

SERVICE QUALITY OF THE GOLF TRAINING ACADEMY IN THAILAND

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were: 1) to study golfing behavior of golfers; 2) to evaluate significant level of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy; 3) to compare the significance of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy categorized by personal factors; 4) to analyze a relationship between the significance of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy and golfing behavior of golfers; and 5) to present guidelines for business operation of golf training academy. This study applied a mixed-research methodology. Quantitative data were collected from the research questionnaire distributed to golfers who have played golf in various courses in Thailand via accidental sampling of 385 respondents. The research instrument was a questionnaire. Qualitative data were collected by in-depth interview with 5 key informants who were executives or owners of golf training academy via semi-structured questionnaire and focus group. Statistics used in this study were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. The research results were found as follows: 1. The overall aspects of golfing behavior of golfers were at very high level. Considering golfing behavior, the highest mean was frequency in golfing in the past three months, followed by average expenditure per time, place of playing golf, and type of golf practice. 2. The overall aspects of significant levels of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy in Thailand were at a high level. In particular, golfers paid much attention on personnel, followed by price of training, training service provider, training process, marketing promotion, place of golfing, and training place respectively. 3. Golfers who have different gender, age, education degree, positions, and work experience have no difference in the factors leading to the development of golf training academy operations. 4. There was a moderate relationship between overall area of significant level of factors leading to business operation model of golf training academy and golf playing behavior of golfers. 5. Business operations development approach of golf training academy can be presented as follows: = .952 personnel + .804 price of training + .773 distribution + .754 marketing promotion + .662 training place + .661 training service + .655 training process

Keywords: business operation, development approach, marketing promotion, Golf training academy

Introduction

In Thailand, golf is a widely popular and widely accepted sport. Among business professionals, the sport is used as a means to spend time playing golf while engaging in negotiations, making proposals, exchanging ideas, or discussing business matters. This practice extends to professionals in various fields, as well as students of all ages, as evidenced by its inclusion in the curriculum of various educational institutions (Adung, Amattayakul, 2007). Golf is not solely focused on physical exercise but is also considered a sport that integrates physical activity, personality

development, and mindfulness training. Therefore, golf training contributes to the development of various skills simultaneously. Golf stands out as a unique sport, not only due to its relatively high financial requirements but also because players need to invest time in practice to acquire the necessary skills. It is evident that golf requires a significant commitment and dedication to practice, as controlling a small, round golf ball to go in the desired direction is a challenging task. However, consistent training and practice significantly reduce the risk of errors. Moreover, golf training plays a crucial role in establishing body coordination, proper body movements, and correct body positioning for effective swings. This not only enhances the enjoyment of playing golf but also ensures safety and prevents injuries during the game. As a result, the regular and disciplined training of both amateur and professional golfers, numbering around 1 - 1.2 million people (Ramkhamhaeng University, n.d.), has led to the emergence of golf training facilities to meet the growing demand for such services.

The golf business in Thailand is currently drawing interest from both local and international investors. In the future, investing in this business is expected to add value to the Thai golf industry significantly. Thailand boasts around 200 golf courses nationwide, with approximately 160 privately operated commercial courses and an additional 40 courses managed by government agencies and state enterprises. These courses have attracted foreign investors due to the relatively lower prices for golf services in Thailand compared to other Southeast Asian countries, excluding Vietnam, Myanmar, or Laos. The popularity of golf among foreigners has been on the rise, driven by the affordability of golf services in Thailand. The business of golf courses continues to show a growth trend at a rate of no less than 10 percent, following the global trend of golf enthusiasts, especially among Thai golfers, including the family market. This expansion has covered all age groups, from youth to the elderly. To elevate Thailand to a golf destination, it is crucial to have standardized competition events and golf courses. According to Mr. McKinsey, currently, Spain leads in being a golf hub, but in the next 2-3 years, Thailand has the potential to surpass Spain. Thailand's competitive advantage lies not only in golf but also in its tourism industry.

Currently, the growth of the golf course business in the southern region is considered positive. For example, Phuket, which has six golf courses and contributes an annual income of approximately 500-600 million baht to the province

investors are also looking into other provinces. For example, in Phang Nga province, investors from Hong Kong have purchased golf course businesses from Thais. However, there might be challenges concerning land prices in major provinces in the southern region, which in the past invested around 100 million baht, excluding land costs, in creating golf courses. Presently, investing in golf courses is a challenging task, requiring an investment of no less than 1,000 million baht and an area of not less than 1,000 rai (Prachachat Business Newspaper, 2017).

When considering spending behavior, golfers' group clearly ranks the top expenditure as golf-related expenses, accounting for 20% of the total monthly expenditure per person, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 baht. This includes expenses for golf courses, food, equipment, and training costs for current playing methods. Currently, there are 85,000 members who hold golf credit cards,

and there is a trend showing that the younger generation is increasingly inclined to play golf. Privately operated commercial golf courses number around 160, while an additional 40 are government and state enterprise golf courses. Thailand's golf courses are of interest to foreign investors because the prices for golf services in Thailand are lower than in other ASEAN countries, except for Vietnam, Myanmar, or Laos. The popularity of golf among foreigners is increasing, contributing to the continuous growth of the golf course business at a rate of no less than 10 percent. This trend aligns with the strong appeal of golf among Thai players, particularly in the family market, resulting in the expansion of the Thai golf market across all age groups, from youth to the elderly.

Following the success of the Thailand Golf Expo in the past, which attracted over 50,000 visitors, N.C.C. Exhibition Organizer Co., Ltd., with support from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, has decided to organize the "Thailand Golf Expo" to continuously promote the golf tourism business. The event aims to promote golf resorts and golf courses in Thailand to both domestic and international buyers. Within the expo, there will be a Meet & Match Session to facilitate business negotiations between entrepreneurs and buyers, with representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) inviting international buyers. The goal is to develop this event into the largest annual golf business exhibition in Asia, showcasing products and services related to the golf industry.

At the same time, the general public and parents are increasingly engaging in or supporting their children to play golf. This is attributed to the influence of "Pro May" becoming the number one player in the LPGA or the world's number one professional female golfer. Ariya Jutanugarn, or May, has not only expanded the player base from a specific group but also attracted new players from various age groups and professions. This has significantly boosted the popularity of golf, turning it into a lucrative business. The surge in golf's popularity is evident from the soaring sales of golf clubs, particularly online, where people from across the country are ordering golf clubs. Previously, the majority of customers were company employees, government officials, and business owners. However, now there is a substantial increase in younger customers, and it is believed that this trend will continue to grow. The influence of "Pro May" is making younger generations more interested in playing golf, seeing it as a sport similar to tennis and badminton. This, in turn, is expected to attract new entrepreneurs to open more sports equipment stores catering to golf, further expanding the accessibility of this sport to a broader audience.

While the golf course business continues to experience consistent growth, with an annual growth rate exceeding 6%, it not only attracts Thai golfers but also attracts a significant number of international golfers, including those from China, Korea, and Japan. Thailand currently boasts over 200 golf courses nationwide, with approximately 160 being privately operated commercial courses and an additional 40 being government and state enterprise golf courses. Certainly, the rate of service utilization is expected to increase significantly in the future.

Golf is a highly popular sport in Thailand, ranking among the top sports in the country. With approximately 1 - 1.2 million golfers and over 200 golf courses, the golf industry encompasses various professionals, including golf course staff, caddies, professional golfers, golf equipment retailers, and other related professionals, totaling more than 200,000 individuals. Golf generates a substantial income, exceeding 14,000 million Baht, for those involved and serves as a sport that contributes billions of Baht to Thailand's economy annually. Recognizing the significance of the golf industry, the business management sector has introduced golf management courses to meet the educational needs of those interested in golf-related business. Since the 2004 academic year, these courses have seen a continuous increase in applicants. In response to the growing business and to promote diversity in golf education and personnel development, adjustments have been made to the curriculum. The revised curriculum includes two groups of specialized courses: Golf Management (the original specialized course) and Golf Coaching (the new specialized course). This initiative aims to cater to the expanding golf business and enhance the diversity of golf education and personnel in the field.

Currently, Thailand lacks qualified personnel with knowledge and skills in golf sports management. There is also a shortage of educational facilities focusing on business management in the golf industry, including training grounds, golf courses, golf equipment stores, and libraries. Those interested in professional golf management often have to travel abroad, for instance, to the United States or Australia, for further studies. This leads to a substantial loss of currency to other countries. To address this issue and support the growth of the golf business, it is necessary to establish educational courses locally. Many students who successfully complete their secondary and higher education levels choose to pursue further education in golf-related fields abroad. Therefore, to accommodate the continuous growth of the golf business, create a skilled workforce in golf, and retain currency that would otherwise be lost through education abroad, it is imperative to develop educational programs that support the golf industry.

The research focuses on the quality of services provided by golf training academies, covering aspects such as training services, pricing, sales strategies, marketing promotion, training processes, staff, and facilities. The study aims to serve as a guideline for running a successful golf training business, improving the quality of services offered by golf academy, and aligning them with the needs of aspiring golfers. This, in turn, will have positive effects on the golf business, local communities, society, and the country as a whole.

Research Objectives

- 1) To study golf golfing behavior of golfers
- 2) To evaluate significant level of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy
- 3) To compare the significance of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy categorized by personal factors
- 4) To analyze a relationship between the significance of factors leading to business operation of golf training academy and golf playing behavior of golfers
- 5) To present guidelines for business operation of golf training academy.

Research Methodology

This research applied a mixed research methodology, combining qualitative research and quantitative research. Population and samples were customers who have played golf and are currently playing golf at various golf courses in Thailand. The sample sizes were determined using a formula for unknown population, yielding 385 samples. The research questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data. Data were collected through accidental sampling. The research questionnaire was verified and checked by 5 research experts to find the Index of Item-Objective Congruence: IOC. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was equal to 0.96. The research has distributed the research questionnaire to try out with 30 people who were not the samples in this study in order to test the reliability of the questionnaires. The reliability of the questionnaire was equal to 0.89. Statistics used in this study included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, F-test, and Multiple Regression Analysis. Data were analyzed using the SPSS program.

Results

From statistical analysis, it was found that the majority are males, accounting for 203 individuals (52.7%). Those aged 46 years and above are 133 people (34.5%). Individuals with a bachelor's degree are 159 people (41.3%), and business owners make up 157 people (40.8%). Monthly income exceeding 30,001 Baht or more is reported by 147 individuals (38.2%). Regarding educational background, the majority of the sample group had a moderate academic performance with a grade point average (GPA) between 2.00 and 3.00, totaling 183 people or 45.75%. The next category is those with lower academic performance, with a GPA below 2.00, comprising 115 people or 28.75%. Lastly, individuals with higher academic performance, with a GPA between 3.01 and 4.00, are 102 people, accounting for 25.50%.

The overall golfing behavior of golfers was at a high level. In particular, the results showed that the top-ranked aspects include the frequency of golfing in the past three months, followed by average expenditure per session, the location of playing golf, and type of golf training respectively (Table 1).

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of the overall golfing behavior.

Overall Golfing Behavior	\bar{X}	S.D.	Behavior Level	Rank
1. Type of Golf Practice	3.39	0.382	High	4
2. Place of Playing Golf	3.50	0.408	High	3
3. Frequency of Golfing in the Past 3 Months	3.54	0.380	High	1
4. Average Expenditure Per Session	3.51	0.312	High	2

Overall Average	3.46	0.284	High
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The level of importance of factors contributing to the operation of golf school businesses, on average and across all aspects, is high. When considering the level of importance of factors contributing to the operation of golf training academy based on the average values, it is found that the top-ranked aspects were personnel, followed by price of training, training service, teaching processes, marketing promotion, distribution, and training place respectively (Table 2).

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of the Level of Importance of Factors Contributing to the Operation of Golf Training Academy

Level of Importance of Factors Contributing to the Operation of Golf School Businesses	\bar{X}	S.D.	Importance Level	Rank
1. Training Service	3.61	.653	High	3
2. Price of Training	3.70	.509	High	2
3. Distribution	3.52	.644	High	6
4. Promotion	3.55	.654	High	5
5. Personnel	3.75	.689	High	1
6. Teaching Processes	3.58	.743	High	4
7. Training Place	3.49	.655	High	7
Overall Average	3.43	.483	High	

The overall average of factors contributing to the operation of golf school business has a medium level relationship between that of golfing behavior (Table 3).

Table 3 The Overall Average of Factors Contributing to the Operation of Golf Training Academy

		Factors contributing to operation of Golfing Behavior							Overall Average
		Training Service	Price of Training	Distribution	Promotion	Personnel	Teaching Process	Training Place	
N1	Pearson Correlation	.831(**)	.753(*)	.434(**)	.224(*)	.274(*)	.394(**)	.555(*)	.216(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385	385	385

N2	Pearson								
	Correlation	.184(**)	.033	.133(**)	.722(*)	.535(*)	.742(**)	.480(*)	-.165(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.519	.009	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385	385	385
N3	Pearson								
	Correlation	-.003	.110(*)	.845(**)	.399(*)	.042	.330(**)	.713(*)	-.533(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.954	.031	.000	.000	.410	.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385	385	385
N4	Pearson								
	Correlation	.765(**)	.734(*)	.314(**)	.739(*)	.762(*)	.001	.195(*)	-.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.006	.001	.981	.000	.651
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385	385	385
N1	Pearson								
	Correlation	.408(**)	.241(*)	.558(**)	.428(*)	.378(*)	.561(**)	.661(*)	-.509(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385	385	385

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N1 = Type of Golf Practice

N2 = Place of Playing Golf

N3 = Frequency of Playing Golf in the Past 3 Months

N4 = Average Expenditure Per Session

N11 = Overall Average

Analysis of the development strategies of golf training academy using Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis.

The analysis of development strategies for the operation of golf training academy using stepwise multiple regression analysis can be presented as follows: Development strategies for the operation of golf training academy = .952 (Personnel) + .804 (Price of Training) + .773 (Distribution) + .754 (Marketing Promotion) + .662 (Training Place) + .661 (Training Service) + .655 (Teaching Process) (Table 4).

Table 4 Factors Contributing to the Operation of Golf Training Academy

Factors Contributing to the Operation of Golf training academy	Coefficient			Relationship	Rank
	(r)	SD.	Sig.		
1. Training Service	.661	2.882	.017*	Yes	6
2. Price of Training	.804	3.175	.003*	Yes	2
3. Distribution	.773	4.135	.004*	Yes	3
4. Promotion	.754	4.449	.009*	Yes	3
5. Personnel	.952	2.207	.001*	Yes	1
6. Teaching Processes	.655	1.703	.002*	Yes	7
7. Training Place	.662	2.109	.000*	Yes	5

* Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed Adjusted R Square =.81)

Discussion

From the results of statistical analysis of the development guideline of golf training academy operation in Thailand, the following actions should be taken: prepare for personnel improvement, adjust training fees, enhance distribution, promote marketing activities, improve training facilities, enhance training services, and improve teaching process respectively. Furthermore, the researcher would like to discuss the results of the findings as follow.

The personnel aspect significantly influences the success of operating a golf school business, accounting for 0.952 units. Business managers must prepare and improve the development of personnel, including both instructors and support staff. Personnel play a crucial role in the success of running a golf school business. Initially, there is a need to prepare and enhance instructors, ensuring they receive certification from reputable international institutions, possess high expertise, and have received awards from competitions in the country. Instructors should undergo training abroad and should have a reputable standing in the golf industry. Sutthprasertphorn (2011) conducted a research on the user requirements for golf practice facilities in the Bangkok metropolitan area and its surroundings. The study found that users have preferences for service processes, personnel, marketing promotion, and distribution channels, consistent with the research conducted by Booncheua (2011) on the behavior of choosing golf services in Chiang Mai province. The key influential marketing mix in friendly personnels and efficient service by employees, with a sufficient number of staff meeting customer needs.

The pricing of training fees significantly impacts the success of operating a golf school business, contributing 0.804 units. Business managers must prepare and improve the development of personnel involved, especially in terms of setting training fees. Overall, golfers should incur

reasonable expenses for training that are competitive and more affordable than those of other competitors. Training courses should be worth the training fee, ensuring that the quality of training matches the price. The pricing of training fees should offer a variety of levels for selection, aligning with the study conducted by Kedkham (2015) on the marketing mix influencing users' choices at golf courses in Pathum Thani province. This study aimed to explore the marketing mix that users choose at golf courses in Pathum Thani province. The research population consisted of golfers who used golf courses in Pathum Thani province, with a total of 400 individuals. The study identified pricing as the primary mix influencing customers' decisions.

The distribution aspect significantly influences the success of operating a golf school business, contributing 0.773 units. Business managers must prepare and improve development related to distribution, which includes the ability to apply for training through online media (websites, applications, Facebook, Instagram), having registration locations at golf driving ranges, community-based registration locations, shopping malls, and organizing registration events for various occasions, in that order. This aligns with the research conducted by Senrid (2010), studying the dimensions and components of dedication in golf, a case study in Khon Kaen province. The study identified marketing mix in terms of distribution channels and marketing promotion are influential to golfing. This aligns with the study conducted by Kedkham (2015) on marketing mix influencing customers' choices at golf courses in Pathum Thani province. This study aimed to explore the marketing mix customers choose at golf courses in Pathum Thani province. The research population consisted of golfers who used golf courses in Pathum Thani province, with a total of 400 individuals. The study identified distribution channels (place) and marketing promotion as marketing mix that influence customers' decisions.

Marketing promotion has a significant impact on the success of operating a golf school business, contributing 0.754 units. Business managers must prepare and improve development related to marketing promotion, including advertising and public relations through online media (websites, applications, Facebook, Instagram). They should promote training for the second person with a 50% discount, offer one free training for every four paid participants, announce certificates from foreign institutions when completed, provide a 20% discount when golfers bring friends for training, and offer lower training fees on regular weekdays compared to weekends. This aligns with the research conducted by Senrid (2010), studying the dimensions and components of dedication in golf, a case study in Khon Kaen province. The study identified marketing mix in terms of distribution channels and marketing promotion are influential to golfing. This aligns with the study conducted by Sutthprasertphorn (2011), exploring the needs of golf practice facility users in the Bangkok metropolitan area and its vicinity. The study found that users have preferences for service aspects, personnel, marketing promotion, and distribution channels. This is consistent with the research conducted by Booncheua (2011), studying the behavior of choosing golf course services in Chiang Mai province. The study identified promotion as marketing mix influencing users' choices, such as discounts based on date and time, aligning with the study

conducted by Kedkham (2015) on marketing mix influencing service users' choices at golf courses in Pathum Thani province.

The location of the golf training facility has an impact on the success of operating a golf school business, contributing 0.662 units. Business managers must prepare and improve development related to the training venue by enhancing facilities and ensuring that the practice venues are comprehensive. Selecting training locations on golf driving ranges with a pleasant atmosphere is crucial. The training venues should be easily accessible for trainees, and the training should align with various golf club associations, in accordance with Lei Zhang's (2015) study on the operational results of golf course investors and institutional investor performance. The study hypothesizes that investing in golf businesses creates opportunities to build positive relationships with the community by attracting a large number of golfers and visitors. A clear phenomenon observed is that golf training institutions are often located close to golf courses.

The quality of training services has an impact on the success of operating a golf school business, contributing 0.661 units. Business managers must prepare and improve development related to the provision of training services. Successful training should lead to enhanced performance. Well-defined training courses, catering to various skill levels (for beginners with some basic knowledge, competitive players), emphasizing practical application aligned with international standards, and offering specialized courses for children, women, or the general public, contribute to success. The duration of training aligns with the research of Cheuachang (2014). The study aims to compare golf skills and muscle electromyographic (EMG) activity between the experimental and control groups, consisting of 40 students majoring in physical education. The findings indicate that the quality of training services significantly influences success.

The teaching process has an impact on the success of operating a golf training school, reaching up to .655 units. Managers need to prepare and improve related development in both the teaching process and the training process by enhancing golf playing skills rapidly. The teaching methods should be suitable for the individual shapes of each golfer. Utilizing technology effectively to assess and address swing flaws is crucial. Technological tools can enhance performance, and instructors should use teaching techniques that align with the study of Maisuphorn et al. (2009). This study examines the impact of golf course operations and practice facilities on education. It stems from the Thai Golf Course Association's complaint to the Sports Authority, the Senate Committee, and the Prime Minister's Secretary that they have faced unfair treatment and obstacles in development, including the promotion of golf due to the enforcement of two laws: 1) Ministry of Public Health Announcement No. 5/2538 according to the Public Health Act B.E. 2535 regarding businesses harmful to health, categorizing golf courses or practice facilities as health-threatening businesses, and 2) Royal Decree amending the Local Development Tax Act B.E. 2527 (4th edition) B.E. 2546, designating golf courses as environmentally impactful businesses. Therefore, the Ministry of Public Health has assigned the Public Health Committee to urgently

review businesses that are health-threatening for a summary regarding whether golf courses and practice facilities are detrimental to health or the environment. This study focuses on the teaching process's impact on the success of operating a golf training school and aligns with the research of Sutthprasertphorn (2011). The research examines the needs of golf practice facility users in the Bangkok metropolitan area and its vicinity, revealing that users have requirements in terms of service processes, personnel, marketing promotion, and distribution channels.

Research Knowledge

This research aims to contribute substantially to the development of golf training school businesses in Thailand. The golf training academy should implement the development strategies for business operations. The key areas for implementation are as follows: preparing improvements in training services (chance of success .952), price of training (chance of success .804), distribution channel (chance of success .773), marketing promotion (chance of success .754), training place (chance of success .662), training service (chance of success .661), and teaching process (chance of success .655) as appeared in the following model.

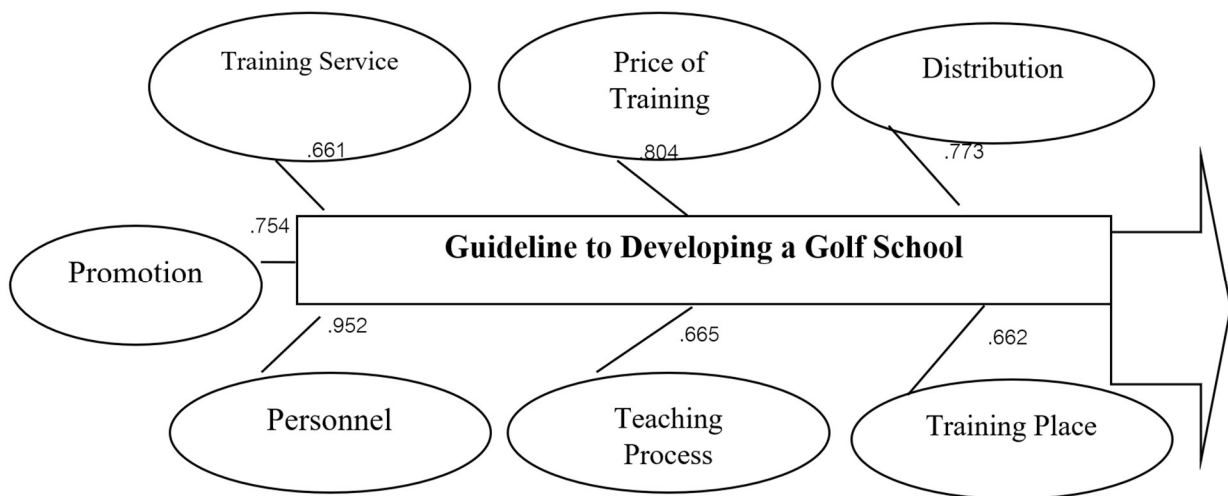


Figure 1 Guideline for Developing Golf training academy

Recommendations for Future Study

1. It is recommended to compare the outcomes resulting from the implementation of development strategies for operating golf training school businesses in practice. This involves utilizing and comparing the effects of implementing these strategies in real-world scenarios.
2. It is advisable to research the relationship between golfing behavior and the development strategies for operating golf training school businesses in other countries.

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