

SATISFACTION OF THAI STUDENTS TOWARD MASTER'S DEGREE IN ECONOMICS (ENGLISH PROGRAM)

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ABSTRACT

Due to the opening of ASEAN Community and the integration of regional economies through the free movement of skilled labor in an English-mediated environment, the English program is part of Thai government's strategy for the country to thrive in the ASEAN Community.

The objectives of this study were to assess the graduate students' satisfaction toward microeconomics subject and their satisfaction toward Master's Degree in Economics (English Program) in the department of economics at Kasetsart university, Thailand. The methodology was a survey by collecting questionnaire and observation. The sample in this study was all six graduate students taking Microeconomics class. The survey found that most students lack of English proficiency because most of them had Bachelor's degree in Thai program. For Microeconomics class, students were very satisfied with the subject content, learning material, teaching method, teaching ability, caring of lecturer and lecturer-student relationship. Students were satisfied with the grade evaluation by quiz and class participation.

The most impressive thing was all lectures pay attention to teaching. Students was impressed with the method of evaluation final grade by the quiz and class participation.

Students suggested that the program should have a preparation course especially for those who did not have Bachelor's degree in economics. The reason for enrolling in this program because they expect a good job, want to boost their skills in English.

Keywords: Economics, English Program, Master's degree, Satisfaction, Thai Students

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the opening of ASEAN Community and the integration of regional economies through the free movement of skilled labor in an English-mediated environment, the English program is part of Thai government's strategy for the country to thrive in the ASEAN Community. The higher education is strongly affected by ASEAN Community. This has increased the competition among higher education institutions to adopt English program strategy to attract as many students as possible satisfying current students' needs and expectation.

In 2016, the department of economics at Kasetsart University, Thailand has implemented a new program, Master's degree in economics (English Program). There were only six Thai students in the first academic year. There were only one student had Bachelor's degree in Tropical Agriculture (International Program) and the other student had Bachelor's degree in economics (English Program). All of them had to enroll three subjects in the 500 level, i.e., microeconomics, macroeconomics and quantitative method In the first semester. Each class met for 3 hours once a week during a 16 week semester.

Literature Review

Students' satisfaction as a short term attitude, resulting from an evaluation of a students' educational experiences (Elliott and Healy, 2001). Students' satisfaction can be defined as a function of relative level of experiences and perceived performance about educational service during the study period (Carey, et al, 2002). Students' satisfaction is a multidimensional process which is influenced by different factors.

According to Walker-Marshall & Hudson (1999), Grade Point Average (GPA) is the most influential factor on student satisfaction. Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006), Marzo-Navarro, et al (2005) identified two groups of influences on students' satisfaction in higher education as personal and institutional factors. Personal factors include gender, age, preferred learning style, employment, their GPA. Institutional factors include promptness of the instructor's feedback, quality of instructions, teaching style and clarity of expectation. According to Wikins & Balakrishman (2013), quality of lecturers, quality of physical facilities and effective use of technology were key determinant factors of students' satisfaction. Garel a-Aracil, A (2009), Kuh, G. & Hu, S. (2001) identified that students' satisfaction in higher education is influenced by lecturer-student relationship, interaction with fellow students, quality of classroom, quality of feedback,

course content, library facilities and learning materials. According to Douglas, J. et al. (2006) and Palacio, A. (2002), flexible curriculum, teaching ability, university status, caring of faculty, independence, campus climate, student centeredness are identified as major determinants of students' satisfaction in higher education.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study were to assess the graduate students' satisfaction in microeconomics subject and their satisfaction in Master's Degree in Economics (English Program).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample in this study was six graduate students in Master's degree (English Program) in the department of economics, Kasetsart university. This English Program was the new program in the department of economics and these six students were the first group of this new program. The subject in this study was microeconomics a 500 level economics course. The class met for 90 minutes once a week during a 16 week semester. The reason to choose microeconomics subject in this study because I was the lecturer in this subject.

Data Analysis

A questionnaire survey and observation were used to assess the students' satisfaction. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part probed for students' personal data. The second part inquired about students' satisfaction in microeconomics subject. The third part inquired about students' satisfaction in Master's Degree in Economics (English Program) and the final part was open-ended questions to elicit students' comments.

Questionnaire responses used a five-point Likert scale implemented to assess students' satisfaction toward microeconomics subject and their satisfaction toward Master's Degree in Economics (English Program).. The respondents answered, on this five-point Likert scale, indicating whether they were very unsatisfied, unsatisfied, moderate, satisfied or very satisfied by assigning weights. Then, a weighted average index (WAI) was applied to analyze students' satisfaction. Following (A. Black and Dean J. Champion, 1976), WAI has been computed using Equation (1).

$$I = (\sum s_i f_i) / N \quad (1)$$

where, $I = \text{WAI}$, such that $0 \leq I \leq 1$, s_i denotes the scale value at the i -th priority ranging from very unsatisfied, unsatisfied, moderate, satisfied to very satisfied, f_i denotes the frequency of the i -th priority and N is equal to the total number of observations = $\sum f_i$. WAI was used to transform the satisfaction of respondents from a nominal scale (very unsatisfied–very satisfied) into numeric scores. The scores were classified into five levels by providing weights, such as: 0–0.20 = very unsatisfied; 0.21–0.40 = unsatisfied; 0.41–0.60 = moderate; 0.61–0.80 = satisfied; 0.81–1 = very satisfied.

RESULTS

Students' Personal Data

There were 6 graduate students, 4 female and 2 male representing 66.67 percent and 33.33 percent of the students, respectively. The average age was 23.83 years. Half of the graduate students (3 students) had a Bachelor's degree in economics and the rest had a Bachelor's degree in applied mathematics, accounting, and tropical agriculture. There were only one student had Bachelor's degree in tropical agriculture (International Program) and the other student had Bachelor's degree in economics (English Program). Their undergraduate GPA was between 2.50 to 2.99.

Because this program is English program, we asked these graduate students to do their self assessment on their English proficiency as shown in table 1. All of the students thought their overall English skills and their listening had to improve. 83.33 percent of the students thought their speaking proficiency was poor. For their self assessment on writing, 50 percent of the students thought their writing was good.

Table 1 Students Self Assessment on Their English Proficiency

Student Self Assessment on Their English Proficiency	Level of Proficiency			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
1 Overall English skills	0	0	50.00	50.00
2. Listening	0	0	50.00	50.00
3. Speaking	0	0	16.67	83.33
4. Writing	0	50.00	33.33	16.67

Note: The number in table 1 represents percentage of students.

Students' Satisfaction in Microeconomics Subject

Microeconomics subject was one of the requirement subject they had to enroll. The class met for 90 minutes once a week during a 16 week semester. The lecture had the power point-handouts for the students. Table 2 showed the students' satisfaction in microeconomics subject. From table 2, students were very satisfied with the subject content, learning material, teaching method, teaching ability, caring of lecturer and lecturer-student relationship. Students were satisfied with the grade evaluation by quiz and class participation.

By observing, we found that all students were very pay attention to class. They were never absent. In the first few weeks, they answered the question by speaking in Thai but the lecturer did not allow. After they were familiar with the lecturer and their fellows, they tried to answer in English.

Table 2 Students' Satisfaction in Microeconomics Subject

Students' Satisfaction in Microeconomics Subject	Weighted Average Index (WAI)
1. subject content	0.83
2. learning material	0.87
3. teaching method	0.87
4. teaching ability	0.87
5. caring of lecturer	0.87
6. lecturer-student relationship	0.90
7. grade evaluation by quiz and class participation	0.73

Note: WAI: 0–0.20 = very unsatisfied; 0.21–0.40 = unsatisfied; 0.41–0.60 = moderate; 0.61–0.80 = satisfied; 0.81–1 = very satisfied

Students' Satisfaction in Master's Degree in Economics (English Program)

After they finished the first semester, they were very satisfied (WAI = 0.97) in Master's degree in economics (English Program). Before the year 2016, this Master's degree in economics was Thai program. We asked these graduate students about their opinions regarding whether the program should be in Thai or English program. Five students (83.33 percent) thought this Master's degree should be English program only one student who had Bachelor's degree in ac-

counting (Thai Program) was not sure that the program should be in Thai or English program.

For curriculum improvement, the students suggested that the program should have a preparation course especially for those who did not have Bachelor's degree in economics. The reasons for enrolling in this program because they expect a good job, want to boost their skills in English.

Students' Comments

The most impressive thing is that all lectures pay attention to teaching. Other impressive things such as the class size, kindness of the lecturers, academic advising.

They suggested that the program should have a preparation course especially for those who did not have Bachelor's degree in economics.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to assess the graduate students' satisfaction in microeconomics subject and their satisfaction in Master's Degree in Economics (English Program). A questionnaire survey and observation were used to assess the students' satisfaction. The sample in this study was graduate students in the department of economics, Kasetsart university.

For the students' satisfaction in microeconomics subject, the study found that students were very satisfied with the subject content, learning material, teaching method, teaching ability, caring of lecturer and lecturer-student relationship. Students were satisfied with the grade evaluation by quiz and class participation.

For their opinions regarding whether the program should be in Thai or English program. Five students (83.33 percent) thought this Master's degree should be English program only one student who had Bachelor's degree in accounting (Thai Program) was not sure that the program should be in Thai or English program.

The students commented that the program should have a preparation course especially for those who did not have Bachelor's degree in economics.

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