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Re-positioning an exam training institution after COVID-19:
case study of a Chinese institution

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**Re-positioning an exam training institution after
COVID-19: case study of a Chinese institution**

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Productos y Servicios

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Abstract

During the last 15 years, the number of students studying abroad has increased six times in China. AAA Group is a top overseas educational counseling services group in China. In Shenzhen, it has an exam preparation training institution Z for 10 years that includes mainstream international test training, such as IELTS, TOEFL, basic English, SAT, SSAT, ACT, Interview tutorial, AE (Academic English) and so on.

The pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020 has caused an impact on the whole study abroad industry and the examination and training industry particularly. These institutions need to be resilient, having the ability to adapt to the needs of market and customers and, also, adjust them internally.

Therefore, through the combination of theoretical discussion and case analysis, this thesis analyses a specific Chinese institution in Shenzhen that is adapting its marketing strategy to the current situation, with a user centered approach. Tools such as in-depth interviews would help to better review the service and market strategy and re-positioning it.

Keywords: Study abroad / exam training institution / Education / Marketing strategy / Customer experience Journey / In-depth interview

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1 Introduction

This thesis aims to explore when the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the study abroad industry, the teaching mode has moved to online, how China's overseas exam training institutions adapt to this global change and adjust internally and develop a customer-centered marketing strategy. The writer has worked in this institution for nearly 6 years and played a role as one of the participants in the customers' purchase and consumption process. The innovation of this paper is that it combines theoretical knowledge with a user-centered approach to conduct in-deep interviews among stakeholders, especially for students. After analyzing the feedback and results and evaluating the reasons why Z institution can survive in the pandemic, posing the practical suggestions to make Z institution flexible, resilient, and adaptable under the new normal. At the same time, some suggestions are applied to the reform of the Z institution now.

At the same time, answering the research questions. (1) Under the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, what changes have taken place in the marketing strategy of Z institution with 7Ps? (2) What do customers (students) think of Z institution through an in-depth interview? (3) How to unitize the interview results to improve the Z marketing strategy?

2 Background

2.1 The environment of study abroad and exam training in China

Studying abroad is not a new concept. It has a history of more than a hundred years in China. It is mentioned in the Chinese Overseas Talent Development Report (Wang et al., 2009) that China first sent students to study abroad in 1872, from 1872 to 1978, before China's reform and opening, the total number of students studying abroad was less than 130,000 in nearly 100 years. The total amount and growth rate of the scale of overseas talents are very imbalanced and contemporary.

According to the Ministry of Education of China (2021), from 1978 to 2019, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad reached 6.56 million. In 2019 alone, more than 700,000 people chose to study abroad. The main reason for the rapid development of the study abroad industry is that in 1978 China put forward the national policy of reform and opening. Specifically, on the education level, the government adopted the policy of "going out" and "bringing in" and decided to vigorously support and encourage study abroad. Deng Xiaoping, the statesman who served as the paramount leader of China from December 1978 to 1992, proposed to expand the dispatch of international students to provide more outstanding talents with opportunities to study and exchange abroad. Since then, in addition to the greatly increased number of publicly funded study abroad places, the Ministry of Public

Security can also accept applications for self-funded study abroad. The reason has directly led to the rapid increase in the number of applications for studying abroad. To regulate the conditions of applicants, the State Council has issued the "Interim Regulations on Studying Abroad at Their Own Expenses" to provide people who meet the conditions with multiple channels for studying abroad and initially explore the development of the study abroad industry specification.

After the reform and opening, many high-tech talents choose to study abroad. These highly educated and skilled scholars are also talents that other countries are vying to retain. Around 1992, the United States, Australia, and Canada successively introduced policies to grant these students the right of abode, which increased the risk of the loss of international talents specially cultivated by China (Wang et al., 2009: 33-34). Therefore, China and various provinces and cities have successively promulgated different types of talent introduction policies to attract overseas experts in various fields and use practical actions to show the importance of talents. For example, in 2006, the Ministry of Personnel of the Central People's Government of China formulated and promulgated the "Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Returning Overseas Chinese Students" and formulated the work policy of "supporting studying abroad, encouraging returning to China, and freedom of coming and going" (The State Council, 2007). In the critical period of China's comprehensive construction of a well-off society, the introduction of overseas talents is one of the measures to

strengthen the country.

As the number of students sent out increased, so did the number of people returning to China after completing their studies. Patriotic enthusiasm and the purpose of serving the people have led elites who have been leading figures in different fields to return to China to build their homes. The return of talents has brought China's technological development to a higher level, and at the same time, it has also given Chinese people a firm belief that studying abroad will bring them positive feedback. For example, they can learn advanced science and technology in developed countries and absorb different cultural ideas.

As the demand for studying abroad increases, study abroad institutions that provide consulting services to applicants emerge as the times require. Similarly, to protect the rights and interests of applicants, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China promulgated in 1998, in the Regulations on the Management of Self-funded Study Abroad Intermediary Services (MOE, 1998), the business scope of service intermediaries for study abroad application services is defined as: "Provide relevant consultations, handle admissions applications, and provide visas, services and training before going abroad". And corresponding requirements are put forward for the establishment of this type of service company, for example, professional personnel, sufficient funds, and stable cooperation and exchange relationships with foreign educational institutions. Slowly, the study abroad agency also began to play a

pivotal role. Just as Wang and Qin (2018) discussed, the contribution of Chinese study abroad agencies to the development of the country's study abroad since the reform and opening, they believed that "study abroad agents are not only the product of the country's reform and opening up and the study abroad movement but also an important part of the development of the study abroad". This also shows that the intermediary company's role as a bridge between the student and the school is worthy of recognition.

Nowadays, the market segments led by the study abroad industry are very mature. According to Li and Sun (2018), there are college and professional consultation, language test training, clerical guidance, and career planning. According to Zhiyan Consulting (2016), in 2015, China's entire study abroad market was about 158.909 billion yuan, and the language training for overseas examinations reached 8.292 billion yuan. The high proportion of exam training is also because the most basic thing about studying abroad is to meet the language requirements of the applied school so that students be able to enter the classroom normally and smoothly.

2.2 The environment of study abroad and exam training in

Shenzhen

2.2.1 Basic introduction

Shenzhen, as a product of reform and opening, is one of the earliest special

economic zones established in China. With the unique geographical advantage of neighboring Hong Kong and Macau, and the blessing of special national policies, it has become the fourth largest city that can compete with Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, commonly known as "Bei Shang Guang Shen" cluster. In 2020, Shenzhen with GDP 2.77 trillion yuan (429 billion U.S. dollars), ranking third in the country after Shanghai and Beijing. In the Global Urban Competitiveness Report (2019-2020), after evaluating the cities around the world, Shenzhen ranks 9th in the ranking of economic competitiveness and sustainable competitiveness.

With such outstanding performance, Shenzhen is not only "rich", but also "overcrowded". Shenzhen only had a population of 35,000 in 1982, and when the seventh national population census was held in 2020, it revealed that the city had grown into an international city with a permanent population of 17.56 million. Compared with the last census ten years ago, there are nearly 7 million more (TJJ, 2021).

2.2.2 Talent situation

In Shenzhen, for every 100,000 people, nearly 30,000 people have a university (junior college and above) education level (28.85%), which is almost double the national average (15.47%) (TJJ, 2021). All this "shows that the city's talent introduction policy has achieved remarkable results, and the talent dividend has been continuously improved. The scale of the high-quality talent team has

continued to expand, and the number of highly educated talents has continued to increase, providing a stronger impetus for innovation-driven development in Shenzhen." (TJJ, 2021).

The slogan "You are the Shenzhen person when you arrived in Shenzhen" also intuitively reflects the city's action strategy and exclusive characteristics: "open" and "inclusive." It not only attracts people from other provinces and cities in China to work and settle here, but also attracts international elites to Shenzhen. Various types of talent policies have been introduced during last 20 years, such as the "Peacock Program", "Talent Housing Project", "Industrial Development and Innovation Talent Award", "Pengcheng Talent Program", and "Returned Overseas Talent Subsidies" for overseas high-level talents. Including Priority, welfare and other forms, the equivalent values of subsidies range from 10,000 to 3 million yuan. With attractive policies and development opportunities, thousands of talents have come to Shenzhen, giving this once-small fishing village a compelling performance.

2.2.3 Local education

As mentioned above, studying abroad for further studies and the introduction of returned talents need to coexist. In terms of introducing talents, Shenzhen already has a relatively mature and complete system. However, there is still space for improvement and lag in terms of local self-sufficiency, provision of higher education

resources and training of local students. The economic development and technological innovation are well-known all over the world, as China Silicon Valley, but the development of higher education has been slow and backward. A city with more than 17 million permanent residents will have only 11 colleges and universities by 2020. These include the established local universities, the introduction of China's double first-class university research institutes, and the universities that cooperate with international universities and universities in Hong Kong, China. The specific list of universities is as follows (Table 1).

Table 1 The universities in Shenzhen

Types of school	School Name	Year of establishment
Local college/university	Shenzhen University	1983
	Shenzhen Polytechnic	1993
	Shenzhen Institute of Information Technology	2002
	Southern University of Science and Technology	2010
	Shenzhen University of Technology	2016
Shenzhen branch of top domestic school	Jinan University (Shenzhen Campus)	1996
	Harbin Institute of Technology (Shenzhen)	2001
	The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen)	2014
Domestic cooperative graduate school	Tsinghua Shenzhen International Graduate School	2001
	Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School	2001
Sino-foreign cooperative university	Shenzhen MSU-BIT University	2016

Source: Shenzhen Bureau of Statistics and schools (2021), compiled by the author

It can be seen from the above table that before the millennium, there were only two local colleges and universities in Shenzhen, which have been supplemented sporadically in the past 20 years. Compared with the top three cities in China (as

shown in Table 2), the number of 11 schools is far from being able to meet the needs of locals for education.

Table 2 Residents and universities in different cities

City	Number of permanent residents (Unit: ten thousand people)	Number of colleges and universities
Beijing	2189.3	92
Shanghai	2487.1	63
Guangzhou	1867.7	82
Shenzhen	1756	11

Source: Statistical bureau and education bureau of each city (2021), compiled by the author

If the student groups in Shenzhen are not studying locally, they have two choices, namely, to study in universities in other cities and provinces or to study abroad.

Furthermore, regarding the annual national postgraduate examination, the "2021 National Postgraduate Admissions Survey Report" (EOL, 2021) mentioned that the number of applicants in 2021 has reached 3.77 million. In 2019, it was 2.9 million. Due to factors such as economic depression caused by the pandemic, there will be an increase of 510,000 in 2020 to 3.41 million. Correspondingly, although the number of students enrolled in 2019 has expanded to 917,000, the acceptance rate is less than 27%, which means that nearly 2 million candidates will be unsuccessful a year and need to choose a new way out. Therefore, many students are discouraged from taking the domestic postgraduate exams due to the low admission rate, lost time, and long school system.

Therefore, the focus of learning has gradually expanded from this city to the province, domestic and foreign countries. Conforms to the statement from "White Paper on Studying Overseas in China in 2021" (EIC Education, 2021), it is verified that the main overseas students in China are in higher education. "From 2018 to 2020, the main stage of Chinese students studying abroad is studying at the master's level, and the proportion has been on the rise in the past three years. In 2020, more than 80% will be studying at the master's level."

2.2.4 Family Characteristics and Educational Consumption View

Penguin Intelligence and QUTOUTIAO (2019), pointed out that in first-tier cities, the family which have high school and below school-age/preschool child, 71.9% of them have prepared education savings for their children. Education savings for future learning, and the average education savings amount is 309,000 yuan. In other words, in areas where the economy is now more developed, most families put education in a more important position. In the "2017 White Paper on Educational Consumption in Chinese Families" (Sina, 2019), when exploring the characteristics of consumption behavior of Chinese families, it was found that more than 60% of parents are willing to send their children to study abroad. According to the Shenzhen Bureau of Statistics (TJJ, 2021), the average annual salary of employees in urban non-private units is 137,310 yuan in Shenzhen in 2020 (RMB:EU=1:7, about 19,615 euros), and the per capita disposable income is a 64,878 yuan. In other words, the

share of Shenzhen families with the ability to pay for studying abroad and the awareness of studying abroad is high. The study abroad industry has a market in first-tier cities like Shenzhen.

As parents, they are willing to provide better educational conditions for their children, “Chinese parents hope that their children will be able to give birth to their ancestors” (Xia&Yan, 2013). Young people with financial means also hope to improve by studying abroad educational qualifications and increased insights will increase your competitiveness in the market, because society also needs more global and diverse people.

2.2.5 Current status of study abroad industry and introduction of Z institution

Across the country, ZHIYAN Consulting (2020) reported that the number of training institutions and schools has grown faster and faster in the past six years according to the China National Bureau of Statistics. In 2019, the number of private training institutions and schools in China was 33,099, an increase of 8,035 over the previous year and a year-on-year increase of 32.06%. However, from 2014 to 2016, it was almost maintained at 20,000.

The annual review information announcement of Shenzhen education and training institutions (Shenzhen Education Bureau, 2020) showed that there are

nearly 144 institutions that have received the permitted "Private School Running License" by Shenzhen Education Bureau (this figure does not include the situation if a company has multiple branches/branches in Shenzhen). When coupled with the number of the small institutions and individuals studios without permission, the number of the institutions arrived more than 500.

AAA Group is a top overseas educational counseling services group in China, the main business involved in Counseling Service, Test Preparation, Study Tours, International Academy. In Shenzhen, AAA Group has two main business branches. One is a consulting service company for studying abroad applications, and the other is an exam preparation company, Z training institution. In 2019, after years of gestation and development, the training products of Z institution include mainstream international test training, such as IELTS, TOEFL, basic English, SAT, SSAT, ACT, Interview tutorial, AE (Academic English) and so on.

2.3 The impact of the pandemic on study abroad industry

2.3.1 During the pandemic

The COVID-19 outbreak suddenly broke out in 2020. In the face of this sudden public health event, the world was caught off guard and did not know how to respond. The world seemed to have pressed the pause button, and everything stopped. People need to reduce the frequency of going out and reduce the frequency of gatherings

through home isolation. From elementary school to university, the teaching mode has become online.

Due to the changes in teaching methods, physical health issues and so on, the number of international students enrolled in 2020 decreased by a certain amount. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) as a global provider of services, analysis and insights dedicated to higher education, conducted a report named the COVID-19 is Impacting Prospective International Students at Different Study Levels (2020) which in May 2020 surveyed more than 30,000 prospective international students. The results show that less than 15% of the respondents felt that they were not affected by the pandemic, and about 60% of the respondents believed that their study abroad plan was affected (Figure 1). And more than half of the respondents intend to postpone or delay enrollment until the next year. Although the world was in a confusing and unknown state at the time, fewer than 10% of the respondents directly decided not to study abroad because of the pandemic. (Figure 2)

Has the coronavirus affected your plans to study abroad?

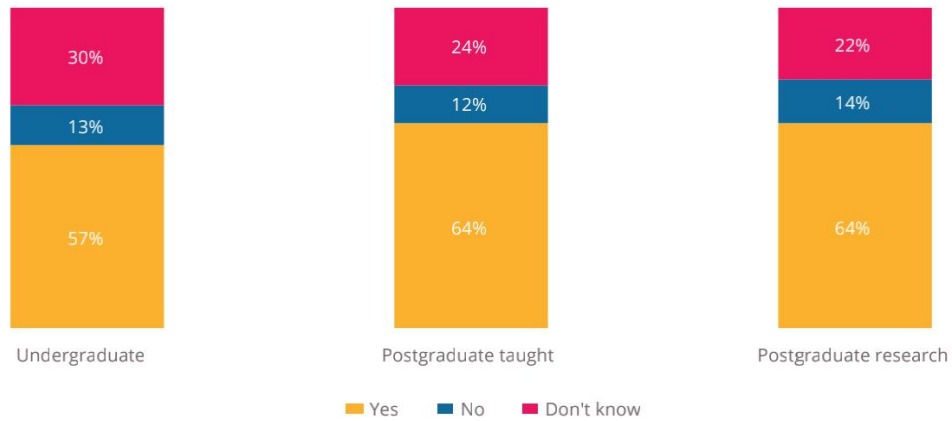


Figure 1 How the COVID-19 affected students' study plans. *Source: QS, 2020*

Which of these best describes how the coronavirus has changed your plans to study abroad?

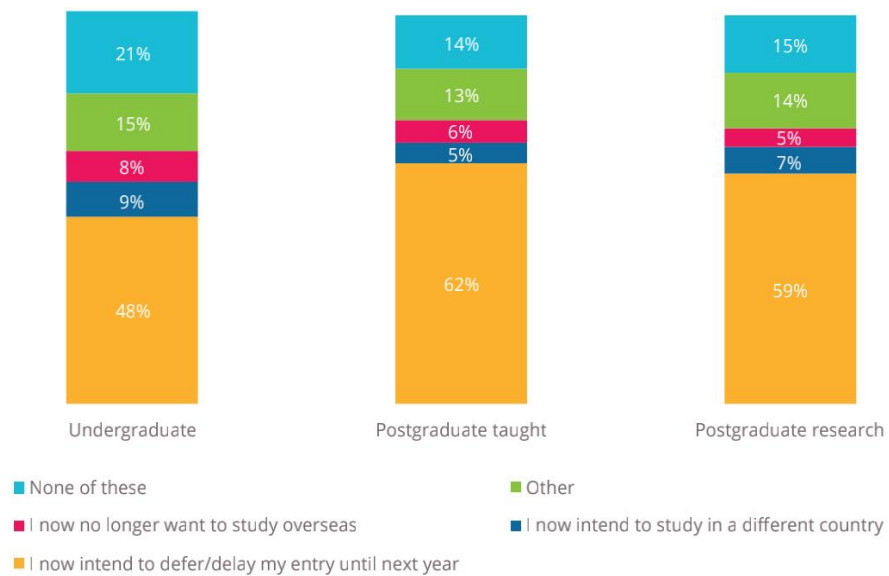


Figure 2 How the COVID-19 changed the study abroad plans. *Source: QS, 2020.*

However, those students who were expected to enroll in the fall of 2020 had already submitted their college but had not yet taken the required TOEFL IELTS scores. When the examination room is not allowed to be open and the language test

cannot be conducted, those tests that originally used online computer-based tests to examine students' English proficiency became suitable substitutes for foreign schools to replace TOEFL IELTS. For example, Duolingo, PTE and other exams. In the United States, undergraduates originally needed to assess students' SAT and ACT scores, and universities also introduced new standards that do not require these scores. Whether it is a university or an examination institution, they are all thinking of ways to deal with this unprepared "disaster".

Examination training institutions are no exception. In Shenzhen, training institutions will not be able to conduct offline teaching from the end of January to June 2020. The restrictions have been gradually lifted from June 2020, and offline classes have been opened in schools. But in November 2020, the university was not able to enter and exit freely, and only teachers, students and staff were able to enter the gate of the school. The policy was changing irregularly. Therefore, since the outbreak of the pandemic, training institutions have been like ants on a hot pot, and companies need to adjust from top to bottom, such as teaching methods, company operations, all need to be moved from offline to online.

At that time, people had to go out less and take online courses at home. Therefore, students do not need to attend classes at a physical campus close to home. For training institutions, when it is no longer necessary to consider geographical location in terms of enrollment, if the geographical area is not restricted, it can recruit

students from all over the country, and group classes according to the same needs. Using nationwide resource in personnel, such as teachers, teaching assistants. In the case of some costs that cannot be reduced, including employees' basic salary, rent, when the company's income is reduced, the sharing of resources could reduce costs to a certain extent.

2.3.2 After the pandemic

China Education and Training Industry Development Trend Report (New Oriental and iResearch, 2021) stated that the overall international education industry market size in 2020 will be nearly 70 billion yuan. Except for the trend of negative growth in 2020 due to the pandemic, from 2018 to 2022, there will be a year-on-year increase of nearly 10%. (Figure 3). "International education includes the traditional track: international schools, study abroad consultation, study abroad examination and training. And the emerging track: background improvement for international students and prospective international students, employment consulting." The business scope of AAA Group, in addition to international schools, both are its flagship products. In other words, the market in the next few years is still worth looking forward to.



Figure 3 China international education market size. *Source: own elaboration from China Education and Training Industry Development Trend Report, 2021*

The market in 2021 was expected to recover. According to QS survey on how the COVID-19 shaped the higher education (2020), 67% and 18% of respondents chose to enroll in 2021 and 2022, respectively. Also, according to EIC (2021), nearly half (49.3%) of students planned to enroll in 2021, and 23.9% of students planned to enroll in 2022.

2.4 The oversea exam training

2.4.1 Overseas study exam

The common tests for studying abroad are TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT. (Table 3)

Table 3 The types of international test for school admission

Test Type	Test Name	Total Score
Language Test	TOEFL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language)	120
	IELTS (International English Language Testing System)	9
Undergraduate Admission Test	SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test)	1600
	ACT (American College Test)	36
Graduate Admission Test	GRE (Graduate Record Examination)	340
	GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)	800

Source: own elaboration from the TOEFL IELTS SAT ACT GRE GMAT official website (see reference).

The international language tests could be under a standard assess system. In 2001, COE (Council of Europe) launched CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) as a common standard to evaluate the score range of IELTS and TOEFL (2021). "The levels B2 and C1, which are typical requirements for admissions in higher-education institutions. Test takers with very high scores are likely to be able to perform at CEFR level C2."(ETS, 2021)

Table 4 The standard of CEFR compared with IELTS and TOEFL

CEFR	IELTS	TOEFL
C2	9	114
C1	7-8	95
B2	5.5-6.5	72
B1	4-5	42
A2	-	n/a
A1	-	-

Source: own elaboration from <https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/scores-admissi>

ons/ compare & <https://www.ielts.org/about-ielts/ielts-in-cefr-scale>

(1) IELTS. The basic admission requirement for English-taught courses in universities in Europe, Hong Kong, Macau and other regions is B2 level, which corresponds to a score of 6.0 or higher. Higher education in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada requires a total score of 6.5, and the four individual items such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing must not be less than 6. For the global top 50 universities ranked in QS or majors related to English, Law, and Media, the minimum score requirement is 7.

(2) TOEFL. For example, the admission requirement of the Ivy League universities in the United States is at least 100, and most of the remaining schools make the scores between 79-90 points as the minimum admission requirements.

2.4.2 Overseas exam training institutions

The examination is already a culture and custom in China. The earliest examination can be traced back to the 7th century, it was called the Keju test system. Nowadays, the annual college entrance examination (Gaokao) and graduate entrance examination are being held as the important regular exam in China. After having more than 1,400 years of experience, the phenomenon of "test coaching and extra hours tutoring" to help students improve their grades has become very common today (Yu&Suen, 2005).

It is no exception to the overseas examination training industry which has emerged because of the studying abroad fever in China. Based on the different requirements and needs, those test preparation institutions established to help test takers have also sprung up. The institutions are facing changes and challenges.

China overseas exam training institutions were originally created to meet the needs of undergraduate students to achieve the required scores for graduate admissions to foreign universities. Especially when New Oriental was built in 1993, it was the signal that the training industry in China was starting up. The purpose at that time was to teach students the so-called "exam skills" to achieve satisfying marks.

However, such "skills" no longer fill in the diverse needs nowadays. The schools, exam makers, students, society all put forward their demands.

For example, after being trained on the overseas exam, it is necessary to simultaneously improve the ability to use English rather than only getting a high score on the test. Xue (2012), after studying the experience of Chinese students studying in the UK, put forward that "the language barrier is an insurmountable gap when students study in the UK". Achieving high scores in the IELTS test cannot ensure that students can successfully complete their studies. Moreover, "high scores are almost of no value in high-degree courses", because when studying abroad as an international student, the language challenge comes from all aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, a standardized test cannot be used to accurately measure a student's language ability.

2.5 Summary

Although in 2020 the world was undergoing tests, the industry needed to be

reshuffled, and the market was reshaped. However, there is still a positive side in the field of studying abroad and the demand for exam training. Therefore, this research also uses the analysis and research of Z institution to reflect how the training institution "maintains the status quo", which is flexible and adaptable.

3 Literature review

3.1 7Ps Marketing strategy

As mentioned above, Chinese language test training institutions are the products of the wave of overseas study, so the marketing strategy between international language training institutions and higher education institutions has similarities.

In the study of the operation of higher education, Andrljic, Budic and Pismis (2013) considered that private colleges can solve the problem of declining enrollment and increasing operating costs by attracting students and funds through marketing strategies.

The traditional 4Ps theory is product, price, place, promotion, which is a marketing mix mainly applied to tangible products. However, the 7Ps marketing approach is used in the service sector to cater to customer needs (Ivy, 2008). Demand for college applications rises when process, people, and physical evidence are added, and if firms do not use this marketing mix, it is challenging to meet organizational goals (Ogunnaike, Tairat, Adeniyi and Omolade, 2014).

(1) Product

The "product" is showed as "a form of intellectual service" in education marketing, by offering the education content and process and servicing the students,

making the product as a total product (Andrlic et al., 2013). Education service is an intangible product. Because teachers tutor students and students are considered consumers, they are the consumer group of educational services (Ogunnaike et al., 2014). There are several topics to cover in product, including diversity, branding, quality, packaging, and whether it is the most innovative (Jain, 2014).

(2) Price

Jain describes price as including item costs, promotions, and payment plans, among other things (2014). Pricing for profit and increasing sales and market share ensures the company's survival and development (Mostaani, 2005).

(3) Place and Distribution

Place is the factor to affect the clients' perception because it is specifically regarded as the location and form of students receiving teaching services. Besides, the new channel of distribution developed to the remote learning without being restricted by distance (Andrlic et al., 2013).

(4) Promotion

Some scholars have defined "Promotion" as "publicity, public relations, advertising, personal selling" (Andrlic et al., 2013). The tools to inform, remind and persuade prospective clients include open days, exhibitions, conventions (Ivy, 2008), and some regular method like emails, telephone, press conference (Andrlic et al.,

2013).

Educational institutions need to establish contact with their target markets and the public, students and parents need to be informed of their goals and activities to stimulate their interest (Ogunnaike et al., 2014).

In addition to using traditional media to spread, "word of mouth is the best way of publicity" (Andrlic et al., 2013). In the UK, more than half of students are influenced by personal connections, such as "friends, acquaintances, parents, relatives" (Andrlic et al., 2013). Not only that, "in addition to personal resources, the image of teachers and staff is also the choice of educational institution important factor" (Andrlic et al., 2013). Adopting a reward mechanism, a membership system, and a feedback mechanism can improve the effect of promotion (Jain, 2014).

(5) People

The importance of this element has been recognized by many scholars. The "people" is "a picture towards to the public" and "the important source of service differentiation over the competition". In general, it is clearly to understand the roles and perform the duties by "acting responsibly within the assigned rights and responsibilities" (Andrlic et al., 2013). Recruiting suitable employees and training them is an indispensable part of a company that wants to gain competitive advantages (Ogunnaike et al., 2014).

Both roles of academic, administrative and support staff are the element of People (Ivy, 2008). People should be polite, respond enthusiastically enough to customers, provide professional advice, have sales skills and knowledge (Jain, 2014).

(6) Physical Evidence

This is the place to get products and services. Including corporate interior decoration, electronic equipment (TV, Internet), physical facilities (tables and chairs), and the displayed atmosphere (Jain, 2014).

(7) Process

“The process of services provision is actually the procedures, tasks, mechanisms, methods, activities and steps” (Andrlic et al., 2013). It could be controlled by following the principles of reducing costs and increasing productivity during the process so that reaching the planned goal. (Andrlic et al., 2013)

3.2 Customer centered theory

The customer-centered perspective is often used in daily life. It is not a strictly academic term, however there are many theories related to this idea that can help understand the theory (Li Yiming, 2019).

Starting from the 20th century, many scholars have used market data to generalize and summarize different types of customer characteristics and consumer behavior (Li Yiming, 2019). That is, summarizing consumer characteristics and

behaviors through inductive summarization can extend new content to help companies and predict markets. If customized services can be provided, the value which the customer gets increased, and vice versa, it is also beneficial to consolidate the relationship with customers. Because a good customer relationship can be used as the basis for marketing to attract, maintain, and strengthen the relationship with customers. Because when the first transaction is carried out, through the first-hand experience of the product and service, if the buy-back in the future, it is a way to reduce costs for both sides.

Moreover, companies and customers prefer long-term and stable relationships. So, Li Yiming (2019) believes that there are four aspects in the whole life cycle of customer relationship that need to be considered: “① Customer needs-oriented ② Customer experience as a priority ③ Customer service throughout the whole life cycle ④ Customer value-driven”. After understanding the customer's needs, it is important to ensure that the experience is as promised, so that the customer's sense of experience is same from every step, at the same time, generating more added value.

Companies "can implement the customer-centered theory into their management style and institutional mechanisms” (Li Yiming, 2019). For example, the process of focusing on the customer journey to improve the customer experience. For example, the convenience and speed of the service channels of the automation equipment online and offline as well as the attitude and professionalism of the responded staff (Li

Yiming, 2019).

3.3 Customer experience map/Customer journey map

About customer experience, customer journey, customer experience map. The definitions of the four terms customer journey mapping have been defined by different scholars at different times with new perspectives. Nonetheless, the vast majority agree that these efforts are practical. "Only by looking at the customer's experience through his or her own eyes-along the entire journey taken -can you really begin to understand how to meaningfully improve performance" (Abramson, Maloney-Krichmar, and Preece, 2004).

Below is an explanation of the four definitions:

"Customer experience is divided into convenience experience, sensory experience, and emotional experience" (Li Fei, 2019). In particular, the level of convenience is experienced at the beginning, a sensory experience during the process, and the emotional experience at a later stage.

According to the definition of "Customer journeys", Abramson et al., (2004) pointed that "it includes many things that happen before, during, and after the experience of a product or service". The customer journey has five characteristics. First, it is a complete journey for the customer, second, it focuses on the entire journey experience, and satisfaction with a particular touchpoint is not necessarily journey satisfaction,

third, the representation is based on the customer's perspective, fourth, it is an online and offline multi-modal touchpoint, and fifth, it has a longer and repeatable nature (Maechler, Neher and Park, 2016).

The customer experience map started as "customer behavior process and customer need experience" structure and was later "populated with expectations, senses, emotions, opportunities, and risks". This based on the combination of customer behavior process and customer experience content (Li Fei, 2019).The customer journey map is " a flow type visualization technique", which can be presented in the form of a diagram and the service process is unfolded in a timeline (Abramson et al., 2004).

"There are many experts who recognize customer journey maps and customer experience maps as one tool, both used to design and improve products and services" (Li Fei, 2019). But there are also scholars who use them separately. For example, customer experience mapping is used by product developers, product managers and management decision makers to design and improve products and services. Customer journey mapping, on the other hand, is intended for marketing, sales, and service stakeholders to increase sales, improve customer relationships, and enhance brand image, focusing on the sales component of products and services (Li Fei, 2019). Using a mix of the two together is also more common in practical applications today.

This study is using this mixed map to demonstrate customers' journey.

4 Methodology

This thesis utilizes a qualitative method to explore how to understand and analyze the clients' sights in the Z institution, and according to the feedback to improve the marketing strategy. The reason why chooses the qualitative method is that it is better to match the study whose theory should be built (Click, 2020), and this thesis aims to build an updated and suitable marketing strategy for Z institution, instead of testing some theory.

The methodology of this paper is as follows:

(1) Information has been gathered previously from the background and the theoretical framework.

(2) Second-hand information was collected through combining with the description of the industry and enterprises on the website and publications.

(3) Draw on the marketing plans of other Chinese institutions within last ten years.

(4) To obtain first-hand information about the company since the author works in Institution Z by conducting in-depth discussions. The semi-structured in-depth interview was chosen, preparing a list of questions (Annex 2).

(5) Record and organize opinions by interviewing 12 enrolled students. Restore

and present the interviewer's answers and attitudes in the form of "quote from the user's original words".

(6) Combine the user experience journey map with the enterprise's 7Ps service marketing theory, and obtain a complete and more comprehensive user-centered marketing strategy.

Regarding the strong point, if used properly in research, qualitative research is "unbiased, in-depth, valid, reliable, credible, and rigorous" (Anderson, 2010). Qualitative research requires interaction with the research objectives. In the process, misunderstandings between questions and answers can be resolved through multiple communications and repeated confirmations, making the results fairer and more rigorous. Also, after a certain period of interaction, the two parties had more in-depth communication with each other, so that trust was established, and the survey results were more reliable.

However, it also has disadvantages. "Small or weak sample sizes, single-source studies, and poorly written data analysis processes" (Crick, 2020) are obvious shortcomings. Compared with quantitative research that can survey hundreds of interviewees or objectives, the sample size of qualitative research is relatively small. It is hard to use many data samples quantitatively to make inferences and estimate the population's development and trend of the research. Moreover, the characteristics of flexibility also show the low accuracy and low standardization of qualitative research.

These may cause the limitations of this paper.

Generally, there are three common qualitative methods which “particularly suited for obtaining a specific type of data”, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. “In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored.” (Kalra et al., 2013)

To better understand students' attitudes towards Z institution, a one-to-one in-depth interview is adopted to provide a way to express their views on the courses, teaching, services, and prices and complaints so on.

The interview uses a semi-structured format. The outline of the question is prepared in advance. During the in-depth interview, further questions are made according to the content and progress. It uses a one-to-one in-depth interview format and conducts in two ways: directly interview (face-to-face) and indirect interviews (voice calls).

The in-deep interview applied in this thesis is to explore the "mental journeys" of the students who studied in the exam training institution Z. As a scientific method, the in-deep interview is a qualitative research method to understand what people have experienced, their attitudes, and how they have interacted (Kalra et al., 2013). So, the "journey" starts from having the plans and demand of English learning or exam

training and study abroad, then evaluates the professional training institution, and decides to choose the appropriate institution, and finally experiences the whole process of products and services. That means the contents in the journey could be dug from the in-deep interview.

Boyce and Neale (2006) believe that the advantage of in-depth interviews is to provide “much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods” and “a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information”. Nevertheless, “not generalizable” as its limitation is as same as the qualitative method. Overall, this paper conducts qualitative one-on-one in-depth interviews with the research objective.

The content obtained through the interview will be simplified, refined and analyzed by a deductive approach. That is, the semi-structured in-depth interview was chosen, preparing a list of questions from the background and current positioning (Annex 2). By summarizing all the answers, the interviewees' preferences and choices can be summed up, which affects the company's marketing strategy deployment.

5 Case study on Z institution

5.1 Current Situation

AAA Group is a well-known education brand in the field of China's international education. The business of study abroad consultation and overseas examination training has been officially certified by the Chinese Ministry of Education. AAA owns five major sub-brands: study abroad, exam training, study tour, academy, and international K12.

Since its official establishment in 2000, it has been committed to promoting international educational exchanges between mainland China and other countries and regions, such as professional college applications, study tours and exchanges, scientific research project cooperation, capacity improvement projects, and overseas examination training, Cooperation in running schools and other businesses, with strong international education resources advantages, it is one of the most professional study abroad consulting and examination training institutions.

The study abroad business end has a team of study abroad experts, which has been highly recognized by the media and public institutions. AAA Study Abroad is an official enrollment representative authorized by thousands of colleges and universities in more than 20 countries and regions, it has the rare American International Admissions Association (AIRC) certification membership in the world, it is the first

batch of "electronic visas" authorized by the Australian immigration bureau. The systematic institution is also the country's first official agency of Australian eight prestigious universities, as the country's largest admissions agency officially authorized by British institutions, it serves students all over various top universities in the UK.

Founded in 2003, exam prepare business side has established test training centers in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Jinan, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Changsha, Wuhan, Chengdu, Chongqing, Hangzhou, and other major cities. Branch schools are located in major first-tier cities across the country and will continue to expand the territory to establish more branch schools.

AAA Group is committed to building a truly global education service network, providing professional services according to the needs of students. Comparing with some popular medium and large institutions on the market(Table 5).

New oriental (XDF, 2022) is an English training institution founded in 1996 and listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 2006. Its appearance has promoted the vigorous development of China's study abroad industry and has a pivotal position. At the very beginning. The first large class model was a great success. The offline courses size with 80-100 students were very hot among students at that time. As mentioned previously, it was not easy to study abroad in China in the early 90s unless people who meet the requirements. So, they study harder to get the mark to cherish

the opportunity and quota.

Table 5 AAA Comparison between AAA and the other three mainstream institutions

Name	Main service when established	The study platform	Features and Advantages
AAA	Consulting	Physical campus + official website	1)Provide many counselling services and exam training products related to studying abroad 2)Have good cooperative relations with foreign universities 3)High-end training courses
XDF	Language test training	Physical campus + official website	1)Rich and diverse products 2>Listed in the United States and under strong financial support 3)Publications(Vocabulary books, textbooks, etc.)
XHD	Language test training	Physical campus + official website	1)Low price 2)Large size class 3)Publications(Vocabulary books, textbooks, etc.) 4)Study policy(Retake class)
GX	Language test training	Physical campus + APP	1)High-scoring teachers 2)Publications(Vocabulary books, textbooks, etc.) 3)Free online courses

Source: own elaboration from AAA XDF XHD GX official website (see reference)

For example, those who went abroad at the expense of the state were from families with very strong financial backgrounds. Because of this rare opportunity, students were very enthusiastic about studying and taking exams, and they studied hard to meet the basic requirements for studying abroad.

New Pathways (XHD, 2022) is an institution founded in 2004 and currently focuses on overseas training. The founder, Hu Min, was also previously an IELTS teacher and has edited many IELTS exam-related study books. The organization has made a big impact on the training industry in China with its low course prices and large number of students.

GuiXue (GX,2022) is an online education provider that established 21 physical

campuses in China 10 years ago. It has its own app and teaching books to provide professional course services to students. The three current founders, all experts who have been working in the IELTS training industry in China for twenty years, have also published many study books. Its mobile app is also very well known among the academic community.

In summary, it shows that each company has similarities as well as its own uniqueness, attracting most customers through similarities and universal characteristics, also using its own characteristics to make customers feel the difference and thus be able to be chosen.

5.2 Current Marketing Strategy

5.2.1 Target group in Z

Z is an institution that started out as a study abroad service and now specializes in helping students train for English-related exams, with a history of 10 years in Shenzhen. Through 10 years of accumulation and precipitation, there are three main groups of customers by age range (Table 6).

Table 6 Type of target customer group

Age range	Occupation	Study purpose
9-18	Primary/Middle/High school student	Study abroad/English advanced
19-30	College student/Worker	Study abroad/English advanced/Immigrate
30+	Worker/Non-workers/Freelancers	Immigrate/English advanced/Study abroad

Source: *own elaboration from Z internal data*

It can be shown that the commonalities of target groups are:

(1) The client has the willingness to study abroad: there are mandatory requirements for the English test of the international system in the future.

(2) Students have no intention to go abroad for the time being: through English learning to improve the score of domestic English test.

(3) Planning to immigrate or having the English need at work: get a certain required score or plan to improve English ability.

That is to say, the advantages and characteristics of the Z institution are:

(1) Meet customers with different budgets: Students who want to teach offline need to have financial strength, and students who want to teach online need to have stronger self-control and self-learning ability to purchase courses at a lower price.

(2) Word-of-mouth effect: Since AAA group has a 30-year history, it started as a consulting service for studying abroad, and it has a very good reputation in studying abroad. People who studied abroad more than ten years ago will let their children choose AAA's study abroad service and English learning again.

(3) Brand influence: Those consumers who care about brand awareness and like reliable large enterprises will be the target group of Z institution.

5.2.2 Positioning matrix of Z

As previously mentioned, Z's primary customer base is students who plan to study abroad, and Z can provide study programs for people at different grade levels and with different levels of English. Nevertheless, Z's positioning in the international exam industry can change depending on the criteria.

As shown in figure 4, in terms of price range and learning platform positioning, both Z and XHD are focused on opening physical campuses, but have different pricing strategies, with XHD's prices being lower than Z's. Besides, XDF and GX, whose overall price level is more similar to Z, both have a higher coverage of online classes due to their strong capital and technology investment.

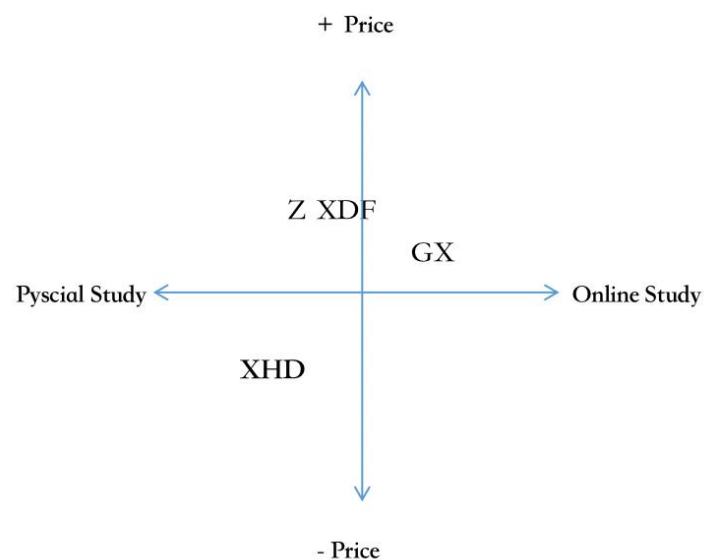


Figure 4 Positioning of Z(Price and Study platform). *Source: own elaboration*

When analyzing the variety of products and class sizes, it is seen that Z is the only one of the four institutions that provide mostly small classes. XHD, which has a lower average product unit price, ensures the turnover by having more big class sizes. XDF, the dominant player in the industry, has a wide product range and class sizes to be chosen. GX, which also has a variety of class sizes, has found its niche in the market by specializing in TOEFL IELTS GMAT GRE exams, opening physical campuses while also providing learning platforms and materials integrated into their APP, this corporate positioning attracts many college students.(Figure 5)

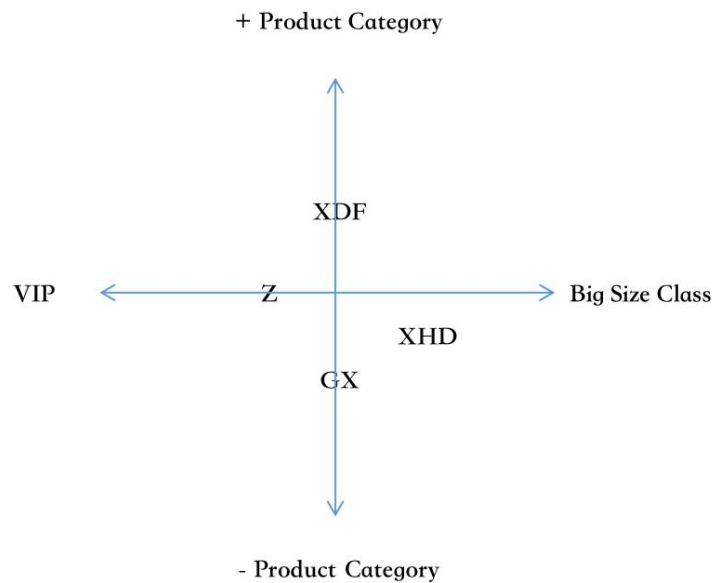


Figure 5 Positioning of Z(Product category and Class size). Source: own elaboration

5.2.3 7Ps applied in Z

Every company has its own specific business positioning. Such as brand image, customer groups, price policy, market strategy, customer service, value orientation. In fact, all business positioning can focus on one point, that is the company should take the needs of customers as the starting point and conducts organized and purposeful business activities, matching standardized products, prices, channels, and promotions, to provide customers with satisfactory and valuable products and service experience, and ultimately the process of achieving corporate goals.

In order to analyze and summarize these influencing factors and apply them in practice, 7Ps is a service marketing strategy that is different from product marketing strategies. The most important thing for a business is to fully understand and meet the needs of consumers, and in the marketing process, a series of activities that are taken regularly and dynamically. The 7P marketing theory was proposed by Booms and Bitner in 1981 and already achieved a high degree of acceptance as a generic marketing mix (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995).

(1) Product strategy

As an educational institution in charge of examination training. The diversification of examination types in the product and the full service of the service constitutes a complete "product".

“Product settings” include Basic English courses, Interview training, Language exam training. After the outbreak, DUOLINGO and PTE were added. These courses are also in line with the changes of the times and meet the characteristics of social needs. There are the details of products of Z (Table 7).

Table 7 The products of Z institution

Type	Items
Language test	IELTS, TOEFL, DUOLINGO, PTE
Professional examinations	SSAT, AEAS, SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT
Language learning class	AE, Basic English, Business English, Interview tutoring
Domestic exam	International School Entrance Exam, DSE
Other languages besides English and Chinese	Japanese, Korean, Spanish, French, German, Italian

Source: own elaboration from Z internal data

The courses offered by training institutions are a product, selling "knowledge" and "services", which are intangible and cannot be materialized. Because of this intangible nature, more value needs to be generated for this reason. In the education service, it is necessary to interact and adjust and adapt instantly, which will make the customers feel risky and uncertain to a certain extent, so the education training industry needs to make the service tangible.

Service systems of Z institution are standard and rich and shown below:

① Student management

Study advisors follow up the training process and create three Wechat groups with study group, student feedback group and exclusive parent feedback group.

② Learning supervision

Focus on attendance management, homework inspection, word recitation supervision and provide daily learning suggestions.

③ Learning guidance

It refers oral English practice, composition correction and stage mock examination.

④ Exam preparation guidance

It refers to the self-study plan after class, test period planning, and psychological counseling before the test.

⑤ Additional benefits

Providing scholarship program, abundant student activities, such as having parties in clubs and bars, making ukuleles, moon cakes and flower arrangements, DIY canvas bags and so on.

(2) Price strategy

Price has a huge influence on marketing effectiveness. Many teaching and training institutions have fallen into the misunderstanding of low-price competition in the marketing process. Scientific prices should take full account of factors such as the current market situation, guaranteeing product quality, customers' cognitive value, and regional price levels.

Z institution is based on small class teaching and mid-to-high-end customers. For students with different family backgrounds, different learning experiences, and different learning foundations, diversified courses are matched due to their differentiated backgrounds and individual needs. Such as recorded courses and online courses, live class and offline physical class. The form of physical class is VIP, small size, middle size (8–12 students) class. The price ranges from 2,000 yuan to 28,800 yuan.

Table 8 Price list of Z institution for offline learning

Course Name	Form	Class size(Students)	Hours	Price (yuan)	
TOEFL/IELTS	Recorded	—	56	2980	
Basic English	Physical teaching/Online	2	80	24000	
		3-6	80	16000	
TOEFL/IELTS		5-7	80	24000	
ACT/SAT		3-6	72	28800	
IELTS		8-12	80	12800	
Basic English		VIP(1)		1	500/h
TOEFL/IELTS					800/h
SSAT/ACT/SAT					800/h
GRE/GMAT					800/h
AP/A-level Subjects					1000/h

Source: own elaboration from Z internal data

(3) Place strategy

① How to let the clients know Z

On the one hand, online channels: advertising on Baidu/Sougou/360 search engine, own official website, and cooperating with some online educational agents. In addition to these traditional marketing channels, Z also promotes on new media platforms. For example, video-based Douyin (Chinese Tiktok), Xiaohongshu (Red), and WeChat Channels, knowledge supplement-based Zhihu, WeChat Subscriptions,

APPs for merchant store recommendation, such as Dianping.

On the other hand, in the offline aspect, through holding education exhibitions, offline outdoor advertising, and cooperating with related individuals and companies. It would be searched on map application. And referrals as the most efficient way to spread the brand. The referral reward standard refers to Figure 5. For example, when the new client paid 20000 yuan, the previous student could have 1000-yuan reward.



The image shows a red banner with the title '推荐亲友奖励' (Referral Reward Standard). Below the title is a table with two columns: '报名金额' (Registration Amount) and '奖励现金' (Reward Cash). The table lists five registration amount ranges and their corresponding reward amounts. At the bottom of the table, there is a note: '说明：报名金额指纯学费，签约金额减去住宿和教材费，只包含学费和其他辅导费用。' (Note: Registration amount refers to pure tuition, signed amount minus accommodation and textbook fees, only including tuition and other tutoring fees.)

报名金额	奖励现金
5000元-10000元	500元
10001元-20000元	1000元
20001元-50000元	1500元
50001元-80000元	3000元
80001元以上	4000元

说明：报名金额指纯学费，签约金额减去住宿和教材费，只包含学费和其他辅导费用。

Figure 6 The referral reward standard of Z institution. *Source: Z internal data*

At the same time, it is also essential to use market segments, such as various international cooperative education projects specific to different international high schools and different universities.

② Site selection environment

Z institution has two campuses in Shenzhen, both are in office buildings located in prosperous areas with convenient transportation. Futian campus is in the CBD business district, where education and training institutions gather (Figure 7). Nanshan campus is where many shopping malls gather (Figure 7).



Figure 7 The entrance of office building of Futian campus(left) & the outdoor advertisement of office building of Nanshan campus(right). *Source: own elaboration*

(4) Promotion strategy

Promotions are happening anytime, anywhere, and have penetrated every corner of our lives. Z's advertising forms include subway paper billboards, subway multimedia advertisements, bus station advertisements, bus body advertisements, community light box advertisements, elevator advertisements, and so on.

In addition, in different time periods, such as winter and summer vacations, company periodic activities such as education exhibitions and other important nodes will be matched with a wide range of promotional activities, such as full gifts, lucky draws, cash back and so on. Especially at the education exhibition three times a year, while providing the lowest annual discount, it also provides lottery opportunities according to different contract price ranges. The image shown below is the June 2022 Education Fair (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Event site picture (left) and list of prizes (right) for the June 2022 Education Fair raffle. *Source: Z internal data*

(5) People strategy

The people-oriented strategy has two meanings, one is customer-oriented. Students are the foundation of the survival and development of education and training institutions. The essence of market competition is to attract students to compete. Therefore, the purpose of marketing is to cultivate loyal student customers. And highly respect and trust students and parents, and provide high-quality, standardized, professional, differentiated products, services and promises allow students and parents to enjoy satisfactory and surprising services, and ultimately become loyal consumers of teaching and training institutions.

Students can request to change classes or change teachers at any time during the study period with reasonable reason. After each session, the study advisor would send students a link to fill out the satisfaction questionnaire so that the institution evaluates the staff's behavior (Figure 9).

Translated by Weixin(results for reference only) Translated by Weixin(results for reference only)

Teaching quality of service feedback form – Shenzhen Campus

Dear students, hello! Thank you for spending 2 minutes to complete the following questionnaire, provide your views and comments, we attach great importance to data security, will never disclose any of your privacy issued information. Let's get started right now!

• Now reading the course paragraph:

• Your advisor at this stage is:

Please make the following comments according to the teaching of different teachers:

• Listening (including comprehensive listening and speaking)

Teaching service

• Does the student advisor ask you to take an entrance test?
 Yes
 nothing

• Did the study consultant introduce you to important information about campus attendance, leave, scholarships, next stage study plan, recommended students to sign up for classes and other important information during the course from the beginning to the end of the course?
 yes
 no

• Does the consultant encourage you to study or practice?
 yes
 No

During your study in school, did the learning

Figure 9 Sample of teaching quality and service feedback questionnaire. *Source: own elaboration*

The second is employee-oriented, specifically the employee-oriented training institutions, to correctly motivate, cultivate, and select. Mobilizing the creativity and enthusiasm of employees to create the greatest synergy for the overall marketing of the training school. Educational institutions should attach importance to the training of employees in terms of skills, achieve standardization and reproducibility of services, and recognize corporate culture and values.

For example, the criteria for recruiting course consultants are:

- a. Good communication skills: Who can express accurately to express their views and lead the conversation, and politely not interrupt others.

b. Strong ability on learning and integrating information: Knowledge of study abroad and examination policies will be adjusted from time to time, requiring a strong learning ability to learn the newest. At the same time, having the ability to integrate information and background and current situation to match the courses.

c. Self-driven ability and strong stress tolerance: As a course consultant, taking the initiative to communicate with customers and working under pressure to achieve personal and team goals is required.

d. Basic English skills: Ability to correct entrance tests and explain students' weaknesses in English in a simple manner.

(6) Physical evidence strategy

Physical evidence strategy can be divided into physical environment and information communication tools. The physical environment consists of school environment and design, staff dress etiquette, corporate image and so on. The two campuses use transparent glass to provide the style of freedom and business.

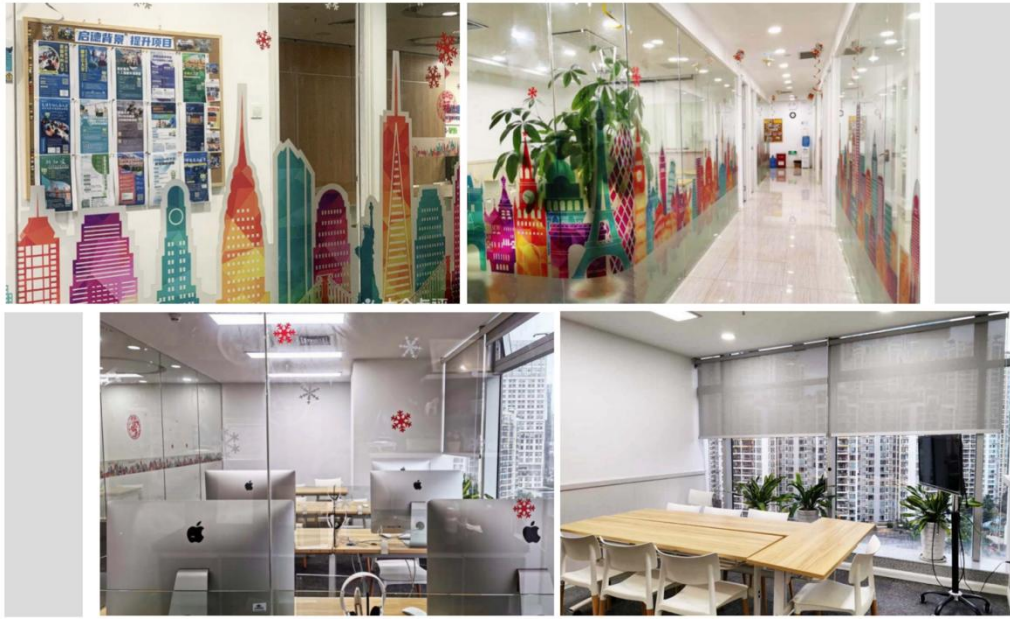


Figure 10 Pictures of Z institution. *Source: Z internal data*

Note: The pictures are: notice wall, corridor, test room, classroom.

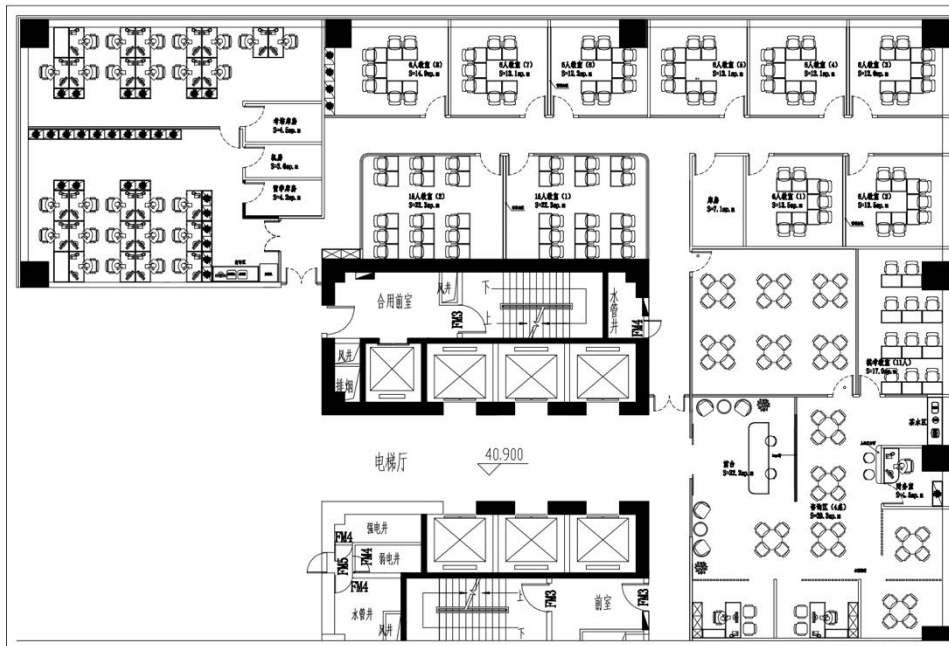


Figure 11 Nanshan campus with 10 classrooms. *Source: Z internal data*

Z from various sources, and then begins a "journey". The specific service process can be referred to Figure 13.

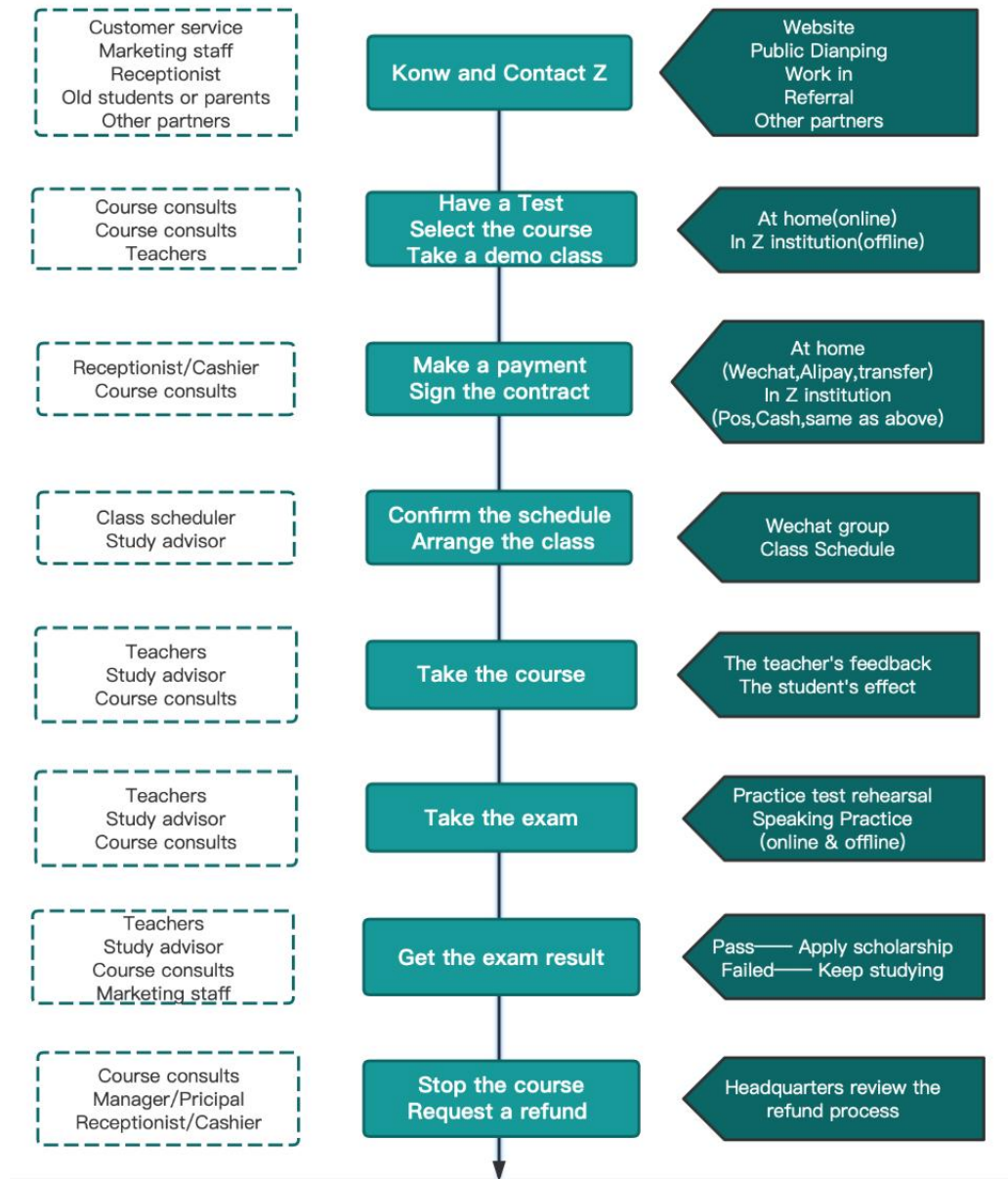


Figure 13 Customer "go shopping "in Z institution. *Source: own elaboration.*

Whether it is in the maintenance and updating of the website and public website, the cooperation with other companies, and the layout and decoration of the campus.

Or in contacting and communicating with different employees, in teachers' classes, in after-school supervision and coaching by SA, or simply in paying and signing contracts. All can be as efficient, simple, fast and professional as possible.

In other words, it is worthwhile for the company to optimize the operation and invest more money in these touch points to provide a better experience and feeling for the customers.

Overall, the current Z's 7Ps with many shortcomings are at the fundamental stage, and it could be improved.

6 Data

Since the semi-structured in-depth interview is used in this thesis, the data is from the students who studied in Z institution, mainly to obtain the more targeted point of views. The principle of designing the interview's process is referenced from Boyce & Neale (2006).

Aims and background

To provide the Z institution with a marketing strategy that is more suitable for the new normal after the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the customer-centered premise, through in-depth interviews with the institution's customers, to understand their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, and to take the interviews. More detailed information is summarized and analyzed in the form of the customer experience journey and then targeted suggestions are made.

6.1 Interview plan

Since the model is used customer experience journey map and 7Ps marketing strategy, so design questions are mainly about the journey on "before study", "during study" and "after study". Through the application of one-to-one in-depth interviews to explore what they have experienced, especially those neglected and undervalued scenes and concerns.

(1) Participants

Interviewer: the author. The writer is course consultant who responsible for enrollment in the z institution, the main duty is providing reasonable learning plans for students who need English learning or exam training and promoting transactions.

Interviewee: students in Z institution. The selected interviewees are all students who signed a contract with the author. A high degree of trust has established between the loyal customers and the writer. So as far as possible to improves the accuracy of the interview results.

(2) Location and method

Online interview: students who studied online and who are not convenient to conduct face-to-face interviews in Z institution using Tencent Meeting APP

Offline interview: face to face in Z institution

(3) Language

The language of the interview is Chinese. The selected interviewees are students whose mother tongue is Chinese so that it is better to understand each other during the process of questioning and answering avoid communicating difficulties caused by language differences.

(4) Tools

In the interview paper, pen, computer, the mobile phone should be prepared. Such as taking notes based on the respondent's answers and make a record. All the interview content is recorded and kept. The key contents are translated into English text for integrated analysis.

(5) Recruitment of interviewees

To compare the thoughts and suggestions of students before and after the pandemic, the respondents were divided into two groups:

Students before COVID-19 pandemic: 6 students (registration, study, and exam time are all before October 2019)

Students after COVID-19 pandemic: 6 students (registration, study, and exam time are all later than October 2020)

(6) Time scale

The interview time: In June 2021

Duration: 1 hour per person

6.2 Process

There is the standardized process.

① Self-introduction and interview content

- ② Check whether the student's personal information is incorrect
- ③ Understand the students' English or exam situation
- ④ Understand the feelings and experiences of training in Z institution
- ⑤ Ask the students for their complaints, suggestions, and expectations
- ⑥ Further discussion
- ⑦ Concluding remarks

7 Findings

Through interviewing 12 students who studied in Z institution, there is a more in-depth understanding of the customers' thoughts. From planning to study abroad, having the need to take the international standardized language test, going to participate in language test training, taking a class, and a series of actions in the process, the interviewee's feelings, reasons, suggestions have been further understood. And the interviewees were divided into two kinds according to signing up before or after covid-19. At the same time, to analyze and study the impact of the pandemic on customers' thinking and actions.

7.1 The interviewee' basic information

In this in-depth interview, twelve research subjects were selected. It consisted of 6 females and 6 males, with an age range of 20-24 years old. Some "Before" students have already studied abroad and returned to work in China. "After" students are preparing to study in different countries and regions. Their study plans are transferring to universities and having a master's degree. Except for one student who did not have an official exam after training and two students are in training. The rest of the students have taken the official exam and have official scores as shown in Table 9. (N/A means that the student has not taken the test yet.)

Table 9 The basic information of interviewee

No.	Age	Occupation	The planned country and area	The planned degree	Final score
BF1	21	Student	USA	Bachelor	TOEFL 110
BF2	23	Sales	UK	Master	IELTS 6.5
BF3	21	Student	UK	Master	N/A
BM1	22	Tutor	KO	Master	IELTS 7
BM2	21	Student	HK	Master	IELTS 7
BM3	24	Programmer	UK	Master	IELTS 6
AF1	20	Student	MC/HK	Master	IELTS 5.5
AF2	20	Student	AU	Bachelor	IELTS 6.5
AF3	22	Student	HK/UK	Bachelor	N/A
AM1	21	Student	CAN	Bachelor	N/A
AM2	23	Student	AU/HK	Master	IELTS 6.5
AM3	23	Programmer	UK	Master	IELTS 6

Source: own elaboration

Note. This table includes including interviewee' age, occupation, country and degree where he plans to study abroad, and scores already obtained. The role of coding number is B represents the students studied before the COVID-19 pandemic, A represents the students studied after the COVID-19 pandemic, F represents Female, M represents Male. Abbreviations for countries are CAN=Canada, MC=China Macau, HK= China Hong Kong, UK=United Kingdom, USA=America, KO=Korea.

Table 10 The detailed information of interviewee

No.	Education background	Home address (District)	Data source in system	Purchase method	Deciders	Class size	Teaching method
BF1	Senior High School	Baoan	Offline - Walk in	Offline	with family	Small size / VIP	Offline
BF2	Bachelor	Nanshan	Word-of-mouth	Offline	personally	Middle Size	Offline
BF3	Senior High School	Nanshan	Offline - Walk in	Offline	with family	Middle Size / VIP	Offline
BM1	Korean Bachelor	Nanshan	Online - Official website	Offline	personally	Small size	Offline
BM2	Bachelor	Nanshan	Offline - Education Fair	Offline	personally	Small size / VIP	Offline
BM3	Bachelor	Longgang	Word-of-mouth	Offline	with family	Small size	Offline
AF1	Bachelor	Longgang	Online - Education Fair	Online	with family	Small size	Offline
AF2	Bachelor	Baoan	Offline - Walk in	Online	with family	VIP	Online/Offline
AF3	American Bachelor	Longhua	Channel of cooperation	Online	personally	Small size	Online
AM1	Bachelor	Baoan	Offline - Walk in	Online	with family	Small size / VIP	Offline
AM2	Bachelor	Nanshan	Offline - Walk in	Offline	with family	VIP	Offline
AM3	Bachelor	Baoan	Online - Baidu	Offline	personally	Small size	Offline

Source: own elaboration

Note. This table summarizes the basic information of the interviewee, such as the education background at that time, the district where the home address is located, the source of the system data, the online or offline mode of signing the contract and attending the class, the decision makers who confirmed the transaction (with family and personally), and the selected class size (small size=less than 6 students, middle size=8-12 students, VIP=1 student).

It can clearly see the educational background of the interviewed students when they had the exam training in Z, which ranges from high school to undergraduate, and 2 students were studying overseas (BM1&AF3). (Table 10)

Their home addresses are in different districts of Shenzhen. Most of the students in the "Before" category live in Nanshan District, which has a campus. Students in the "After" come from four districts, Longgang, Longhua, Baoan, Nanshan. According to the data from 12 interviewees, the distribution of the "After" is more scattered than before. Some students do not mind the long distance and long commuting time (BF1&AM1&AM3), and some could have an online class (AF2&AF3) or rent a flat around the campus (BM3&AF1) to solve the distance problems. In addition, two of the interviewees are college students studying in other cities, commuting between the two cities to attend training courses (AF1&AF2).

There are many sources of student information registered in the system, including online search, referral, and direct walk-ins to the Z. It shows that the ways for students and parents to contact Z institution are more diverse and can also increase the possibility of acquiring customers. In terms of purchase method and class mode, the "Before" students have chosen to pay and sign the contract face-to-face on campus and attend the offline classes in Z institution. The "After" students are more inclined to accept to process the payment and study online. Additionally, the decision-makers and class size have no obvious changes in

different periods.

7.2 The designed customer experience journey map

In order to describe Z's customer experience nodes and details more clearly, the new process map was made and sorted out (Annex 3). This map is mixed from parts of the Customer experience map and the Customer journey map. Named customer experience journey map.

The customer experience journey map will be divided into five phases, namely, Awareness, Findability, Reputation, Conversion, and Advocacy. Each phase corresponds to the specific details of both the product user (the customer) and the product provider (the exam training institution). For customers, different scenarios show the goals and specific behaviors they want to achieve. For exam training institutions, correspond to relevant stakeholders and influencing factors.

This integrated experience journey map shows how the customer and the institution interact, and when observing and analyzing every touch point and every action of the segmented customer, the advantages and disadvantages of the process can be discovered.(Figure 14)

Phase	Awareness	Findability	Reputation	Conversion	Advocacy	
Scenario	Have the need of studying abroad and passing exam	Know more about course settings and arrangements	Compare and select an optimal institution	Decide to have a class in the institution	Study and being training (online or offline)	Take the exam
Function	Initial contact with the study abroad and examination training industry	Get a general understanding of the products and services of exam training	Confirm whether the institution can meet the demand	Make a deal and become a customer (student)	Get the needed and satisfied scored through learning	Test the results of learning and get the official score
User action	1.Ask experienced people around them 2.Search on the Internet 3.Go to the physical institution	Ask some questions and listen to the course consultant's study suggestions and plans	1.Argue and compare 2.Request a demo class to experience	Sign up the contract online or offline	1.Have a class 2.Finish homework 3.Do some exercises 4.Practice speaking	Prepare the admission ticket and other to the examination room to take the exam
Stakeholder	1. Regular customers 2.Cooperate partner/ Customer service group 3.Receptionist	Course consultant	1.Couse consultant 2.Teachers	1.Couse consultant 2.Study advisor	1.Couse consultant 2.Study advisor 3.Teachers	1.Couse consultant 2.Study advisor 3.Teachers
Factors	1.Brand effect 2.word of mouth 3.Advertisement 4.Location and institution environment 5.Marketing channel	1.Product design (teachers/class size/ schedule/ content/text book/price/discount/ teaching model) 3.Commucation and sales skill	Experienced and professional staffing	1.Payment method 2.Contract content	1.Course progress 2.Homework completion 3.Follow-up service 4.Feedback mechanism	1.Pre-test service and guidance 2.training effect 3.Satisfaction 4.Post-purchase expectations 5.Recommend willing

Figure 14 The customer experience journey map. *Source: own elaboration.*

7.3 The interviewed results

7.3.1 The theory of interview questions

By aggregating the questions asked by the respondents with the designed customer experience journey map of Z and the analysis of Z's 7Ps status in Chapter 5.

The theory corresponding to the questions can be found in the figure below. It became the cue to provide guiding factors for customer-centered strategy.

Table 11 The relationship between "List of questions" and "Map and 7Ps theory"

Question No.	Qusetion Keyword	Customer experience Journey map	7Ps Strategy
1	English is difficult or not	Awareness - Interest	Product
2	Why study in institutions	Awareness - Interest	All
3	English improved or not	Advocacy - Experience	Product
4	Exam results satisfaction	Advocacy - Experience	Product
5	How to know Z	Findability - Search	Promotion/Place
6	Why inquire Z	Reputation - Research	All
7	Compared to others or not	Reputation - Research	All
8	Why sign up	Reputation - Research	Product/People/Price
9	Detailed sign-up reason	Reputation - Research	All
10	Study online or offline	Conversion - Purchase	Product/Promotion
11	Z VS Others training schools	Reputation - Research	Product/People/Price
12	Z VS Traditional School	Reputation - Research	Product/People/Price
13	Class size preference	Findability - Search	Product
14	Recommend Z or not	Advocacy - Experience	Promotion/Place
15	Dissatisfied parts	Advocacy - Experience	Process
16	Personal advice	Advocacy - Experience	Process
17	What did you gain	Advocacy - Experience	Product
18	Advertisement	Findability - Search	Promotion/Place
19	Proposal new products	Findability - Search	Product
20	Z's location	All	Physical evidence

Source: own elaboration

7.3.2 The results of interview

The following results are presented according to the questions asked by the authors. (List of questions see Annex 2)

①How difficult is English for you: 1 very easy, 2 easy, 3 general, 4 difficult, 5 very difficult

This question aims to know the English foundation of the students. In order to

give the respondents an answer to define easier, this question provides them with five numbers to indicate the English degree they have. From the scores of 12 respondents on their English foundation, (from 1 point means English is easy for me to 5 points English is difficult for me, 3 is general), the results show that BM2 considers he masters English well and English is easy (1 point), and BM3, AM1, AM3 think that English is very difficult to learn (5 points) according to Figure 14.

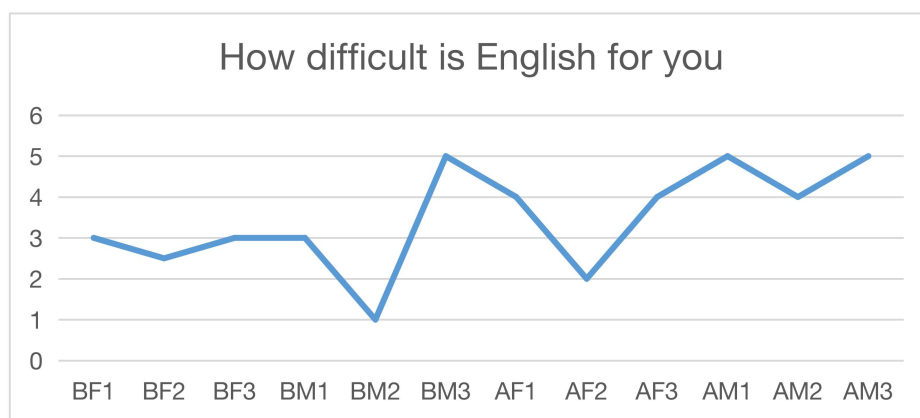


Figure 15 How difficult English is to the interviewee. *Source: own elaboration.*

② Why do you want to study at an English test training institution? (Why not study by yourself?)

This question aims to know the advantage of studying in an institution. The answers of interviewees are focused on “Professionalism and Timesaving”.

a. Self-study is difficult and time-wasting

Respondents have received English education in elementary school, high school, and university. They have followed the courses in the school step by step

or have participated in a training class for learning English, or they have studied abroad for examinations, or in other Institutions have studied. Regardless of the situation, they have a unified requirement because they have not yet received a satisfactory score. The goal is to find a training institution that can help them improve their English proficiency and get the target score as much as possible.

Although there are a lot of learning test materials on the market.

"They need to be screened. Training institutions' teachers can point out the direction of learning. Especially for students with a foundation in English, they can improve in a short time and make full use of their time." -AF2

"It is not intuitive. I can reduce the time cost by directly asking the teacher in the organization." -AF1

"I don't want to study by myself, and I don't need to prepare the materials myself. The institution has everything"- BM1

The time-consuming and unprofessional shortcomings of self-study are obvious, and they can realize that, so they will try to find solutions.

b. Some parts of English language exam improvement

(Listening/Speaking/Reading/Writing/Grammar)

However, some students think that oral and writing need to be trained but listening and reading can be learned by themselves. They also mentioned the need for oral and writing training. Because through interactive communication in the classroom, students can take the initiative and promptly ask questions to the teacher, and the teacher can also intuitively discover the students' problems.

"If I learn it by myself, I don't know how to learn it. Now I can let the teacher assess my level and point out where there is a problem. The oral class gives me the opportunity to practice, and the writing class makes my writing more organized and structured."- AF3

"The two sub-items of oral writing and writing cannot be found wrong when I study by myself." -AM2

Speaking and writing is seldom used during Chinese students' language learning, and the ability to communicate with people and academic writing is necessary for studying abroad, so students will choose the part that needs to be improved according to their own demand.

③After the training, has your English improved?

④Have you learned the knowledge you want? Or did you get the score you satisfied with?

These two questions aim to the results and the satisfaction after training.

The extent of improved English and the satisfaction about official scores

Table 12 The extent of improved English and satisfaction of training result.

No.	BF1	BF2	BF3	BM1	BM2	BM3	AF1	AF2	AF3	AM1	AM2	AM3
Has your English improved?	Yes	Yes	A bit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the score you need or satisfied?	Both yes	Need Not satisfied	Neither	Need Not satisfied	Need Not satisfied	Need Not satisfied	No	No	On the way	On the way	Both yes	Need Not satisfied

Source: own elaboration

Overall: The normal study period in Z institution is from one month to two

years. Except for BF3 who thinks it only a little improvement, other students think it has improved, including two who are studying and have not participated in the official exam, because they refer to the improved accuracy rate from the usual practice and the higher scores in the mock exams than before.

Most students get the scores that they need but they were not satisfied, which means that students have higher expectations and goals for language tests.

⑤How did you know Z institution ?

⑥Why did you choose Z institution to consult?

These two questions were designed to understand how respondents knew Z institution and why they chose to learn about Z's products. The three aspects are "Brand effect" "Teacher recognition" and "Referral".

a. Brand effect

Some respondents knew that AAA's main business was in the study abroad sector, so they thought of Z when they need an English certificate to meet the school's requirements.(AF2,AF3,AM1,AM3)

b. Teacher recognition

Since AAA group is a long history education brand, students and parents

will associate the brand with teachers because the teachers of educational institutions are the core product competitiveness.

"Because Z is top 3, so it is guaranteed. The teachers own a high-level English skill."- AM3

"Everyone says that the teachers in Shenzhen will be better, and the big institutions have brand protection."-AF1

"Because it is a brand organization, the teachers should be good."- BM2

c. Referral

Referral includes friend recommend (BF3,BM1,BM3,AF3) and relative recommend (BF2).

⑦Which institutions have you compared before? (Why did not choose others?)

This question was designed to find out which strong competitors in the market had been known to the enrolled students and the reasons for not choosing them already. And what kinds of customers have "uniqueness and trustworthiness" for Z institution.

Some of the respondents connected and chose Z institution without comparing the course with other institution(BF3,BM1,BM3).

The rest of the respondents were touched and consulted by several institutions to find the optimum one.

a. Compared more than three institutions

"New Oriental, Global IELTS, Zhumuniao and Z."-BF1

"Xintong, Meilian, New Oriental, Guixue."-BF2

b. Decided between two institutions

"I learned about Peiji (an institution next to the campus of Shenzhen University), although it is very cheap, the large class size makes me feel unreliable. I hope to choose an institution which can help me get a higher score." -BM2

"I have taken the IELTS class in Global IELTS, and I consider the teachers normal. The price is more expensive in New Oriental." -AF3

"Z's English study plan is nearly 100,000 yuan cheaper than the one offered by New Oriental, and the shorter study period saves my time." -AM1

"The geographical location of some institutions is not suitable. The top brand New Oriental has too many students and its reputation is not very good. I like the top three Z."-AM3

⑧ Why did you sign up with Z institution?

⑨ What prompted you to sign up? (Distance, price, discount, teachers, consultants, tight time, poor foundation, professional institution, brand)

This question aims to gain the reasons on purchasing the study service.

a. Professionalism of institutions and consultants

BF1,AF1,AF3 experienced the professional style of Z through their consultant.

b. Highly trusted referral

BF2 met and trusted Z through the introduction of her relatives. BF3, BM1, and

BM3 were all recommended by friends, and decided to sign up after learning about Z institution without comparing it with other institutions.

c. Demo class

BF1 & AM2 are comparing more than three institutions at the same time, and they all made their choices after the demo class. Because "feeling the professionalism and strength of the teachers".

d. Brand influence

BM1, BM2 feel that big institutions are guaranteed. Both AM3 and BM1 deliberately do not choose top1 (New Oriental).

e. Appropriate location & excellent environment

"Coastal City is a high-end business district with a very good surrounding environment. The campus is full of learning atmosphere, and I like floor-to-ceiling windows very much."- BM1

f. Participated in Z's activities

BF2 and BM2 have participated in Z's large-scale education exhibition which is held three times a year.

g. Efficient process

AF1 felt that the consultant's responsiveness demonstrated her accountability and high level of institutional reliability.

h. Family decision-making

"Price and payment are my mother's business, I don't care, I will be in charge of classes and exams." -AF2(whose mother arranged her study in Z.)

i. School apply to service and language learning are in a company

AF1 and AF3 need to have an English certificate after purchasing the application service in AAA.

j. Lower prices and time-saving plan

Here is cheaper than other institutions(AF3, AM1, AM3) and saves my time(AM1).

k. Public comments and views on the Internet

"I found the comments and feedback of Z are not bad on the Internet."-AM3

⑩ Why did you choose to teach online or offline? How did your feel?

This question aims to find out whether the outbreak has affected students' perceptions and feelings about online teaching. Respondents expressed their opinions and held opposing views.

Those interviewed who signed up before covid-19 have all chosen to take classes offline, although had experienced nearly half a year of online teaching and office mode due to the epidemic. When asked about their preference for online or offline teaching, these 6 students still chose offline teaching, and pointed out the

shortcomings and disadvantages of online teaching. For example, "not cost-effective", "low learning efficiency", "attention will Dispersion" "poor effect".

At the same time, among the respondents who signed up after covid-19, 4 of them having taken online courses offered by other international training institutions aboard, choose offline teaching. The main reason is that they consider the depressed and sleepy online courses are not suitable for them.

" The state of learning at home is not good, and I could not keep awake in class." -AF1

"I took an online class from KAOMANFEN (an exam training institution specializing in online APPs), and I fell asleep."-AM3

"I have taken a video class, but it is not effective. The offline class will have a 'ceremonial sense' because it provides a learning environment, put on my clothes and go to the campus, I would not be sleepy."-AM2

There are also students who think that it is a device problem, such as *"I have tried the online IELTS class. Take the writing class as an example, it is very inconvenient. Because I need to open several pages at the same time and switch back and forth, it is a waste of time and there will be network delays."- AM1*

Some students need teachers and study advisors to supervise. *"If it is an online class, no one 'forces' me to learn."-BM2*

In contrast, there are also respondents who like to take classes online.

"I am studying for an undergraduate degree in the United States. I have taken online classes in China with one year of online class experience (some courses are

recorded, and some courses are live), so I have become accustomed to and accepted the mode of online class teaching. Moreover, online classes have advantages: I have the study habit of sorting out class notes for review, and the electronic version of the materials sent by the teacher It can be convenient for me to organize. You know, if it is an offline class, it is inconvenient for the teacher to write on the blackboard. Anyway, it must be online teaching in the speaking and writing class.” -AF3 (who signed a contract and took classes online)

AF2 is acceptable for online courses, but she put forward requirements for accepting online classes *“I need a teacher Both students and students turn on the camera and video class”.*

⑩Have ever you had course in others training school before? what type is it? What are the similarities and differences between us?

This question aims to understand what Z can learn from training institutions in other industries.

“I have studied Korean before, and the language learning is very similar between institutions.” -BM1

“I have participated in the training of ACCA (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), I only need to pass for this certificate. For the language test, I want to get the higher score because of its scoring standard.” -BM2

“I have taken synchronous courses in middle school and high school before, including large, and small size classes and VIP. In my opinion, the teachers are more responsible and professional with the higher course fees.” -AF1

⑪What is the differences between institution and the general school when you study English?

This question aims to understand what the difference between Z and traditional schools is, and the irreplaceability of Z.

a. Class size

"There are no more than 6 students in Z's class. I can 'passively' study." -BM2

b. Teaching mode and content

"There are 18 people in my language foundation course in the United States. Reading lesson teaches me how to read literature, listening and speaking lessons teach me how to make presentations, and writing teaches how to cite and write papers. In the past, I learned new words, logic and method at school. However, in Z institutions, teachers help students sort out the focus of exams and provide categorized study ." -AF3

"I could study in different classes and levels in Z. Having similar level classmates and same progress." -BF1

"The curriculum is taught by chapter, and the content is easier." -BF3

c. Teacher background and style

"The teachers in the university are aged and lack vitality. Oppositely, the teachers are younger and having satisfactory academic background, test scores and professional English skill in the institution." -BM1

d. Teaching quality and effect

"The learning materials are all provided by the institution. The professors in the university teach us by following the PPT that has not been updated many years, and I have to learn by myself after class. I need to take the international standardized test through a lot of English practice by supervised from Z's teachers. It is a learning model that the learning outcomes can be quantified and visualized" -BM2

"In college, I just want to 'pass', and I don't care about 'being better'. We have a clear objective while we learn here." -BM3

"I am lazy in a university class. But in Z my time is filled with homework, and my teachers, study advisors, and course consultant all urge me to practice." -AF1

"Z pays attention to my grades and the goals. Students have the same strong goals." -AM3

③ Without considering the factors such as price and time, which class size do you prefer? VIP, small class, or large class? Why?

This question aims to understand the customer's favorite class size and collect the reasons. Regardless of any objective conditions(money, time, and so on), respondents have their own preferences for class size.

Two students who have taken VIP and small class stated that VIP is their preferred method of teaching.

"I like the VIP course because all the feedback given by the teacher is aimed at focusing on me. I think my poor oral English has caused an inferiority complex, so I dare not speak in the class. If nobody is here, it makes me more relaxed, this can discover more problems. Moreover, oral learning requires practice, so face-to-face classes are suitable for me."-BM2

"VIP is effective because on-demand to design the class contents and process, the effect of raising scores is remarkable." - AM2, the student who obtained the desired and satisfactory scores through VIP study, chose VIP teaching.

Students also indicated the disadvantages of VIP study.

"It doesn't feel good to be focused"-BM1

"It's annoying to be stared at all the time."-BM3

"No classmates for reference and comparison."-AF2

"I can't take a nap in class if only me." -AM1

" Too expensive, and I'd be embarrassed if I couldn't answer the teacher's question"-AF3

The rest of the students, no matter what type of class they were in, think that the class size of 3-6 people is their favorite. The advantages are "making friends" "chatting with each other" "having a reference to compare", and "the teacher pays less attention to me".

Students also mentioned the disadvantages of studying in small classes.

"Promoting each other among classmates" (AF2), "Wasting time" (AM1).

"Teacher's focus on students is reduced because every student needs to participate and interact in class."-BM3

"The learning of speaking and writing does not receive the teacher's attention."-AF3

⑭ Would you recommend the Z institution to friends and relatives?

Most of the respondents (10 of 12) felt they would recommend Z to those around them because of their good class experience.

"Because I have experienced the course myself." -AM1

When asked whether the referral reward would motivate them to make a referral, BM1&AF3 said "yes", and two respondents believed that even if there was a referral reward, it would not be more recommended (BM3&AF1). Additional rewards could not motivate them.

There are also respondents who bluntly said "No", because she thinks that the effect of large-scale class study is not effective". She is a student who took a college interview coaching course at Z institution after Gaokao. She also took the IELTS class in the summer vacation of her freshman year. *"I want to study at that time to have a preliminary understanding of IELTS, so I took a middle-size class of 8-12 students."* One year later, she consulted the Z's other course consultant again when she needs to improve her speaking (but didn't pay). Despite the above three experiences, she still gave a bad review.

"I wouldn't recommend Z to my friends because there are too many training institutions in the market and I wouldn't dare to recommend it, but if someone told me there was a referral reward, I would." -AF2

⑮ Is there anything you are not satisfied with? (product, service, CC, and so on)

⑯ What advice do you have for Z institution? (product, service, CC, and so on)

a. Quality of teaching and service

Respondents raised some dissatisfaction with teaching and tutoring services. For example, the teaching method is not practical (BF3), the uncertainty about which method to use comes from different teachers (BM3), the uneven quality of teachers (BF1).

"Some teachers are wasting my time by teaching students boringly with no

feedback on assignments." -AF1

"Dissatisfied with listening subject, it's not worth spending money on it" - AM3

"SA provided few assistances, only supervising, no feedback. Their level of English was also different"-BF1

"It might be effective to be more active in urging students to do homework. I mean sometimes I feel lazy to learn, it would remind me."-AM2

b. Price, Discount, Promotion

"Actually, I care about the price. I think the money should be spent because if I don't spend it on IELTS study, the language foundation course will spend more. Z gave me a cheaper study plan and saved my time."-AM1

"In contrast, boys consume more impulsively, simply, and direct, and the price is not important. It would be better if there is a discount, but I think it's just a means of promotion." -BM1

"The price is acceptable. You gave me a discount to make me feel better, because the teachers of the brand organization should be good." -BM2

AF1&BM2 think the price is a bit high, but they think the price is reasonable in Shenzhen.

In terms of promotion, many students are not familiar with word-of-mouth referral rewards. (BM1, AF2, AF3)

Regardless of whether it is a student who has decided to sign up and pay by themselves or determined after discussing with family, they showed a feeling of not caring about the price. The interview results indicated that the interviewees care about the price, but the price factor seems not important when measuring the training value, because the target score is the top priority. In terms of discounts, it is

also a similar attitude that there is little effect on promoting transactions as they said.

c. Views on Course Consultant (the author)

Note: As a very critical role of offline educational institutions, course consultants need to professionally and clearly explain to customers the products and services, and when they have objections to course contents, prices, discounts, course arrangements and so on, they must be able to communicate and adjust at any time. When interviewing students, not only asked them what they think of the author but also asked them to express their own suggestions for this role and position.

Since the student signed a contract with the author, it means that they trust the author. but the interviewee also already be told before the interview that tries to explain their truest thoughts as much as possible.

1) Making sure the correct and detailed study plan and service.

"You didn't emphasize my tutoring service details. It is recommended that CC should introduce the course service to clients accurately, such as 10 full-real oral practices after class." -AF3

"Sometimes you are so busy that you forget some things you promised me. For example, you must send me timetables but you forgot. But I know that you are a very responsible and capable person. You get along well with every student. I think this position requires people with strong hands-on and business abilities and high efficiency."-AM1

2) Owning Strong affinity and skill of communication, flexibility and efficiency.

"I feel very relieved when I communicate with you, I don't bother to compare, and the plan you gave is also very suitable. You helped me arrange a weekend class one day a week, which met my requirements. Other institutions are not so. Flexible customization. I like it very much."-AM3

"After I met the consultant teacher at the campus, I thought it was good and decided to buy it."-BM3

"The role of CC has increased my trust in this institution. After talking with you, I found that the aura is very compatible for us, which is high context. You know, Chinese care about this very much." –BM2

3) Having professionalism in studying abroad and examination knowledge.

"I will not sign up because of the unprofessional course consultant, and I will lose my recognition with the company."-BF3

"Actually, I also connected to other institutions on the Internet, but you contacted me earlier. This behavior made me feel that you or Z institution would be more caring about students. But I don't care about CC. I just hope somebody could answer my questions clearly and give me a study plan. This person should be professional and humane and able to solve problems and give two learning plans to choose."-AF1

"The influence of the consultant on my registration and study is not great, and it will not be very important. The teacher is valued. Be kind and encourage me and be able to answer questions in a timely manner. However, parents should look at the professionalism of this consultant." -AF2

d. Product design

"It's too early for class at 8:30 in the morning."-AM3

"Because I used to take an advanced class, it is suggested that the course cycle can be compressed to 1-2 weeks, which does not require so many class hours. It is enough to teach me the strategies and skills of doing exercises, and I will do a lot of exercises after class."-BM1

"It supposed to add some psychological counseling on the service side."-AF2

e. Physical evidence

"The learning system is not smart and needs to be updated."-AM2

"Study rooms are arranged to have separate spaces, not shared ones."-BF2

"Hope to give more materials and introductions related to studying abroad"-BF3

It is recommended to establish new campuses (AF1, AM1, AM3), and it is

recommended to establish in Baoan (AM1, AM3).

f. Process-the positive communication

"I didn't feel good about changing teachers during the course. If it needs to change teachers please tell me first to ask my attitude."-AF1

"I don't like the teacher said that the speaking part is difficult to improve, and it gave me inaccurate hints."-BF1

⑰ Except for learning English-related knowledge, what else did you gain?

This question aims to know what value-added services they get.

a. Ability improvement

Learning habits, methods of memorization, and how to be more efficient(BF1),
compression resistance(BF2), methods of learning English(AF1).

"In the speaking class, I learned about foreign cultures and some authentic expressions. In the writing class, I learned about the foreign writing mode without making preconceived judgments and learn how to write academic papers. "-AF2

b. Understand the training industry

Understanding the industry and business processes(BM1, AM3)

c. Good relationship

Interact with the teacher to understand the common sense of life(BM2), made

friends(AM2,BM3), feel the human touch and get along well with. (AM1,AM3).

"The teacher is very charming, and the extracurricular content is very interesting. It will also answer some doubts in life."-AM2

d. Nothing

"I didn't learn anything."-BF3

⑱ Have you seen the advertisement for Z institution? If so, where?

This question aims to understand where they saw Z.

BF1 said the Z's advertisement is around. But some of them "rarely" (BF3,BM1,AF2) and "never"(AF1) see it before.

In the aspect of offline, BM2&AM2 both mentioned that they have seen advertisements in the school.

"I have seen them around the Z institution office building. Such as in elevator ad, outside the building."- BF1&BM3

On the online platforms: When "searching for keywords on studying abroad or TOEFL IELTS on the website" (AM1), "it seems to see on Weibo" (AF2).

"I have seen Z's information on Xiaohongshu(Red). This new media APP mainly showed entertainment content, I felt real when I saw the content related to the oversea study. So I didn't consider other institutions when I read their bad reviews."
-AF3

⑲ What products do you think can be added?

Z institution currently has more than 10 courses for language exams abroad.

"In the course of the study abroad exams, the products are already very comprehensive. There is no need to add ."-BM2

Some of them recommend adding some new products, such as "GMAT/GRE" "DUOLINGUO" "Foreign Teacher Oral Class", three "Before" students said. The first two courses are already regular products in Z institution after February 2020. Some peripheral products for studying abroad, such as computer courses, business courses, and history courses(AM3&BM3). There are also students who want " some free courses" in the course setting (AF2).

⑩What do you think of the location of the Z institution? How should it be selected?

This question seeks to find out how well students recognize the current campus address, as well as a proposal for a new campus.

The transportation is convenient not only by subway (BF1, BF3) and bus (BF2), but also by walking (BF3). They were satisfied with the campus location.

" It is nearby the university and business district, with many delicious food."-BM2

"It's close to residential buildings and close to colleges and shopping malls, so there are many delicious restaurants."-AM2

If there is a plan to build a new campus, they gave many ideas. It is recommended to be near the university town (BM2), in Baoan district (AF2, AM1, AM3), not only in the urban area (AF1), one campus in each district (BM3).(Students' addresses see Table 10)

"I suggest planning in shopping mall and education institutions cluster." -BM1

8 Discussion

8.1 The repositioning matrix of Z

Here is the repositioning matrix combined the interview results and demand of market.(Figure 15)

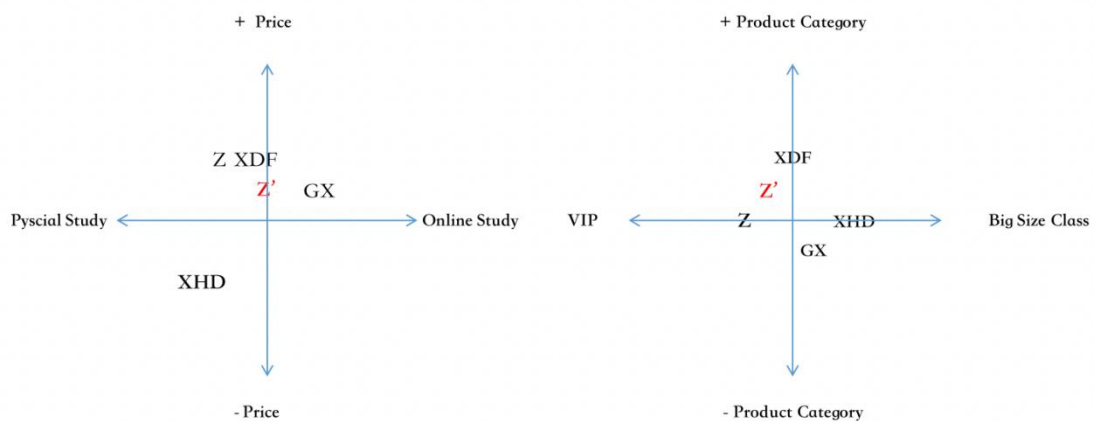


Figure 16 Repositioning Matrix of Z. *Source: own elaboration*

As mentioned above, the interviewees recognize the quality of offline teaching, so offline courses as the main product remains. It is reasonable to add 1-2 new campuses to meet students' needs and Longgan or Baoan are two candidate areas. Furthermore, in the future, training institutions with technology and integration will be more tenable and can satisfy those students who are accustomed to the online teaching mode and who are concerned about tuition fees. Therefore, in the further strategy, increasing the share of online courses is necessary.

With the normalization of life and learning, by increasing the types of products, it is recommended to add products for subject examinations to satisfy more students.

For example, students who plan to study in international high schools in China and students who are studying abroad during middle and high school can have the opportunity to improve their entrance examinations and school grades.(Note: The proposed positioning of other institutions remains the same.)

8.2 The new 7Ps strategy of Z

(1) Product strategy

a. Online courses

Increasing the proportion of online teaching. After COVID-19, more students are now accepting and accustomed to the online class model, which can meet the needs of those students who do not exclude online classes.

Since there are few colleges and universities in Shenzhen, those students who study in other cities can reduce their commute time and choose online courses from training institutions in Shenzhen with good teachers.

If it can expand to the surrounding cities of Shenzhen to expand Z's influence is also one of Z's marketing goals.

b. Product variety

For example, adding international discipline training. With the impact of the epidemic, a large number of underage students gave up their studies in overseas schools and returned to China. As an international city, Shenzhen has a large number of international schools to undertake a group of students returning from abroad, and also attracts many students from other cities to study. Therefore, there is a market demand for AP, A-level, IB and other subject course training in international schools.

c. Service materialization

Students' homework completion, homework correction, practices, word dictation, oral practice, mock test scores are all filled in the system on time and in the required format. In addition to regular VIP and small size classes, improving the class quality of non-main 8-12 people size class and maintaining the relationship between students, so that every student can be cared for.

(2) Price strategy

a. The overall cost of the course in one stage is decreased by modifying the class schedule and course syllabus. Especially for students who already have a strong foundation in English and are hoping to pick up additional test-related knowledge rapidly. For instance, the total cost can be decreased by 5%-15%, and the class hours are cut by 10% to 20% on the basis of 80 hours.

b. Advertise online courses actively (VIP & small class size) to recruit national

and international students. It can be given to students who prefer to study online anywhere in the world without distance limits.

(3) Place strategy

a. Discuss cooperation with international schools and universities. Cooperative projects are not limited to taking classes on campus, customizing courses, or providing special enrollment discounts for students of the school.

b. Publicize by distributing flyers and advertising around the test center of the international test, especially on the test day.

c. Advertise on online channels. Such as web search, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, Station B and other new network platforms, increase exposure by investing more funds and locking keywords.

(4) Promotion strategy

a. Issue coupons for welfare activities, let customers experience teaching and services, not just learn about course settings, prices, basic information, etc. Such as free test services to attract students to the campus mock test to evaluate English proficiency experience services, such as free trial class services to learn English and experience the classroom, experience the teacher's style and teaching quality.

b. Introduce a high-score bonus policy. If TOEFL 100+, IELTS 7.5+, ACT32+,

SAT1500+, GRE325+, GMAT700+, the specific amount will be reimbursed according to the score, and the test registration fee will be reimbursed according to the percentage.

c. Publishing high-quality copywriting on a variety of platforms, including official websites, search engines, WeChat public accounts, video accounts, Xiaohongshu, Douyin (Tiktok), and Zhihu, can not only help encourage repeat business from loyal customers who have already purchased Z products, but can also leave a lasting impression on potential customers and increase the brand's influence and penetration rate.

(5) People strategy

Course consultants must have the ability to formulate courses for students on demand to meet the individual needs of students. When potential customers propose cheaper solutions, or learn based on weaker items, they need to be professionally based on the customer's Demand is the center to provide products.

Respondents requested that the course consultants need to have the professionalism of studying abroad and examination knowledge, the flexibility of adjusting the plan, the efficiency of following up with customers, and the strong affinity of communication with others.

(6) Physical Evidence strategy

a. Update Z's online learning mock test system and create a small program for learning

b. Standardize the use of the campus study room. If you do not occupy the seat, remember to take your personal belongings away after use.

c. Baoan and Longgang campuses can be added within 1-3 years, the current site selection standards are maintained and near the business district with convenient transportation.

(7) Process strategy

a. All-round mastery of student information runs through every node of the customer experience journey, reducing communication costs and information errors.

b. Diversity of payment channels and optimization of contract signing steps.

c. Minimize the replacement of teachers and SAs, and inform students as soon as possible in case of special circumstances to improve their feelings.

9 Conclusions, limitations and Future Research

The normal cycle of product evolution, teaching format, and class delivery would have taken months or even years, but with the "sudden" change in the global environment, Z has made new breakthroughs and attempts in a short period of time.

Returning to the research questions mentioned in the introduction, the post-epidemic 7Ps have added a different "diversity" element. The addition of computer-based tests such as DUOLINGO, PTE, and other courses can effectively respond to the urgent need to replace test scores with other exams due to the temporary closure of test centers, and the newly created video and online courses cater to some customers who require less commuting time. With the expansion of the course offerings, the price range is also wider, between 2,000 yuan and 24,000 yuan per stage, providing more possibilities for customers to make choices. At the same time, the company has sought out more innovative and trendy platforms and channels to promote its brand, such as Douyin (Chinese Tiktok), Xiaohongshu (Red), WeChat Channels, Zhihu, WeChat Subscriptions, Dianping. The referral as a traditional low-cost, high-reward promotion is being carried out as usual, it provides quality teaching services to the regular customers while spreading the word about Z. Based on the diverse promotional way of text, graphics, video, and live streaming, Z has moved its events, which are usually held in hotels or convention centers, to the mobile port, allowing customers to get up close with professional lectures and classes on

mobile devices.

It has a clearer understanding of the students, after in-depth interviews with 12 students who attended the courses. Basically, students with different English bases have different needs for training. The main purpose of wanting to take the training before the test is to save time and to be educated professionally so that they can get a score boost. It is good to know that almost all of the respondents felt that their English skills were improved. When asked how they knew and why they chose Z institution, a well-known brand, professional teachers, and a good reputation were the three most important factors. Before buying a course, all 9 respondents (75%) had visited other institutions and were dissatisfied by the higher prices, bad study experience, crowded class sizes, and further distances. The reasons for being able to choose Z strongly include professional course consultants (25%), more cost-effective learning solutions (30%), and in-person demo classes (16.7%). Although all respondents were forced to experience distance learning or work due to COVID-19, six "Before" respondents preferred offline classes because of the disadvantages of online teachings, such as "not cost-effective", "low study efficiency", "dispersion attention" "poor effect", four "After" respondents also think that online classes make people depressed and sleepy. Therefore, it can be seen that the quality of offline classes is still recognized by most students. Regarding class size, respondents preferred a class size of fewer than 6 students, as a relaxed atmosphere and better learning results can be achieved by

having classmates together.

Based on the in-depth interviews, the new 7Ps were developed by taking the factors that were considered to be strengths as main points. Additionally, those perspectives were suggested to be optimized, so that the marketing strategy could be more practical. For example, a traditional institution still focuses on offline small classes which less than 6 people and offers large-size classes and online resources as a supplement. Course consultants, study advisers, and teachers all need to have professional knowledge and skills, so monthly or quarterly training is essential.

In order to make the learning process more convenient for students, it is necessary to upgrade the website, applets, apps, and so on. The hardware facilities include study rooms, tables, chairs, and TV screens. These are the changes brought about by the needs of the customer.

The limitation of this paper is it did not interview the parents of the students, because some parents are one of the decision makers of the transaction and one of the experiencers who understand the courses and services. If the parents of the customers can be interviewed and surveyed, the customer experience of the Z institution can be completer and more comprehensive.

The following research directions are aimed to be explored in the future:

(1) Understand the reasons why the students' parents decided to buy, what

factors affect their purchase decision, and what their thoughts are after training. And study the view of the underage customers.

(2) Investigate the attitudes and preferences of potential customers in Shenzhen, including those who have not chosen the Z institution.

(3) How to increase sales through product and service reform.

(4) How to increase the profitability of the company while ensuring the turnover is achieved.

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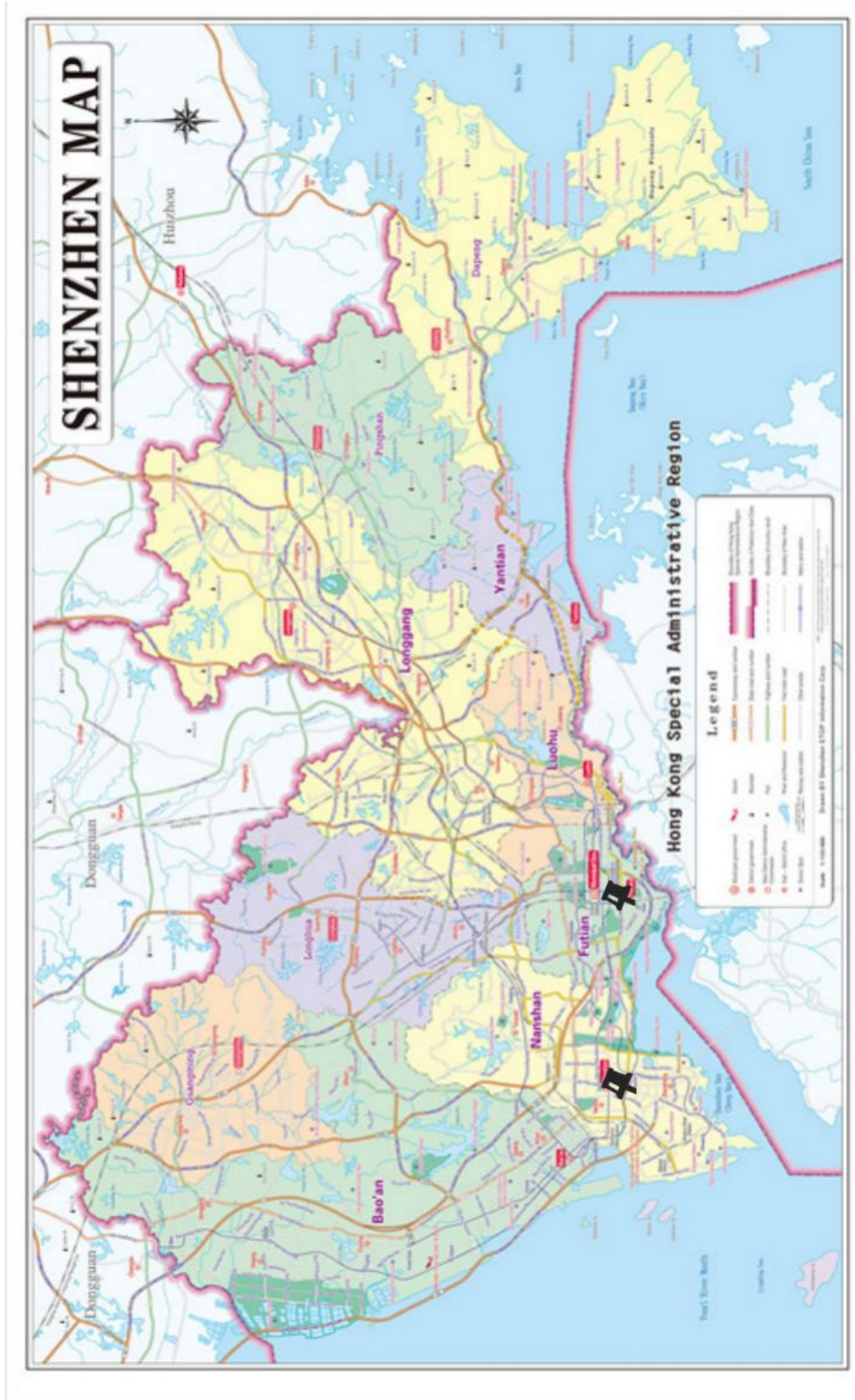
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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

About the students' English level or exam situation

- ① How difficult is English for you: 1 very easy, 2 easy, 3 general, 4 difficult, 5 very difficult
- ② Why do you want to study at an English test training institution? (Why not study by yourself?)
- ③ After the training, has your English improved? Why?
- ④ Have you learned the knowledge you want? Or did you get the score you satisfied with? Why or why not?

About the feelings and experiences of training in the Z institution

- ⑤ How did you know Z institution ?
- ⑥ Why did you choose Z institution to consult?
- ⑦ Which institutions have you compared before?
- ⑧ Why did you sign up with Z institution?
- ⑨ What prompted you to sign up? (Distance, price, discount, teachers, consultants, tight time, poor foundation, professional institution, brand)
- ⑩ Why did you choose to teach online or offline? How did your feel?
- ⑪ Have ever you had course in others training school before? what type is it? What are the similarities and differences between us?
- ⑫ What is the differences between institution and the general school when you study English?
- ⑬ Without considering the factors such as price and time, which class size do you prefer? VIP, small class, or large class? Why?

About the suggestions and expectations

- ⑭ Would you recommend the Z institution to friends and relatives?
- ⑮ Is there anything you are not satisfied with?(product, service, CC, and so on)
- ⑯ What advice do you have for Z institution?(product, service, CC, and so on)
- ⑰ Except for learning English-related knowledge, what else did you gain?

Supplementary questions

- ⑱ Have you seen the advertisement for Z institution? If so, where?
- ⑲ What products do you think can be added?
- ⑳ What do you think of the location of the Z institution? How should it be selected?