

What Factors Influence High School Students in Choosing Cram School in Thailand

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Abstract. The objective of this study was to provide cram school entrepreneurs with guidelines for formulating their business strategies to satisfy their customers. More specifically, this research investigated which factors influence students in junior high and high school when they choose a so-called "cram school" for tutoring; it also assessed whether the factors affecting each group are different. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to a sample group of 198 junior high students and 198 senior high students. A Likert scale was employed to assess the level of importance of factors involved in choosing a cram school and the Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine the differences in factors' degree of importance between junior high and senior high students. The results showed that the teaching-learning factor and location factor influence both groups' choice of cram school. This study suggests that cram school entrepreneurs should use student evaluations of teachers, academic content, and other services as feedback tools to improve the quality of cram schools, which in turn will benefit both students and the entrepreneurs' businesses. In addition, entrepreneurs should provide a suggestion box, e-mail address, and Facebook or Twitter account so that students and their parents can communicate directly with their school.

Keywords: Cram school, high school, students, entrepreneur, Thailand

1. Introduction

Commonly, parents think that, in order for their children to have a happy and secure future, the children must earn a good salary at a stable job. In order to achieve this, parents often feel that their children must graduate from a distinguished university. This leads parents to push their children to get into a good kindergarten, primary school and secondary school, in order to ensure that their children will get into a prestigious university. Currently, educational competition in Thailand is increasing dramatically among all ages, ranging from the kindergarten to the tertiary level. Because parents and children do not believe that education from these schools is enough to prepare their children to compete with others, parents are sending their kids to cram schools at a very young age. Therefore, cram schools in Thailand play important role in the education system.

According to the Office of the Private Education Commission, there were 1,243 cram schools across the country in 2009, an increase from 1,078 cram schools in 2007, 325 of which are located in Bangkok while the remaining 918 are in the provinces [1]. Even though the cram school business is prospering, it remains highly competitive because students have a variety of options. Consequently, entrepreneurs of cram schools must compete to satisfy their customers, the students. Student satisfaction with instructors, academic content, the learning environment, and the overall experience is the ultimate goal of cram school administrators and owners because customer satisfaction affects customers' trust [2] and their upcoming action intention [3]. Additionally, investing to retain students is more cost-effective than attracting new students [4]. Thus, a cram school must have a comprehensive understanding of students' needs and provide what they expect.

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Both junior (high school level 1-3) and senior high school (high school level 4-6) students go to cram schools, however, they may have slightly different reasons for choosing cram schools. The objective of this research was to study the cram school service usage behavior of junior and senior high school students and to compare the factors influencing their decisions when choosing cram schools. The results of this research will serve entrepreneurs of cram schools, enabling them to know what marketing stimuli attract their customers, since business success depends on a firm's understanding and meeting of customers' needs and demands [5] [6] [7] [8] [9].

2. Thailand's Education System

When Thai children turn 3 years old, their parents or guardians take them to study in the kindergarten level, which takes approximately 3 years. After that, children enter into "primary education", a level that takes approximately 6 years. After finishing primary education level 6, children further their study in "high education" for 6 consecutive years. The first 3 years of high education is called the "lower high education level" and includes the following subjects: Thai, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Buddhist Studies, Health Education, Physical Education, and Art Education. The next 3 years are categorized as the "upper high education" level. In this level, students can choose one of the following 3 fields according to their interest and aptitude: Science, Art/Math, and Art/Thai. To conclude, each student takes approximately 12 years to finish compulsory education as stipulated by the state. However, when high school students reach level 3, they still get to choose whether they want to pursue their study in vocational fields. For students wishing to further their study in the "university", they have to sit for entrance exams, which are operated by central system. The central system requires the 3-year GPAX from high school level 4-6 combined with the results of university admission tests in which the 3-year GPAX accounts for 20%. The Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) score accounts for 30%, the General Aptitude Test score (GAT) for 10-50%, and the Professional Aptitude Test (PAT) for 0-40% [1]. As a result, students in the upper high school level need to constantly maintain good grades each semester in order to increase their chance of getting into tertiary education institutes.

3. Literature Review

Cram schools in Thailand play an important role in the Thailand education. As is well known, customers are the reason for businesses to exist and that meeting customer needs is central to any business's success [5], [6], [7], [8]. Students are the customers of cram schools [3],[10], whose role is adapted to the concept of the service industry because students can assess the school and can choose to switch to another cram school at any time, so cram schools have to listen to students and provides products or services to meet or exceed their expectations, like lots of activities in other businesses. Major factors that are considered by students in their evaluation of cram schools are categorized into four factors: teaching-learning, price, place, and promotion [5]. For teaching-learning style, the application of the service industry model to cram schools means that students are customers and teachers are assumed to take the role of service providers. Previous research globally found that students think that the teachers' teaching methods of cram schools outperform that of their high schools [5]. For pricing factor, prices are perceived by students through the fairness of price to be paid. In general, cram schools in Thailand use going-rate pricing. For location factor, as with other service organizations, a convenient location is essential since the inseparability of production and consumption of services often call for dealing directly between the customer and service organization. Previous study has shown that students want cram schools to be located at the convenient areas [5]. For the promotion factor, cram schools in Thailand normally use the Internet and brochures for advertising.

4. Research Methodology

The population for this study is comprised of high school students in cram schools at Wannasorn Tower, Bangkok. The sample size consists of 198 junior high school students and 198 senior high school students collected from the questionnaires. In order to investigate factors influencing their decision in selecting cram schools, this research employed a Likert scale consisting of 5 levels, ranging from Level 1 for unimportant to

Level 5 for most important. The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to determine the differences of importance between junior and senior high school at the statistically significant level of 0.05.

5. Empirical Results

5.1. The Behavior of Cram School Use

The junior high school students sample group was comprised of females (56.1%) and males (43.9 %). The senior high school students sample group was comprised mostly of females (71.2 %) and some males (28.8 %). Some students in each sample group had started attending cram school when they were at the primary education level (43.4 % for junior high school students and 28.3% for senior high school students) because nowadays competition in the academic field is getting increasingly fierce and because students believe that studying in their own school is insufficient, indicating the deficiency of Thai public schools. Therefore, students are forced to attend cram schools at a very young age in order to gain an advantage over others (Table 1).

Table 1 Class Level that Students Started Attending Cram Schools (N =396)

Class Level that students started attending cram schools	Junior High School Students (Percent)	Senior High School Students (Percent)
Primary school	43.4	28.3
High school Level 1	21.7	19.7
High school Level 2	21.2	13.6
High school Level 3	13.6	19.2
High school Level 4		11.1
High school Level 5		4.5
High school Level 6		3.5

From Table 2, it is clear that the most important reason why both sample groups attend cram schools is their desire to increase their understanding of their lessons; they also want to know how to think faster, to gain some special techniques, and to gain confidence in exam preparation. Regarding the selection of cram schools, for junior high school students, it is the parents or guardians who decide which cram school to attend the most (39.1%); the runner-up is that the students themselves choose cram school by themselves (27.0%). For senior high school students, it is the other way around: most students decide by themselves (38.7%) and in some cases, the parents decide (30.8%).

The sample group of junior high school students learned about cram schools mostly from their parents' recommendation (35.1%) and then from friends' recommendations (39.3%); whereas senior high school students learned about it mostly from friends' recommendations (60.7%) and then from their parents 15.7%. This showed that peer group recommendations have more influence on senior high school students than on junior high school students. The top three subjects that both junior and senior high school students study at cram school were Mathematics, English, and Chemistry. Both sample groups pay approximately THB 2,001–3,000 for each course, most which is not expensive because cram schools currently provide short courses which offer specific chapters for students to choose, which helps the price per course to stay affordable. Both sample group travel mostly by sky train since Wannasorn Tower, where the samples were collected, is near Sky Train Station; therefore, it is the most convenient way for travelling. Also, second in both groups was being driven by their parents to school. Both groups studied mostly on Saturday.

Table 2. The Behavior of Cram School Use

Issues	Junior High School Students	Senior High School Students
	%	%
<i>Reasons for attending cram schools</i>		
Increase understanding in their lessons	27.6	32.7
Want to know faster thinking methods and special techniques	21.6	19.5
Increase confidence in exam preparation	20.4	21.5
Want to know guidelines of exam	18.6	16.5
Follow friend's persuasion	8.8	8.7
Are told to do so by parents or guardians	3.0	1.1
<i>Persons assisting in decision making</i>		
Parents or guardians	39.1	30.8
Oneself	27.0	38.7

Table 2 (Continued)

Issues	Junior High School Students	Senior High School Students
	%	%
Friends	24.0	23.7
Seniors	7.1	6.2
Teachers at school	2.8	0.6
<i>Source where students learned of cram schools</i>		
Recommendations from parents of guardians	35.1	15.7
Recommendations from friends	39.3	60.7
Advertisements	17.7	19.9
Internet	3.3	2.2
<i>Subjects that students study at cram school</i>		
Mathematics	24.7	19.3
English	18.6	21.8
Chemistry	16.1	16.2
Physics	11.7	11.4
Biology	13.9	13.5
Others (e.g., Drawings, French, Thai language)	21.6	17.8
<i>Average expense per course</i>		
Less than THB 2,000	17.1	12.1
THB 2,001–3,000	60.1	49.0
THB 3,001–4,000	14.6	23.7
More than THB 4, 000	8.1	15.2
<i>Transportation method</i>		
Sky train	39.9	45.1
Cars of parents or guardians	29.8	26.6
Bus	14.6	24.2
Other (e.g., by foot, boat, misc.)	15.7	4.1
<i>Studying time at cram school</i>		
Monday–Friday evening	7.9	25.7
Saturday	62.4	53.7
Sunday	29.7	20.6

Note: THB 30 is about US\$1

5.2. Factors influencing choice of cram schools

The results of the research shown in Table 3 clearly indicate that the first five factors that junior high school students rank as important in their selection of cram schools are the expertise of instructors, the provision of learning materials, the intensity of academic contents, closeness to a sky train station, and the comfortableness of a classroom with an air conditioner. Senior high school students, however, had some different needs: the proficiency of the teachers, the intensity of academic contents, free consultation service for exam guidelines, a variety of courses to choose from, and a location near other cram schools. So, the teaching-learning factor and place factor are the most two significant factors in this decision. Senior high school students give a mean score significantly higher than junior high school students on the importance of following factors: the expertise of instructors, variety of courses to choose from, free consultation service for exam guidelines, instructors taking close care of students, provision of replies outside classroom, convenience of travel, lack of traffic jams and a policy of guaranteeing success. This is understandable because senior high school students are closer to taking university entrance examinations, so they feel the need for more advice and attention from instructors. They tend to cram many courses, so they make a high priority of having a variety of course to choose from and a location near other cram schools importance.

Table 3 Comparison of Opinion Toward Importance of Factors Influencing Choosing Cram Schools of Junior and Senior High School Students

Factors	Opinion Toward Importance of Factors				Mann Whitney U Test
	Junior High School Students		Senior High School Students		
	Mean Score	Mean Score Rank	Mean Score	Mean Score Rank	Sig
Teaching and Learning Factor					
-Expertise of instructors	4.34	1	4.46	1	.001**
-Intensity of academic contents	4.26	3	4.35	2	.285
- Provision of learning materials	4.28	2	4.09	7	.050*
-Variety of courses to choose from	4.09	9	4.14	4	.027*
- Good image and prestige of the school	4.13	7	3.67	14	.000**
-Free consultation service for exam guidelines	3.81	12	4.17	3	.000**
-Instructors take care of students closely	3.79	13	4.03	9	.001**
-Provide staff for facilitations	3.78	14	3.51	18	.076
-Provide replies to questions outside of class	3.66	17	3.86	13	.024*
Price Factor					
- Tuition fees suitable for study contents	3.73	16	3.87	12	.646
-Reasonable price for each course	3.82	11	3.62	15	.356
-Option to pay tuition fee in installments	2.70	24	2.82	24	.396
Place Factor					
-Close to sky train station	4.21	4	4.07	8	.251
-Comfortable classroom with air conditioner	4.20	5	3.91	11	.000**
-Convenient and safe entrance/exit of schools	4.18	6	4.01	10	.039*
-Located near other cram schools	4.12	8	4.14	4	.533
- Convenient to travel	3.92	10	4.13	6	.033*
-Provide car park	3.77	15	3.57	17	.025*
- No traffic jams	3.14	22	3.45	21	.005**
Promotion Factor					
-Publicity from teachers at school, friends, seniors	3.62	18	3.60	16	.735
-Registering many courses and getting a special price	3.54	19	3.47	20	.818
-The discount of tuition fees for old students	3.47	20	3.50	19	.906
- Advertisements through media	3.37	21	3.36	22	.945
- The policy of guaranteeing success: money back in case of failure	2.98	23	3.30	23	.001**

** Significant at the 1% level

* Significant at the 5% level

6. Discussion

The results clearly showed that the most important reason for both student groups to attend cram school is to increase their understanding of their lessons. Consistently, both groups emphasize the importance of instructor expertise and rich academic content. The instructors' use of student-friendly teaching methods is also extremely important to students. Thus, entrepreneurs or administrators should evaluate teachers' capability to help students understand as well as course content. In addition, administrators of cram schools should also provide a suggestion box, e-mail address, and Facebook, or Twitter account so that students and their parents can use as a way to complain directly to administrators. This research demonstrated that, as in any other retail businesses, a convenient location is an important factor. This study confirms the thinking of Napompech and Kuawiriyapan (2010) that the teaching-learning factor and the place factor both play a significant role in choice of a cram school in Thailand. The research revealed that Thai students begin going to cram school in primary school; therefore, if cram school entrepreneurs, can satisfy them and exceed their expectations, students will become loyal customers and continue their education at the same cram school as well as provide positive word-of-mouth for the school. This is important because the study showed that students are more likely to learn of cram schools from the recommendations of parents and friends than from cram school advertisements. This study demonstrated that, overall, senior high school students give more importance to teaching-learning factor than junior high school students.

7. References

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