

IN-FLIGHT SERVICES PROJECT: CREATIVE EDUCATION FROM AIRLINE CABIN CREW'S SERVICES TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Challenges were happening with traditional universities through Thailand when they have faced serious threats from the shrink of student populations and disruptive innovations. They are in highly competitive environment because they have excess supply over lesser demand from new students. In order to survive in the difficult time and attract more students, several universities focus on creating positive classroom environment and learning outcomes. The subject Cabin Crew Management in Airline Business Program and its in-flight services project are introduced in this paper as an example for successful integration between various teaching approaches and airline cabin crew services training to build creative education. Experience-based learning, problem-based learning, and cooperative learning are used for motivating and inspiring learners. A cabin service mock-up which is the imitation of Boeing 737-800 with necessary onboard facilities are used as a virtual laboratory for students to practice their customer service skills. Students are assessed and gain both feedbacks from lecturers, team members, and other guests who participated in the in-flight services project. This course is also designed to be a marketing tool to promote and to differentiate the program from competitors.

Keywords: In-flight Service, Creative Education, Cabin Crew's Services Training

INTRODUCTION

Challenge on Thai Higher Education

The drop of students enrollments to Thai universities have become one of challenges for Thai Higher Education because number of students means the revenue for operating the business. This is the threat that can lead several non-elite universities, traditional universities and unpopular one that failed to change, to the end of their businesses. The major causes of this problem is the declining birth rate in Thailand. Since the year 1997 or in the year of Thai financial crisis or 'Tom Yum Kung Crisis' to the year 2017, birth rate in Thailand decreased to be around 600,000 - 700,000 persons per year, while the average of the birth rate in Thailand before 1997 was 1,000,000 persons per year. Council of University Presidents of Thailand showed data that illustrated the situation of over supply from Thai universities to less demand of Thai students since 2010 to 2017. The worse year is 2017 because there were around 55,000 vacant seats, while Thai universities offered 136,030 seats.

Preparing and embracing for change is the best solution for Thai traditional universities to survive in the difficult time of the decrease of student enrollment and upcoming disruptive from online learning. Thailand Deputy Education Minister Udom Kachitorn mentioned some recommendations for traditional university to have new effective ways to teach and learn by teaching some soft skills such as leadership and communication, giving experience-based learning to students, creating inspiration and positive mindset, using teaching and learning method that focuses on learning outcomes, and designing more responsive curriculum to business and social requirement. Similar to Subhash Kak said that universities will find themselves asked to build specific programs for particular companies¹. Likewise the ideas of Dr. Willard R. Dagggett said smart people in colleges are doing a good job preparing students for the futures². Moreover, the article The Future of Universities: The Digital Degree supports that students like a course that help them to get a job³.

In-flight Services Project which is a part of the course of Cabin Crew Management is designed as a group assignment to create remarkable learning experience for students. Wallas' four stage of the creative

¹ Kak, S. (2018). Universities must Prepare for a Technology-Enabled Future. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/universities-prepare-for-a-technology-enabled-future-89354>

² Dagggett, R. W. (2010). Preparing Students for their Technological Future. Retrieved from <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Preparing%20Students%20for%20Tech%20Future%20white%20paper.pdf>

³ The Economist. (2014). The Future of Universities: The Digital Degree. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2014/06/27/the-digital-degree>

process consisting of “Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, and Verification” was applied to the course outline in order to prepare students to be able to understand the concept and processes before performing this complicated task.

METHODOLOGY

Empirical study was used from the beginning of the course to the final week that students presented their in-flight services projects. Lecturer observed the development of teaching and learning in each class, recorded on all activities, and described all movements on a weekly report. The assessment of students’ learning outcome was conducted after they attended the Cabin Crew Management course and completed their in-flight services projects. All of 117 students were asked to answer questionnaires in order to assess their self-development in five domains following Thai Qualification Framework of Higher Education, including ethic and morals, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, and information technology skills.

The objectives for this empirical study and assessment on student’s learning outcome are as follows;

1. Investigating the level of learning success from learners, and
2. Analyzing the data for further development on creative education approach.

Creative Education Theory and Framework

If universities decide to manage something to increase the number of student enrollment and to promote their brands, building environment of effective teaching and learning by creative education, and blending with technology from free online media such as youtube, is practical and economical. Creative education is the approach that focus on creative thinking with the content of problem solving⁴. Students have freedom to learn, creating a new classroom atmosphere where thinking, questioning, and imaging is encouraged. Creative education also promotes student’s motivation, self-esteem and the skills⁵. Teacher has significant role to help learners to develop their creative habits and skills by providing the appropriate level of challenge and using question to trigger creative thinking⁶. It is about children experiencing the joy of discovery, solving problem, and being creative⁷.

Creative education is a main concept for designing the in-flight services project and the course outline of Cabin Crew Management. The objectives of the course are clearly aim to build competency and provide soft skills that match with airline business needs. In another word, this course aims to prepare students to their future workplaces. Both objectives and processes of building the course outline and the project were connected with Wallas’ four-stage model of creative process consisting of “Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, and Verification”. The model was created by Professor Graham Wallas, a social psychologist and educationalist, to show the development of the creative thinking. Wallas mentioned his idea of this model on his book ‘The Art of Thought’ as;

“The first in time I shall call Preparation, the stage during which the problem was ‘investigated...in all directions’; the second is the stage during which he was not consciously thinking about the problem, which I shall call Incubation; the third, consisting of the appearance of the ‘happy idea’ together with the psychological events which immediately preceded and accompanied that appearance, I shall call Illumination. And I shall add a fourth stage, of Verification...⁸”

The four phases of Wallas’ four-stage model of creative process can be described as follows;

Preparation - It is a time to gather information from various sources in order to understand and define the problem.

Incubation - The information is put together. It may take short time or long time during this stage to let the brain free from any interference. Then, subconscious mind will manipulate the problem until a new idea pops into the head.

Illumination - This is the moment when small ideas from Incubation become clearer and are connected for being a solution of the problem.

Verification - The solution is tested whether it is proper or improper to use with the problem.

⁴ Tsai, K. C. (2015). A Framework of Creative Education. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283083533>

⁵ Roddovic-Markovic, M. (n.d.). Creative Education and New Learning as Means of Encouraging Creativity, Original Thinking and Entrepreneurship. Retrieved from http://www.worldacademy.org/files/Montenegro_Conferences

⁶ Cambridge International. (n.d.). Innovation and Creativity. Retrieved from <http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/images/426483>

⁷ Shaheen, R. (2010). Creativity and Education. Retrieved from https://file.scirp.org/pdf/CE20100300004_79654079.pdf

⁸ Amazon.com.(n.d.). The Art of Thought. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/Art-Thought-Graham-Wallas/dp/1910146056>

Wallas' four-stage model can be used as a guideline for the lecturer to plan the course outline and the project. It helps the lecturer to understand the movement of thought before he can support, challenge, and encourage students, rather than put the pressure on them.

From Cabin Crew Services Training to In-flight Services Project

Most airlines invest a big amount of money on training for cabin crew because they are airlines' representatives who have direct involvement with passengers through the flight. There are two main areas of training for cabin crew, including safety training and service training. These trainings aim to provide knowledge and skill for cabin crew who have role, responsibility, and duties to ensure that passengers are safe and feel comfortable while they travel to their destinations. New cabin crew are required to join and complete the initial training before they start flying. Initial training consists of lessons on safety and services, rule and regulation in airlines, company's policy, occupational health and safety, first aid training, medical training, and dangerous goods. Other experienced cabin crew are required to join and complete recurrent training or annual training in order to refresh and update new information in airline's safety and service.

In the part of safety training, airlines need to follow flight attendant training standard for commercial and business aviation which is controlled by civil aviation authority such as ICAO, EASA, or civil aviation authority of each country. In the part of service training, cabin crew training department of each airline will conduct their own classes, provide their own unique style of in-flight services, in-flight products, company's culture and policies which are different from other airlines. The initial training also depends on each airlines' policy and requirement, such as Singapore Airlines requires new cabin crew to attend four-month training, while Thai Airways need only two-month training.

Meanings of In-flight services that are defined on dictionaries are services during flight in an aircraft or ones that are provided on board airplane, and happening or available during the flight. Travel website as Daunless Jaunter defined in-flight services as offerings by an airline, both free and paid, that add to passengers' flying experience. Services items that airlines offer to passengers may include meals and beverages, in-flight entertainment, duty free shopping, comfortable seats, and other amenity kits. Cabin crew are assigned to deliver service item, hospitality, and personal touch to comfort and satisfy passengers. Providing flight information and help passengers to solve some problems regard to traveling to the destination are considered as cabin crew's duties. Cabin crew are appointed to create relationship with passengers and turn them to be advocacies by providing superior in-flight services experience.

In-flight services can be classified into 3 phases, including pre-flight service or on ground preparation, in-flight service or services during the flight, and post-flight services that are happened after the airplane land at the airport destination. During pre-flight service or on ground preparation, cabin crew prepare passenger's cabin and service products such as passengers' seat, pillows and blankets, reading materials, welcome drinks, and menus before passenger board the airplane. After take-off and seatbelt signs are switched off, cabin crew start meals and beverages service, duty free shopping, and after meal service for passengers' comfort and privacy. After the landing, cabin crew farewell and ensure that passenger are safe when they disembark the airplane.

In-flight services seem to be complicated task, especially for brand new cabin crew without any flying experience and working experience in airline business. Thus, cabin service instructors need to teach both knowledge and skills that are necessary for new cabin crew to perform tasks. According to airlines' qualification requirement for cabin crew, Emirates wants persons who are adaptive, confident, flexible, friendly, very keen to help others, and can adapt to new people⁹, similar to Thai Airways' requirement on persons who have pleasant personality with good human relations¹⁰.

According to the data gathering from Abinitio Service Training: Emirates Service Delivery Manual, In-flight Service Operation Procedure (ISOP) of Thai Airways, their cabin services training programs aims to build cabin crew's qualification by these following topics.

⁹ Emirates Group Career. (2017). Careers, Cabin Crew. Retrieved from <http://www.emiratesgroupcareers.com/cabin-crew/>

¹⁰ Thai Airways. (2018). https://www.thaiairways.com/en_SG/about_thai/public_information/general.page

Emirates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interacting with passengers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional awareness - Cross cultural understanding - Airline terminology - Cabin familiarization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Galley operator's duties and responsibilities - Sequence to other meal service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interacting with colleagues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional image - Cross cultural communication - Public announcement - Duty free <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food and beverage service skills - Service flow - Special meal service
Thai Airways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time table - Passenger handling - Aircraft familiarization - In-flight communication equipment - Cross culture communication - Manner and etiquette - Working routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Air traffic geography - Baggage in general - Aircraft system - Customer relations - Galley equipment - Basic food and wine knowledge , and service etiquette - Preparation for trainee flight

Cabin service simulator or cabin service mock-up is an important facility for cabin crew service training, and also for safety training. It is built and designed to offer a realistic passenger cabin environment, functional cabin service equipments and training devices, including multiple cabin class passenger seating, functional In-Flight Entertainment (IFE) systems, functional galleys, configured per customer specifications, lavatory mock-ups, functional cabin lighting, functional galley ovens, coffee makers, and other equipment, functional overhead bins, cabin attendant stations, and camera and microphone systems for observation and post-training debrief¹¹. Full functional simulator helps cabin crew to be familiar with working environment on the airplane and feel confident to deliver both safety and service when they work on the real flight. It is also an effective training tool that for developing passenger handling skills and giving experience of team working and team communication to trainees.

Bridging In-flight Services Project to Creative Process

A cabin service mock-up was build at International College of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Nakhon Pathom Education Center since 2016, to promote new learning atmosphere that encourage students to gain knowledge, skills, and experiences for working at the airport and on the airplane. The simulator was equipped with 44 seats configuration, including 4 business class seats and 36 economy class seats. All seats were fitted with personal television screens. There are 4 emergency exits, a functional galley, a lavatory mock-up, functional cabin lighting, functional overhead compartments, camera and microphone systems which are controlled from cabin crew working station.

Students attend 3 hours classroom within 15 weeks during the course. They use the mock-up as a classroom since the first week until 10th weeks, to gain knowledge about cabin crew's role, responsibilities, tasks, and other aviation knowledge. Topics to teach students during this period were selected from Emirates Service Delivery Manual and In-flight Service Operation Procedure (ISOP) of Thai Airways. A group of three airline business lecturers who used to work as cabin crew and three active cabin crew, one of them is from Emirates and others from Thai Airways, assessed and identify knowledge and skills that are required for cabin crew position and also other service jobs in airline business. This is a co-creation and collaboration between academic world and industry to design the course and prepare students to be able to work in the future. Teaching them these knowledge and skills can be called as the Preparation phase of Wallas' four-stage model of creative process.

Group assignment sheets for in-flight services project were given to students on the 2nd week in order to inform them in advance and remind them about the problem that they need to help each other to solve. Instructions, objectives, grading criteria, and time limitation within two hours on this project are clearly shown and explained to students. This problem-based learning can help students to develop new skills and knowledge during the problem solving process¹², and it can help students understand the link between what they are learning that day with similar assignments for their entire post-secondary career and beyond, in real world situation¹³. The assignment is considered as a problem that is presented to students

¹¹ Newton Design. (2017). Cabin Service Trainers. Retrieved from <http://newton-design.com/cabin-service-trainers/>

¹² Northern Illinois University. (n.d.). Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Retrieved from https://www.niu.edu/facdev/pdf/guide/strategies/problem_based_learning.pdf

¹³ Downing, K. E. (2013). Using Problem-Based Learning to Facilitate Student Learning. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/conferences/confsandpreconfs/2013/papers/Downing_Using.pdf

first, and then the lecturer will provide them topics which have information and details that students need to use to solve the problem. This is the period that students start engaging with problem and it is the start of the Incubation phase of Wallas' four-stage model of creative process.

Students are asked to show the first presentation of the plan on their projects on 11th week due to the lecturer wants to assess students understanding and their progress of learning. All group members are motivated to talk about their ideas, whether they are practical or unrealistic. Those ideas are about the design and concept of services, safety duties, each group member's role and responsibility, meals and beverages for serving to passengers, and activities for entertaining their passengers. This time the lecturer will take the role as a facilitator who guide students with reasonable solutions, and advise them to connect every idea with topics in course outline. Opinions from all class members are also welcomed because it is the way to promote peer-to-peer learning.

The lecturer also supports students to develop their creative thinking by organizing in-flight services demonstration for them. This demonstration is conducted by three active cabin crew, who are guest speaker, at the cabin mock-up. They perform as a team of cabin crew work on a flight and students perform as their passengers. The demonstration aims to provide in-flight experience for students. They can observe while three cabin crew working and interacting with passengers. They have chances to ask questions to cabin crew at the end of the demonstration and develop their deep understanding and extend their ideas at the same time with classmates. This is the period that students can explore and discuss with the group members of what information that they need more for developing their second presentations.

Some extra conditions and restrictions are added during the period of second plan development in order to challenge students. For example, some groups of students need to fill 44 seats at the mock-up with 44 high school students, while some need to fill all seats with graduated students from other colleges. The budgets for each group to run the project are also limited. Sometimes, the lecturer challenges them by assigning each group to prepare meals and beverage under the theme of Thai culture, Asian food, or international holidays destinations. To challenge students means to drive students to think in a convergent rather than divergent fashion¹⁴, to encourage students to be expressive and innovative, and to let them play and experiment in learning.

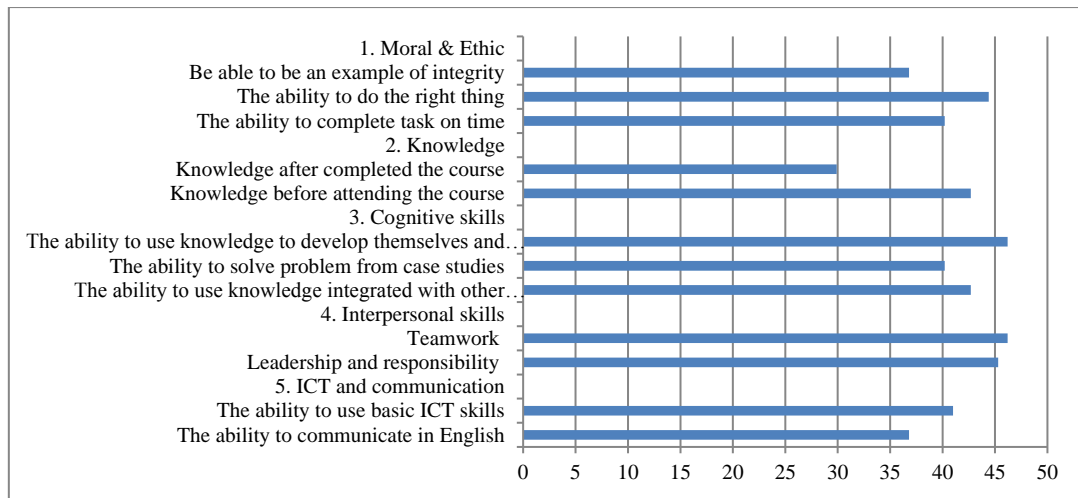
After students gained more information, experience, and confidence from in-flight services demonstration, they will be able to create more practical plan on their second presentations. This is the Illumination phase that they can connect knowledge, skills, and experience to promote their competencies. After the lecturer approved the second plan, students are allowed to practice in-flight services with their groups at the cabin mock-up for two weeks. This is Verification phase that students can test their plans and discuss more with the lecturer and group members to develop the project. It is a significant time for students to build their skills on team work, communication, leadership, and problem solving. Moreover, students are encourage practicing their social skills while exchanging ideas, and help each other to prepare for the day that they have to present the project on the final week.

Learning outcome assessment

The students were asked to express high level self-development and low-level self development (very low level of development - 1, very low level of development - 5).

¹⁴ Tan, L. S. (2016). Fostering Creativity in the Classroom for High Ability Students. Retrieved from www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/6/4/36/pdf

TABLE I
LEVEL OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT



CONCLUSION

Creative education and in-flight services project work well on students learning development because it can change ordinary classroom to have more active, creative, and attractive environment. Although, students have more social activities with group members and the lecturer by cooperative learning and problem-based learning approaches while they are in the class, the lecturer need to introduce more ideas of blend learning for them in order to prepare them for digital era and to advance the course by using technology. Moreover, the lecturer should combine some on-line learning activities with in-flight services projects, such as group video conference, pre-recorded lectures, and on-line quizzes. If group discussion, lectures, and quizzes can be delivered to students on-line, the classroom time is more likely to use for structured exercises that focused on enhancing English communication skills which is the weak point for most students.

Lecturers in creative education also work extra because they need to think several steps ahead to create effective teaching and learning environment, designing both offline and on-line course content, and guiding the learning experience of individual students¹⁵. They need to change the role to be facilitators who help students to learn and encourage them to be active learners. The lecturer in the class of Cabin Crew Management also performs as a coach while students experienced some conflicts or problems during their group projects. Mindset of team spirits, leadership, people skills, and positive attitude are embedded into students' personalities.

Students have freedom to think and reflect their comments in creative education class. Listening attentively to students are another lesson that help the lecturer to find some brilliant ideas that can use for making the course better. Students used to tell that they expect to have more social activities in the class, such as group discussion, group presentation, and game, because they can break the ice and build good relationship among them before doing the in-flight services project together. They also tell the lecturer to use both individual grading for a group project instead of using only group evaluation because it can promote group participation, individual ideas contribution, and team cohesion. This is the fascinating outcome from creative education that turn students to become partners who have co-creation on the course with the lecturer.

To advance this course can be a small starting point to develop the whole Airline Business program. It is the beginning of the change for the challenges from on-line learning era. According to Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School and the author of the book "The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out" predicted, "Fifteen years from now (2012), more than half of the universities (in America) will be in bankruptcy¹⁶". MOOC or Massive Open Online Courses have been grown rapidly and it has high possibility to replace some traditional universities and unpopular private universities that do not change and embrace new technology.

¹⁵ Steward, S. M. (n.d.). What is Blend Learning?. Retrieved from <https://www.mindflash.com/elearning/what-is-blended-learning>

¹⁶ Davis, J. & Farrell, M. (n.d.). Riding the Tide of Disruption in Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://www.dukece.com/insights/riding-tide-disruption-higher-education/>

Changing to better quality of teaching and learning is a solution for Thai universities. One part of better quality building comes from lecturer's dedications and passion to change traditional classroom to be an creative thinking space. Therefore, total quality is a keyword for developing Thai universities sustainably during the difficult time.

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