

Guidelines of Training Curriculum Development for New Skill Requirements of Flight Attendants after Covid-19 Pandemic Impact

Nattaya Srisupha¹

Natesiri Ruangariyapuk²

Krit Witthawassamrankul³

Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic impacted vastly on the global aviation industry, particularly, the national Thai airline which is currently facing economic and business challenges. The major change affected the huge reduction of human resources, particularly operators, who were not allowed to fly during covid-19. Many flight attendants, who were in crisis, found unsecured in their operation position. At the same time, the organization planned to develop the training curriculum for new skill requirement for the flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic impact. The new training curriculum to be developed will help the flight attendants be much skillful in order to cope with the work situation after covid-19 pandemic impact. This research aimed to study the guidelines for training curriculum development for new skill requirements for flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic impact. The researcher interviewed the needs of new skills and the guidelines for training development from the 30 key persons divided into 15 flight attendants and 15 cabin crews in charge, who were personally different in terms of age, work experience, position and income per month. The results of the study found that the flight attendants should study more variety of work, rather than in-flight service, programming and computers, such as Amadeus, reservation. In addition, the flight attendants should gain more knowledge on service during pandemic crisis. The guidelines for training curriculum development included 1) immigration rules and regulation and third language improvement 2) attitude and positive thinking and 3) entrepreneurship and business. The recommendation are 1) the study should include more external specialists in the airline business and 2) the study should include some quantitative research instrument such as questionnaires and tests for evaluation and measurement. For the policy and managerial implication, the results should be transferred to the related department in order to develop the required skills and search more instructors for the aforementioned training. This could help more human resource development in the organization.

Keywords: Guidelines, Airline, Training Curriculum Development

¹ Lecturer at Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University, 60 Romkloa Road, Meenburi, Bangkok, Thailand.
E-mail: nattaya.sri@kbu.ac.th

² Lecturer at Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University, 60 Romkloa Road, Meenburi, Bangkok, Thailand.
E-mail: natesiri.rua@kbu.ac.th

³ Lecturer at Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University, 60 Romkloa Road, Meenburi, Bangkok, Thailand.
Corresponding author: krit.wit@kbu.ac.th

Introduction

Human resources is the most important factors for organization development, particularly airline service, which needs competent human resources in numbers of works, such as operational works such as flight attendants and ground staff. (Anantaphong & Proyrungroj, 2020). Numbers of potential employees in airline business were demanded in 2018 due to the high growth of aviation industry, especially from Thai tourism and international product delivery (CAAT, 2019). Numbers of school, therefore, aimed to produce qualified graduates and students to meet the demands of specific position based on airline. However, there is little consideration on technology, innovation and crisis impact. When the airline is facing the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, it found that the operators, particularly flight attendants could not adjust themselves to the change. Many lost their jobs and found that their abilities were not enough for the other positions in their airlines. Therefore, this research aimed to explore what the new skills requirement for the flight attendants in the National Thai airline and what guidelines for the training development for new skills after covid-19 pandemic crisis for these flight attendants should be. The significances of the study were not only for the flight attendants' coping with the pandemic crisis, but also for the coming challenges they have to face. In 2018, it found that Thai national airlines faced the challenges of its business operation. The accumulated loss has consecutively risen (Thai Airways International Public Company, 2020). The company had to sell out the assets and reduced numbers of employees, particularly flight attendants. The challenges were big in 2019 and bigger in 2020 when the covid-19 pandemic spread and respreads, such as flight cancellation, air navigation service provider inconvenience, reduced aircraft use and international flight disagreement (ICAO, 2021). More and more flight attendants felt unsecured when their job and skills were not stable (Thongtip, 2020). They need to be much flexible and competent in their work, vertically and horizontally. Therefore, the training curriculum development for new skills should be provided for the flight attendants.

Research Objectives

1. To study the guidelines for training curriculum development for new skill requirements for flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic impact.
2. To explore the opinion of the flight attendants and cabin crews in charge.

Review of Literature

This section describes the materials and equipment used in the research, explain how the samples were gathered, any randomization techniques and how the samples were prepared, explain how the measurements were made and what calculations were performed upon the raw data and describe the statistical techniques used upon the data. This study included the review literatures of training and its curriculum development, airline training, change management, and related research as:

Training is one of techniques to provide the knowledge. It is important for operational work such as service and operational workers. Training could be prepared or off-the-job-training and immediate training or on-the-job training, based on appropriateness of time, cost and effectiveness (Duangsong & Suttichote, 2019). Good training should include the important factors such as trainers, equipment, media, environment and trainees (Ford, Henderson & O'Hare, 2014). Well-organized training should be constructed based on appropriateness of timing, lesson preparation with objectives, and measurement and evaluation process. Then, after experienced training, the trainers can develop its curriculum to meet the demands and suits for the trainers. Good curriculum development comes from understanding the knowledge and skill requirement with objective and assessment.

Training in airline service, especially for flight attendants is unique. Some reasons makes the training for flight attendants different is the type of airline. Flight attendants in premium airlines normally need more skills to learn, including both working skills and interpersonal skills in order to provide excellent service for first class and business classes. Training for the flight attendants are service and serving skills, communicational skills, problem-solving skills, etc. (Fariduddin, Hum, Halim & Jaafar, 2020). The ones who provide training for flight attendants, therefore, are the experienced flight attendants who can transfer the knowledge with arts. Since the flight attendants work is dynamic due to numbers of factor changes, such as technological and innovation change, rule and regulation change, environmental changes; flight attendant training has to be revised and recurrent training, particularly, safety and security training is compulsory for the flight attendants. (Salameh, 2016) Hence, the curriculum development has to be considered for the situational changes, particularly innovation and technology and pandemic.

Curriculum development for new skills of the flight attendants has been into the considered issues since 2018 when the national airline encountered financial risks from the business operation (Asian aviation staff, 2021). The problem was even worse when the airline faced covid-19 pandemic problem. Reduction in numbers of flights limits numbers of flight attendants. Numbers of the flight attendants could not find other job in different position. Many faced the challenges due to their familiarity with the work pattern. Restructure and downsizing in the national Thai airline exposed the risks to the flight attendants. Therefore, the curriculum development for new skills of the flight attendants will help them to stay with the organization firmly and usefully. Generally, curriculum development for flight attendants suit one period of time. When the situational change, new skills must be provided for the flight attendants. It is possible that the flight attendants may have to learn new skills beyond their work in order to stay in the airline (Limwirat, Promsawat & Klaisuwan, 2018).

A curriculum comprises numbers of courses with the notions of 'must' and 'should' (Liu and Zhu, 2016). Therefore, to develop a new curriculum, it requires the guidelines to develop the curriculum. The guidelines for curriculum development include understanding the situation, necessities of the courses, adjustment of the previous courses and potentials of the new curriculum. Hence, to discover the guidelines for curriculum development should be the first step in the process of the

curriculum development. It has come before find the courses and writing the course descriptions. Traditionally, airline curriculum development includes the requirement of rules and regulation of the well-known international organization such as ICAO or The International Civil Aviation Organization, especially rules and regulations for aviation safety and security, or CATT (The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand), the requirement of the airline service such as serving, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and the requirement of the competency such as knowledge, skills, attributes. The competency is however, changed based on numbers of factors such as technology, innovation and economic. Human resources in airline business need to update their competencies; otherwise, they will not be able to work in dynamic change (Garcia, Pongkrapan, Sacares & Surinta, 2018).

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative and used the interview to study the guidelines for curriculum development for the new skill requirements for flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic. The reason of using the interview method was to gather more clarification the curriculum development, which needs the explanation and the knowledge is rather tacit. The researcher gathered the data from the 30 key informants who were divided into 15 flight attendants and 15 cabin crew in charge (CIC). Both flight attendants and cabin crews in charge provided the guidelines for the curriculum development for the new skill requirement for flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic since the flight attendants were the one who used the curriculum and could inform their needs for the curriculum development guidelines. The cabin crews in charge were the one who provided the training and experienced the in-flight service work, they could provide the guidelines for the curriculum development guidelines.

Therefore, the key informants were 15 flight attendants and 15 cabin crews in charge in the Thai national airline, segmented by their personal factors in the below table (table 1). The data collection obtained from the key informants was from March 10–April 10, 2021. The selection criterion for every key informant is the work experience of at least more than 1 year and they must work in this national airline. Therefore, they know the organization background and culture.

The data analysis was divided into 2 parts. For the interview method, the answers from the key informants gathered were used content analysis. For the questionnaire, the results were analyzed by descriptive statistics as frequency and percentage. The quality of the interview questions had been validated by 3 experts, who are Ph.D. instructors in the Aviation Institute and the questionnaires were approved its content validity of more than 0.70 and reliability of 0.81.

Table 1 Key Informants (n = 30)

Profile Factors	Variables	f	%
Gender	Male	6	20.00
	Female	24	80.00
Age	23-32 years	5	16.67
	33-42 years	8	26.67
	43-52 years	14	46.67
	53 and Above	3	10.00
Work Experience	Less than 3 years *	3	10.00
	3-10 years	10	33.44
	10-20 years	14	46.67
	21 and Above	3	10.00
Position	Cabin Crew in Charge	15	50.00
	Flight Attendants	15	50.00

*less than 3 years is the contractual period of work.

Research Results

The research results from the key informants has been divided into 2 parts as 1) the opinions of the flight attendants (from the 4 questions) and 2) the guidelines for curriculum development for new skill requirement of the flight attendants in Thai national airline.

The opinions of the flight attendants:

1. What are the environmental factors which the curriculum development?

The key informants informed that covid-19 pandemic was the most impactful factor which the curriculum development should be considered. They recommended that the covid-19 pandemic exposed many notions of training such as on-line training; off-the-job training, media for training should be varied such as DVD and online because some physical locations of training were prohibited and some flight attendants were quarantined of 14 days after flying. Covid-19 pandemic also forced the flight attendants to be aware of the knowledge and the training of safety and security. The flight attendants told that the curriculum should provide more knowledge on service performance during covid-19 pandemic with standard and measurement. Also, covid-19 pandemic drives the technological and innovation movement. The flight attendants informed that they need to learn more technology and innovation. During their work as flight attendants, they physically operated and rather used familiarity in work. They should have more time to learn technology and new equipment, such as programming.

2. What are the organizational factors for the curriculum development?

The key informants informed that downsizing and restructuring in the organization is the factor which should be considered for the curriculum development. There were 2 reasons of the downsizing and restructuring as economic and business management. The organization used traditional

management and functional structure. Therefore, the flight attendants only know their own jobs and tend to work repeatedly since they found there is no need to improve their skills. When they work for long time, they have to no step to go up or new career path. They felt loss and would like to upgrade themselves. However, it is quite difficult for them to change when being old. To this, the flight attendants recommended that the curriculum development should offer more and variety of courses, related with airline functions for them such as Amadeus, cargo packing, reservation. This will be helpful when moving to the new positions. Some of job rotation and job enlargement could help them as well as training from the curriculum development. This program has been implemented in the airline for years.

3. Do you have any suggestion for the curriculum development?

The curriculum development for new skills of flight attendants should not be scoped for the flight attendants' functions only. It is rather based on the competencies and aimed to increase competencies of the flight attendants. In the future, it is likely that flight attendants have shorter working duration such as contractual restriction. Technology and innovation can replace some job of flight attendants. In addition, the curriculum development should provide some psychological lessons, such as stress management, consultation, etc. and business lessons such business excel, entrepreneurship, marketing and management. Some flight attendants who do not want to work more in-flight can switch to training and management positions. And lastly, the curriculum development should concern sustainability by learning. Due to the limitation of physical work, the flight attendants may not work for a long time. There should be the courses for long-life learning and the work-related. This will help the succession plan for the position.

The Guidelines of Curriculum Development for New Skills of Flight Attendants after covid-19 Pandemic

Based on the study, the guideline of curriculum development for new skills of flight attendants after covid-19 pandemic should include 1) the knowledge and skills for the work after covid-19 and during covid-19 such as safety and security, rules and regulations such as immigration rules and regulations, updated aviation laws 2) attitude and positive thinking. Some psychological lessons should be provided for the flight attendants who coped with stress and there should be some lessons for positive thinking and 3) entrepreneurship and marketing and management for the flight attendants in case that they will perform other functions in the organization. In addition, the third language and business soft skills should be added.

Discussion and Conclusions

In conclusion, the flight attendants will need more variety of skills and tends to be job enlargement, rather than job enrichment. This was the same as other operation works, such as hotels or other functional works (Musili, 2010). The curriculum development for new skills for the flight attendants after covid-19 should include the technology and innovation courses like other service in

intense competition by technology and innovation era (Park, Lee & Nicolau, 2020). Human resources in service industry like other industry cannot avoid the competition from technology and innovation. Also, to develop the curriculum has to consider the organization changes, such as downsizing and restructuring. Outsourcing and offshoring are also a factor for competition. In addition, the curriculum development should be based on the competencies, rather than the functional work. Since service works in the future will be much diversified, competencies to work in different areas in the companies are important (Gibbs, Slevitch & Washburn, 2017) and lastly, to be sustainable, the flight attendants should have life-long learning. They should learn from everywhere and every time, either during quarantine from covid-19 pandemic or when they are alone. Last, the flight attendants should have some entrepreneurship and marketing and management skills. This will benefit them and the business work in the future. To the results of the study, it showed that after covid-19 pandemic impact, it is likely that the airline human resources must be flexible and work in the diverse assignments. They have to change their work based on functions but into the personal competencies. The human resource development also has to adapt itself to the new management for the situation after Covid-19 and business management change. It needs to improve more training and manage the needs of training based on competencies. Cross training and small group training, which meets the personal development, should be organized for both business and cost reduction purposes. The recommendation for the research are 1) the study should include more specialists in the airline business, rather inside cabin crews in charge in the airline in order to see how competitor and industry practice and 2) the study should include some quantitative research instrument such as questionnaires and tests; therefore, the results will be much accurate, specific and measurable. For the policy and managerial implication, the results should be transferred to the related department in order to develop the required skills and find more instructors who possess the qualification to conduct the aforementioned training. This could help more human resource development.

References

- Anantaphong, W. & Proyrungroj, R. (2020). Flight attendants's self-adjustment working for foreign airlines. *The Journal of Development Administration Research*, 10(3), 15-21.
- Asian Aviation Staff. (2021, March, 3). *Thai Airways will shed workers, downsize planes in operation in major restructuring to survive*. Retrieved From <https://asianaviation.com/thai-airways-will-shed-workers-downsize-planes-in-operation-in-major-restructuring/>
- Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand. (2019, December, 31). *State of Thai aviation industry 2019*. Retrieved From <https://www.caat.or.th/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/STATE-OF-THAI-AVIATION-INDUSTRY-2019.pdf>
- Duangsong, S. & Suttichote, S. (2019). *Comparing training environments safety management systems of C-Learning and E-Learning that results in the satisfaction of flight attendants: Thai Lion Air*. (Master Thesis, Kasem Bundit University, Bangkok, Thailand).

- Fariduddin, M.N., Hum, W.L., Halim, L. & Jaafar, M.J. (2020). Basic-Sim train-the-trainer: a resuscitation training module for cabin crew in Malaya. *Songklanakarinn Journal Sciences and Technology*, 42(1), 73-80.
- Ford, J., Handerson, R. & O'Hare, D. (2014). The effects of crew resource management (CRM) training on flight attendants' safety attitudes. *Journal of Safety Research*, 48, 49-56.
- Garcia, R.C., Pongkrapan, W., Sacares, R.T. & Surinta, N. (2018). Human Resource availability situation of airline companies in Thailand. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1-16, DOI:10.2139/ssrn.3308092.
- Gibbs, L, Slevitch, L., & Washburn, I. (2017). Competency-based training in aviation: The impact on flight attendant performance and passenger satisfaction. *The Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education and Research*, 26(2), 55-80.
- International Civil Aviation Organization. (2021, March, 31). Economic Aspects of COVID-19 on Civil Aviation. Retrieved From <https://www.icao.int/sustainability/Pages/Economic-Impacts-of-COVID-19.aspx>
- Limwirat, N., Promsawat, P. & Klaisuwan, R. (2018). The factors relating with personal development case study of flight attendant, Thai Airway International Public Company Limited. *Suan Dusit Graduate School Academic Journal*, 14(1), 31-42.
- Liu, X.Q. & Zhu, W.Z. (2016). Towards an integrated approach to cabin service English curriculum design: A case study of China Southern Airlines' cabin service English training course. *Higher Education Studies*, 6(2), 30-37.
- Musli, A. (2010). *Perceived effectiveness of training and development on performance of in-flight attendants in Kenya Airways Limited*. [Master thesis, University of Nairobi]. University of Nairobi Research Archive.
- Park, S., Lee, S.J., & Nicolau, J.L. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the quality of airline service attributes: Satisfiers and dissatisfiers. *Tourism Management*, 81, 1-15.
- Salameh, Z. (2016). Perceptions of safety knowledge and skills in vocational training. *International Education Studies*, 9(5), 133-146.
- Thai Airways International Public Company. (2019). *Annual Report*. Retrieved from <https://thai.listedcompany.com/misc/ar/20200420-thai-ar2019-en.pdf> on 18 May 2021
- Thongtip, B. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) problems and leadership potential for new normal organization development. *Journal of Social Science and Buddhistic Anthropology*, 5(11), 434-447.