

**A Comparison between Perceptions and Expectations
of Instructional Management of English Courses
of the General Education Program
at Phranakhon Rajabhat University**

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Abstract

Students enter higher education with expectations which may not always accord with what they actually experience at university. The objectives of this study were to 1) investigate student perceptions and expectations of instructional management of the English courses of the general education program at Phranakhon Rajabhat University and 2) compare the students' perceptions to their expectations. The population size was 10,007 undergraduates comprising non-English majors and non-international college students at this institution. The sample derived through cluster sampling was constituted of 600 individuals; only 505 of them properly completed and returned the questionnaire. The statistics used for data analysis were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and paired *t*-test. The findings were as follows: 1) Concerning perceptions, the highest rated aspect was the teachers and the lowest one was the learning environment. Regarding expectations, the highest-rated aspect was the teachers, and the lowest-rated one was the learning environment.

2) Every aspect of the perceptions was significantly lower than its respective aspect of the expectations. Moreover, the greatest expectation-perception difference arose in learning environment, and the slightest one in the teachers with p -value of .000.

Keywords: perception, expectation, service quality, general education, English course, instructional management

Introduction

General education (GE) at university level is often regarded as courses equipping students with a broad range of knowledge, abilities, predispositions and attitudes that we expect of any university graduates. GE, as Laird and Garver (2010: 248) note, exposes students to a variety of disciplinary-based content and practices, aiming to enhance students' skills necessary for life-long learning and help them to become effective citizens in a fast-moving interconnected world.

However, there are some problems about instructional management of the GE curriculum in Thai universities. The report on the GE framework in line with the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, often known as TQF: HED (Tawara et al., 2013) addresses several problems needing urgent action in order to meet the expected learning outcomes. In particular, these problems lie in teachers, students, teaching approaches, and context or learning environment. Moreover, there is inadequate support from top administrators of universities due to their lack of awareness of its importance. Furthermore, the learning outcomes identified in educational quality assurance are not in consonance with GE concepts. Also, the Office Higher Education Commission provides no close supervision.

In addition, Dulayakasem (2013: 52) lists the problems about GE courses as follows. First, some universities consider GE a waste of time and money. Second, many universities do not acknowledge its importance; thus, mostly novice teachers are assigned to teach GE courses whilst experienced senior ones do not teach GE courses but major subjects. Third, the class size of GE courses is often excessive. Therefore, the teacher sometimes cannot make the whole class focus on ongoing lessons. Fourth, many students feel they are forced to study these GE courses, for they do not recognize its importance. Last, teachers lack understanding of the rationale behind instructional management of GE courses.

Like other service industries, higher education institutions are confronted with increasingly intense competition. At present, universities in Thailand, according to Mala (2019), are struggling with major challenges: a significant decrease of the number of college-aged students and technological disruption. Also, higher education institutions are affected by humanistic characteristics of students which have obviously changed (Zhao 2012). Yildiz and Kara (2014) argue that those higher education institutions that fail to provide high quality services will be marginalized and their effectiveness in achieving organizational goals will be jeopardized.

Nowadays, educational service has become a part of the service sector. Students look for educational institutions that will provide them with quality education. According to Sakthivel et al. (2005), students are considered the main customers of institutions. The issue of service excellence is becoming important for universities, since it influences students' decision on purchasing services. Against this background, it is essential for universities to understand what students' value in their university experience.

To maintain competitiveness of higher education institutions, one of possible solutions for this difficult circumstance is the application of service quality model. This solution benefits both universities and students. According to Parasuraman et al. (1991), understanding customer expectations is a prerequisite for delivering superior service, for customers compare perceptions with expectations when they evaluate the services. Meanwhile, Letcher and Neves (2010) found that student satisfaction with the courses helps to build self-confidence and that self-confidence helps students develop useful skills and acquire knowledge.

Phranakhon Rajabhat university is a public university located in Bangkok. It was formerly known as Phranakhon Teacher College. This institute has several important missions, one of which is to provide educational opportunities for people at large. The undergraduates of this university are required to take GE courses at least 30 credits comprising 10 compulsory courses (27 credits) covering various disciplines namely language, humanities and social sciences, science and technology, an interdisciplinary course, and physical education; and one elective course (3 credits). It is worth noting that English is a compulsory subject in most educational institutions in Thailand. Undergraduates at Phranakhon Rajabhat university are required to study two English courses i.e. *English for Everyday Communication* and *English for Study Skills Development* offering six credits in total. This amount is one fifth of the total of 30 credits of the GE program. However, Charuchinda et al. (2019) reported that the average score of the summative test of the course of *English for Everyday Communication* in the semester 2/ 2018 was less than half of the total score (or 46.58 percent), which was the lowest average score when it was compared to GE courses of all the other disciplines.

A handful of research has been conducted in many countries in order to comprehend the quality of services in higher education. However, until recently it there are no systematic studies on student perceptions and expectations toward instructional management of GE English courses. This reveals the necessity of carrying out a study to shed light on the differences between student perceptions and expectations.

Motivated by the concept of service quality proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) which places the emphasis on a degree and direction of a discrepancy between customer's perceptions and expectations, this paper was to examine student perceptions and expectations toward the instructional management of the two English courses of the GE program at Phranakhon Rajabhat University concerning 1) teachers, 2) content knowledge, 3) assessment, and 4) learning environment. The findings would enable the university's administrators to formulate strategies toward the improvement of instructional management of the two GE English courses.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were twofold:

1. to investigate students' perceptions and expectations toward instructional management of the English courses of the GE curriculum at Phranakhon Rajabhat University, and
2. to determine whether the students' perceptions differ from their expectations.

Hypothesis

Students' perceptions differ from their expectations regarding instructional management of the English courses of the GE curriculum at the significance level .05.

Scope of the Study

This study was focused on the context of Phranakhon Rajabhat University, investigating only students' perceptions and expectations of instructional management of the English courses of the GE curriculum.

Related Literature

The term 'service quality' is defined by Parasuraman et al. (1985) as the degree and direction of a discrepancy between consumer's perceptions and expectations. These writers explain that the service quality is the difference between what consumers expect from the service when they were not a user of the service and what they perceive from the service while using it. The concept of service quality is summarized by Parasuraman, et al. (1988) as the following formula: Service Quality (SQ) = Perception (P) - Expectation (E).

According to Bitner et al. (1997), customer expectations are beliefs about service quality delivery that function as a standard or reference point against which performance is judged; customer perception is created when they evaluate the quality of the service. However, it becomes complex when the quality of a service is judged, for service is intangible (Hill 1991, Parasuraman et al. 1985). In addition, customer perception is changeable; thus, it needs reviewing from time to time (Zeithaml & Bitner 1997).

The body of literature concerning effective instructional management is diverse and extensive. For instance, Hill et al. (2003) found four most influence factors in provision of quality education: (1) quality of teachers, (2) student engagement with learning, (3) social/emotional system which means students found support from the universities and gained good learning experience (4) resources of IT and library. Also, various writers have listed several elements of effective teaching. For example,

Chalardkid (2005) writes instructional management includes the following elements: 1) teachers, 2) learners, 3) learning activities, and 4) the context. Clawson (2008) points out that there are seven key contributors serving as fundamental elements in teaching: 1) institutional culture, 2) program culture, 3) instructors, 4) students, 5) materials, 6) setting, and 7) methodology.

However, this research covered four elements, i.e. 1) teachers, 2) content knowledge, 3) assessment, and 4) learning environment. The definitions of these terms are given as follows:

Teachers. Successful teachers are defined as those who are active in presenting, explaining, illustrating, and reinforcing concepts. A large body of research has shown that most effective way to enhance student learning directly relates to teacher performance (Cuttance 2001).

Content knowledge. This term refers to the body of knowledge and information that teachers teach and that students are expected to learn in a given subject. Content knowledge embraces facts, concepts, theories and principles that are taught and learned in specific academic courses (Glossary of Education Reform 2016).

Assessment. This term refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that an educator uses to evaluate, measure, and record the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students. (Glossary of Education Reform 2015).

Learning environment. This term is widely used in educational and instructional psychology to capture the idea that a social and physical context affects student learning. In general, a learning environment is regarded as a particular place where students can learn by using a variety of information resources and tools that are designed and allocated in the pursuit of learning objectives (Seel 2012).

Methodology

This research is a survey study of which the methodology is described as follows:

The context of this study

Phranakhon Rajabhat University has four faculties: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, Faculty of Industrial Technology, and Faculty of Management Science, along with two colleges, i.e. Teacher Education College and International College.

The instructional management of the two aforementioned GE English courses is described as follow: First, time allowed in each course is 45 hours over 16 weeks. Second, the teacher is required to cover all contents as stated in the course specifications. Third, a typical English class has more than fifty students. In some classes, there are up to 70 students. Fourth, very often English classes are heterogeneous. Students are varied in terms of area of emphasis, level of English proficiency, and attitudes toward learning English. Fifth, physical conditions of classrooms may not always facilitate group-work activities or allow the teacher to move around freely, for student seats are not movable. Sixthly, basic classroom equipment includes a projector, a microphone, and a speaker. Last, the teacher is the only person who performs instruction throughout a three-hour session in a large classroom, which has no teacher assistants.

Population and sampling

The population was a total of 10,007 students in the four faculties and the College of Teacher Education, comprising non-English majors and non-international college students. This study did not include English majors and international college students, since it was assumed that these students had motivation to study English.

Thus, the English language proficiency of the population might not have been very high. The population were students in their second, third, and fourth years of study. The research did not include first year student, for during the period of data collection, these students had not yet been completed any GE English courses.

The sample derived by cluster sampling was 600 students who were asked to fill out a questionnaire. And only 505 students managed to do so properly, giving a response rate of 84.17 percent.

Instrumentation

The research instrument was a questionnaire eliciting student perceptions and expectations toward instructional management of the English courses of the GE curriculum at Phranakhon Rajabhat University. It consisted of three parts:

Part I: Personal information. It comprised checklist questions asking the respondents to identify their gender, year of study, faculty, student type, and English courses already taken. This part was to capture the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Part II: Perceptions and expectations. This part featured levels of agreement on a five-point Likert scale. It covered four aspects: 1) teachers, 2) content knowledge, 3) assessment, and 4) learning environment. This part was to gain information about student perceptions and expectations of English courses of the GE program.

Part III: An open-ended question. This part was to elicit information about students' opinions on the instructional management of the GE English courses.

The questionnaire was reviewed and evaluated for its appropriateness or applicability by three experts in the field of English language teaching who had been in charge of GE English courses at this university for at least five years. And their responses were taken into consideration. Revisions were then made according to

their suggestions. Afterwards, the researchers ran a pilot study with a sample of 30 individuals before conducting actual research.

The mean values are interpreted according to Best (1997:147) as to the following details: 4.50 – 5.00 representing very high, 3.50 – 4.49 representing high, 2.50 – 3.49 representing middle, 1.50 – 2.49 representing low, and 1.00 – 1.49 representing very low.

The reliability of every individual aspect of these perceptions and expectations, calculated by using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Reliability of each construct calculated by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Construct	No of items	Perception	Expectation
1. Teachers	10	.922	.933
2. Content knowledge	8	.893	.920
3. Assessment	8	.838	.925
4. Learning environment	6	.890	.906

According to Table 1, all the Cronbach Alpha reliability values ranged from 0.838 to 0.933. Churchill (1979) maintained that a reliability estimate of 0.80 or more was acceptable. Hence, these reliability results were supported.

Data collection

The data collection took place during the first semester of the academic year 2018. The data collectors explained purposes of this survey to the sample and asked for their cooperation. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 600 individuals and collected on the spot. Only 505 copies were valid and employed as data for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data from Part I of the questionnaire asking the respondents about their personal information were analyzed by using frequency and percentage. The data from Part II, asking about their perceptions and expectations, were analyzed by using mean and standard deviation. In addition, a paired *t*-test was employed to identify discrepancies between the respondents' perceptions and their expectations. The data in Part III gained through an open-ended question was analyzed by using frequency.

Results

The results were as follows:

Table 2

Demographic data and other characteristics of the respondents (n=505)

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>P</i>
Gender		
Male	220	43.6
Female	285	56.4
Year of study		
Second-year	139	27.5
Third-year	223	44.2
Fourth-year	143	28.3
Faculty		
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	79	15.6
Faculty of Science and Technology	113	21.5
Faculty of Industrial Technology	70	13.9

Table 2 (Continue)

Variable	n	P
Faculty of Management Science	170	33.7
College of Teacher Education	73	14.5
Student type		
Full-time	417	82.6
Part-time	88	17.4
English courses already taken		
English for Everyday Communication	505	100.0
English for Study Skills Development	345	68.3

Table 3

Perceptions, expectations and differences (n=505)

Construct	Perception		Expectation		Mean Dif.	t	p-value
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD			
1. Teachers	3.52	.73	3.84	.75	-0.31	9.47	.000
2. Content knowledge	3.48	.69	3.80	.76	-0.33	11.34	.000
3. Assessment	3.41	.73	3.79	.78	-0.38	10.02	.000
4. Learning environment	3.26	.82	3.76	.82	-0.50	12.26	.000
Overall	3.43	.64	3.80	.71	-0.37	12.67	.000

It finds that the mean of the overall perception is 3.43, indicating a middle level, and that of overall expectation is 3.80, which is high. Also, students'

perception expectation toward the teachers are the highest in their respective categories. Noticeably, the perception and expectation regarding learning environment are the lowest when compared to all the other aspects. Also, the expectation-perception gap analysis reveals that every aspect of the perceptions is lower than its respective aspect of the expectations at a significance level .05, with p -value .000. In particular, the greatest difference between perception and expectation exists in the aspect of learning environment whereas the least difference exists in that of the teachers.

Discussion

This study has explored the gap between perceptions and expectations toward instructional management of English courses of the GE curriculum at Phranakhon Rajabhat University. The findings of this study agree with the report on the general education framework in line with TQF: HEd (Tawara et al. 2013), which identifies that one of the problems of GE courses is the learning environment.

In this current research, the mean scores of the perception and expectation toward learning environment are the lowest when compared to all the others. It also finds that this aspect exhibits the widest expectation-perception discrepancy. Shown by mean differences of individual constructs of learning environment, the biggest difference exists in appropriateness of the number of students in a class (-0.792), followed by the appropriateness of physical condition for learner-centeredness (-0.781), the modernity and readiness of learning equipment (-0.431), the availability of learning resources outside the classroom (-0.430), the classroom atmosphere (-0.231), and the appropriateness of the course materials (-0.220). This finding is similar to that of Yousapronpaiboon (2013) who investigated service quality in

higher education in Thailand and found that a private university in Bangkok did not meet the expectations of its undergraduates. Yousapronpaiboon's study also found that the students had the highest expectations toward modern and up-to-date equipment.

The findings of the current research suggest that special attention be devoted to learning environment, especially the class size. In the context of this study, typical classrooms of English courses of the GE program have at least 50 students. In some classes, there can be up to 70 students. Although large classes help the university reduce instructor costs, allow the faculty members to efficiently use time, and help students make more friends and exchange their experience and knowledge, too large classes can produce negative results. Todd (2006: 2) researched into numbers of students in several articles about class sizes of EFL and found that a class with 40-60 students was considered large by the authors of these articles. Watanapokakul (2016: 204) found that teachers of EFL classes in a competitive institution in Thailand of which the admission standard was very high suggested that the class with more than 46.88 students was considered large and unmanageable. Nonetheless, teaching in a large class is not without consequences. A large body of research indicates its negative effects. According to Gámez's study, (2015) a higher ratio of teacher-to-student talking was associated with smaller language gains. Furthermore, the class size relates to the student confidence to 'speak up.' Harfitt (2012) conducted a study on the class size and language learning in Hong Kong, and suggested that reduced-size classes may well help to ease language learners' anxiety and assist them in overcoming 'face' issues. Also, Diette and Raghav (2014) found that relatively vulnerable students experienced larger negative effects from increases in class size.

Moreover, the appropriateness of physical condition for learner-centeredness and the modernity and readiness of learning equipment should be taken into account. Needless to say, the classroom physical condition more or less represents teaching models. In the context of this current study, GE classrooms follow conventional models. Student seats are always aligned in rows or fixed in certain places. Students face the teacher's desk in front with their backs to one another. The teacher's microphone cord is only a few meters long. And there is only one microphone for the whole class. This kind of classroom does not allow students and the teacher to move freely or allow the teacher to organize activities in which the teacher can closely interact with students and students interact with their classmates. Inevitably, students, especially in back rows in this kind of classroom can become passive participants in the learning process. Inevitably, the teachers often end up using a teacher-centered approach. Watanapokakul's study (2016: 210) reveals that teachers of large EFL classes emphasize the importance of classroom facilities for effective classroom management.

Conclusion

The results show that all individual aspects of the expectations were above their respective aspects of the perceptions. Their perception toward the teachers was the highest, and theirs toward the learning environment was the lowest. Meanwhile, they had the highest expectation toward the teachers, and the lowest one toward learning environment. In addition, the largest expectation-perception discrepancy was found in learning environment, especially of the appropriateness of the number of students in a class, the appropriateness of physical condition for learner-centeredness, and the modernity and readiness of learning equipment. Practically, these findings offer an

implication for the university's administrators to formulate suitable strategies to reduce the gap between student perceptions and expectations. Some alteration should be made in this study context, such as a reduction of class size and a creation of an active learning environment in order that the students will be equipped with lifelong learning skills, which is considered as a goal of general education.

Limitations and Recommendations

The findings of this study have provided important information about the perceptions and expectations toward the instructional management of the two GE English courses for this higher education institution. However, several limitations of this study are worth mentioning. First, this study suffered from lack of content analysis and employment of qualitative research methods, which could have supported the statistical significance and revealed insights about room for improvement. The researchers recommend that additional qualitative study be carried out. Second, this study confined itself to four elements of instructional management; it is advised that other elements should be studied. Third, this research captured only undergraduates at Phranakhon Rajabhat University. Further research into other contexts should be conducted so that the results are more generalizable.

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