensions (safety, comfort and readiness for providing service) In this study, the survey result illustrated that the every factors influence toward the overall satisfaction except safety, because

most of passengers really understand U-Tapao is a state enterprise controlled by government and Navy army; therefore, passengers do not worry too much in field of safety. The results of this research can be summarized as a suggestion for use in further studies as follows: (1) In term of tangibility aspects, the facilities of the airport can attract the passengers to use the service, which is the least satisfied users of this aspect. U-Tapao Airport should therefore provide airport facilities such as shops or product stores and various services to help attract more passengers. (2) Reliability, it should be measures to solve specific problems occurred to service users in a timely and effective manner such as public relations points or adding more staff to help solve passenger problems. Focus on increasing the area for users to contact more than the area of employees.

(3) Responsiveness, U-Tapao should increase the number of skilled staff to solve passenger problems immediately. (4) Assurance aspect which service users are most satisfied with; therefore, it should be a selection of personnel with good personality for providing the service, providing good training and emphasizing employees dress in appropriate uniforms. In addition, management should support both financial and non-financial incentives to create morale in the work for employees as well.

(5) U-Tapao airport might focus on security to increase the protection system of the station such as fire extinguisher and emergency door sign. (6) Airport should better care for each passenger, such as organizing additional survey staff to look after the passenger. (7) In sense of comfort, U-Tapao should provide bus or public transportation to link between airport and various places such as shopping malls, many check in places in Pattaya. (8) At the present time, many tour groups of Republic of China come to use this airport, airport therefore add more chinese international restaurants to meet chinese want.

From managerial perspectives, many researches states that customer satisfaction based on service quality (Caruana et al., 2000), the result of the study, consistent to the notion of Dagger et al. (2007) "top management level should pay attention to service quality and customer satisfaction constructs as determinants of behavior intention". Similarly, U-Tapao international airport management must satisfy passenger with high service quality.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study adds a number of important concepts to extant literature and provides important contributions for U-Tapao international airport management, it is suggested that it should compare the passenger satisfaction of other airports. Furthermore, customer satisfaction and clients' want should be assessed continuously and consistently in order to obtain current information and use it as supplementary information for providing sufficient resources and equipment to meet the needs of customers. Finally, independent variables can be identified using an appropriate qualitative and quantitative

method regarding service quality and customer satisfaction because they vary across culture and industries.

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