



Comparative Assessment of Companies' Preferences in Cabin Crew Recruitment From Turkey

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Abstract

With this study, It is aimed to determine similarities and differences in personnel preference criteria of the airlines that recruit cabin crew personnel from Turkey. It is believed that the study is important as it exhibits the approaches on the cabin crew recruitment in Turkey. Within this scope, the features and details of job advertisements were analyzed with content analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods, and evaluated. As a result, concepts such as demographic attributes, character, appearance, interests and working conditions were obtained. On the view of the data obtained, it is seen that the most important demographic differences in terms of application criteria are height and weight standards, and age. Apart from the demographic attributes, it is seen that the most typical features in the job advertisements are human relations and physical endurance. This is explained as the importance of customer relations and difficulty of working conditions. Because of the fact that the interaction with guests is more comprehensive especially in the airlines that provide full service, the concept of hospitality is used in the job advertisement criteria. It is seen that this criterion is not included in the low-cost airlines. In addition, due to the continuous decision-making and the difficult training process because of the nature of working conditions, criteria of inclination to learn and being open to improvement are frequently seen in the job advertisements.

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INTRODUCTION

Air transportation is one of the sectors where there is fierce competition. As a requirement of the financial and organizational structure of the sector, airlines are required to continue their activities with personnel who will both ensure customer satisfaction and meet security, safety and technical requirements. The personnel who interact the most with customers during the operation process of airlines are cabin crew. Cabin crew recruitment processes are a detailed and costly process, and the criteria are fulfilled within the framework of civil aviation authorities and business expectations and policies.

Some business sectors came out later than others. For this reason, some sectors can be considered as relatively more modern. It can be expected that the interactions of the personnel working in these modern business sectors with the work and the company will be different from the usual jobs (Turkay, 2016). The cabin crew position can be considered as a different job comparing to usual jobs.

They contribute to the safety of flight as well as meeting the needs of the passengers, such as eating and drinking, during the period starting with the passengers stepping on the plane and until they leave the plane. For an airline, cabin crew can be defined as the face of the brand. In addition, they can provide important clues regarding the brand image and organizational culture of the company with their appearance and attitudes. Virgin Atlantic, for example, allow female employees to be makeup-free in 2019 to enable cabin crew to express themselves better (*The Guardian*, 2019).

The personnel requirement in the airlines as a result of the rapid growth of the aviation sector in Turkey has increased in recent years. Every aircraft that comes in addition to the fleet of the airlines brings the requirement for flight and cabin crew. For this reason, it is observed that airlines are trying to fulfill their cabin crew requirements either through their own websites or career websites. Apart from the fact that the profession of cabin crew has standards, it is also observed that the sociocultural structures of the relevant geographies and companies are effective in setting standards. It has been noticed that in some airlines, recruitment criteria are based on physical elements, while in others this criteria are based on the requirements of the profession. In this sense, it can be said that the differences in cabin crew recruitment criteria are determinative with regard to the position (brand image, attractiveness etc.). Therefore, the approaches of the companies in Turkey and other countries in the recruitment of cabin crew form the problematic of this study.

With this study, it is aimed to determine similarities and differences in personnel preference criteria of the airlines that recruit cabin crew personnel from Turkey. Within this scope, the features and details of the job advertisements were analyzed and evaluated. It is believed that the study is important as it exhibits the approaches on the cabin crew recruitment in Turkey. In this way, it is thought that it will be possible to have an opinion regarding approaches of airlines to cabin crew and to give a general point of view to the matter, particularly for implementers. As no other study on the issue has been found in the literature, it is thought that it will contribute to the literature and that implementers can benefit.

Literature Review

Today, the service provided with customers by institutions and organizations becomes important in accordance with the fierce competition environment. Companies operating in the air transportation sector not only has an

indispensable position in the transportation sector, but also has a structure that has its own dynamics. (Cifci & Ozerk, 2018).

Human resource management is an important competitive factor for airlines. Human resource management is a more difficult and complex issue to manage comparing to other production factors. To manage human resource in an efficient and effective way is possible only with a planned and systematic work (Kucukonal & Korul, 2002).

Cabin attendants constantly obtain and collect firsthand information from their interactions with passengers and other crew members. Their experiences and observations may contribute greatly to airlines' safety management and policy making (Chen, 2017).

It is expected that the personnel who will provide the high service quality after the passengers board will be the cabin crew on board. In other words, flight personnel can be thought as customer agents of airlines, as they provide face-to-face service with passengers. It means the cabin crew have to handle stressful and demanding situations from time to time (Durmaz, 2019). To provide service with passengers is an important task for the cabin crew. Cabin crew are under extreme emotional labor charge due to handling inappropriate passenger behavior (Tsaur vd., 2020).

The personality, humor, the family environment in which he grew up are important in determining his personality. If it is considered from this perspective, a person's personality, endurance, and the way of handling difficulties are determinants of how he will behave under stress (Zehiroglu & Sencan, 2019).

The job of cabin crew is a profession that, because of the nature of aviation, requires that sudden problems be evaluated correctly and resolved by making the right decision. Cabin crew receive training at certain periods in accordance with international and national aviation legislation (Sozen & Gurbuz, 2016).

According to Directorate General of Civil Aviation, (2021), the requirements for being cabin crew are as follows;

“To be a Turkish citizen, to be at least 18 years old, to receive a medical report regarding airworthiness, to be competent to perform their duties in accordance with the procedures specified in the Operations Manual of the Company (height, weight, age, physical condition, criminal record, to know how to swim etc.) to be graduated from a high school or similar school providing a minimum of 10 years of education inside or outside of Turkey, to have proficiency in English within the scope of the procedures determined by the business.”

Methodology

The objective of this research is a mutual assessment of the requirements determined by the airlines in the recruitment processes of cabin crew. Studies that affect the recognition of the rapidly developing airlines sector in Turkey will contribute the literature and implementers (Turkay, 2016). From this point, data was obtained from the career sites and websites of 6 Turkish and 2 United Arab Emirates (UAE) airlines which shared job adverts. In the study of Bayraktaroglu and Dural, (2014), while obtaining the data, only the factor of criterion was considered among the factors of source, method, criterion and decision on which it was based as determining the procurement methods in Turkish and Japanese companies. The adverts were divided into groups and tabulated according to common criteria and annotations of airlines. The data were divided as gender, education, height, age, swimming skill. The tabulated data were analyzed with content analysis which was one of the qualitative research methods. First, the data were

coded with an inductive approach, then they were divided into concepts (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2011). Finally, these obtained concepts were interpreted.

Table 1: Cabin Crew Recruitment Criteria by Airlines

	Turkish Airlines	Pegasus	Sun Express	Corendon	Onur Air	Tailwind	Emirates	Etihaad
Gender	Female-Male	Female-Male	Female-Male	Female-Male	Female-Male	Female	Female-Male	Female-Male
Graduation	High School	College	High School	College	High School	High School	High School	High School
Height (cm) F: Female M: Male	F: 160-180 M: 170-190	F: 160-175 M: 170-185	F: 155-180 M: 170-185	F: 165-180 M: 170-180	F: 160-180 M: 170-192	F: 160-180	160 on tiptoe 212	On tiptoe 214
Age	20-30	Max 30	20-40	25-40	20-30	20-42	Min 21	-
Swimming	Must	-	Must	Must	Must	Must	-	-

When the data are analyzed, it is seen that the only company that recruits only female cabin crew from Turkey is the Tailwind Airlines. The other 7 airlines recruit both female and male cabin crew. It has been detected that the degree of graduation required by the airlines from cabin crew candidates differs. In the adverts of Pegasus and Corendon, it was stated that only college graduates should apply. Other airlines accept candidates with high school degree. In addition, on its website, Turkish Airlines (THY) has stated that it recruits people with college degree but occasionally adverts are available for people with high school degree. Although all airlines require a proportion between height and weight, significant differences have been identified in criteria related to height. It has been observed that airlines of Turkey differ from foreigners in terms of male and female lengths. According to this, airlines of Turkey have set different size criteria for female and male candidates, but it is seen that Emirates and Etihad perform a standard procedure for both genders. In addition, these two companies did not state a maximum limit for height. Although there is at least 160 cm limit for airlines of Turkey, the maximum limit goes up to 192 cm. On the other hand, two companies operating in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) took the height measurement as a reference by reaching out on tiptoes. They stated that the reason is the height required to reach emergency equipment in aircraft. It can be said that the strictest range in height is in Corendon. The limit was accepted as the highest 180 in male and female candidates. The minimum limit was determined as 165 for women and 170 for men. Regarding age limits, it has been observed that there is a significant difference between Turkish and UAE airlines again. According to the instructions of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, a cabin crew must be at least 18 years old. However, any airlines does not accept cabin crew under the age of 20 in Turkey. According to the adverts, only Pegasus has not set a minimum limit among the airlines of Turkey. But, the fact that Pegasus accepts applications of only college graduates makes the application of an 18-year-old candidate impossible. There is another difference concerning the maximum age limit. While Turkey's two largest airlines do not accept any candidate older than 30, Tailwind is the most flexible company about maximum limit (42) among the airlines of Turkey. UAE companies do not have a maximum age limit. Except Pegasus, All companies in Turkey want their cabin crew to know how to swim. However, Pegasus does not have a criterion like this. Furthermore, similar to Pegasus, neither of the UAE companies have set any criteria about swimming.

After this point, after looking at the relevant criteria, it is required to analyze the adverts published by the airlines. Table 2 contains the details of these adverts.

Tablo 2: Descriptions of Cabin Crew Recruitment Adverts of Airlines

<p>THY</p> <p>“The cabin crew who represent our culture at every point where the flag carrier Turkish Airlines flies and who are the representatives of Turkish hospitality in the sky; again owing to their hospitality, smiling face, superior service and safety understanding, they have an important role in making our passengers would like to fly with us again...”</p> <p>“Due to the fact that they are responsible for providing a safe and comfortable flight with passengers and they are also the frontline faces of the company they work for, cabin crew are expected to be a well-groomed, stylish, smiling, courteous, empathetic, people-oriented, capable of making decisions in difficult situations and a good team player.”</p> <p>“Due to the nature of the aviation industry, the working hours, periods and conditions of cabin crew are often various and challenging compared to other professions. Since it is extremely important for people who choose this profession to adapt to new situations and keep their attention under pressure; emotional resilience and flexibility are considered important factors in the adaptation process”(Turkish Airlines, 2021).</p>
<p>Pegasus</p> <p>“We are looking for new teammates to share this excitement in the aviation industry, which we have been a part of for years and have changed and developed together as one of the leaders of digital transformation”(Pegasus Experienced Cabin Crew job advert, 2018).</p>
<p>Sun Express</p> <p>“We have been transporting passengers to their loved ones for 29 years. Over 1200 dedicated SunExpress cabin attendants are pleased to provide service to passengers on a daily basis.”</p> <p>“Would you like to have a dynamic job which excellently combines Turkish hospitality and flight safety? Or how about visiting different cities and countries as part of your daily duties?”(Sun Express HR Portal, 2021).</p>
<p>Corendon</p> <p>“As Corendon Airlines, we are looking for colleagues to be assigned to our Izmir base to be trained as Cabin Crew Members with strong representation skills, successful in human relations, smiling, positive thinking, dynamic and with customer satisfaction awareness”(Corendon Airlines Inexperienced Cabin Crew, Izmir job advert, 2019).</p>

<p>Onur Air</p> <p>“We are looking for teammates who do not have any obstacle to travel, are successful and patient in human relations, are positive and friendly, have a high awareness and open to learn, have knowledge and experience about sales techniques, with the endurance required by professional conditions, and who know how to swim”(Onur Air Cabin Crew (Antalya) job advert, 2019).</p>
<p>Tailwind</p> <p>“Successful and patient in human relations, teamworker, positive and friendly, high awareness and open to learn, endurance required by professional conditions, know how to swim ...”(Tailwind Airlines Experienced / Inexperienced Cabin Crew recruitment job advert, 2020).</p>
<p>Emirates</p> <p>“As well as the role requirements, there’s a little more that great cabin crew members offer. You should be determined to always perform well. And no doubt you’ll be able to manage a pretty demanding work schedule. Also, you’ll be culturally aware and reflect who we are – professional, empathetic, progressive, visionary and cosmopolitan.” (Emirates, 2021).</p>
<p>Etihad</p> <p>“Comfortable to work irregular hours and on a roster; positive, confident, flexible and friendly; passion for travel and adventure; can adapt to new people, new places and new situations; thrive in a fast-paced and changing environment, ability to inspire our customers through innovative hospitality, collective passion for caring for others, excellent personal presentation, style and image; ensure onboard safety and follow all procedures...”(Etihad, 2021)</p>

Table 2 includes the descriptions of the cabin crew job adverts of all airlines stated in this study. When the descriptions of the job adverts are analyzed, it is seen that there are similarities and differences between them. First of all, checking the adverts in general, Pegasus, unlike other airlines, does not mention the expectations and qualifications of the personnel they are looking for. As a result of the analysis, the concepts of the personality, appearance, qualifications, interests and working conditions of the cabin crew to work with are stated in the adverts published by all airlines subject to the study. Within this scope, THY stands out as the airline that provides the most detail. Emirates and Sun Express stand out as the airlines that give the least detail among the airline companies. Pegasus, on the other hand, does not specify personnel criteria in its adverts.

Another fact found from the analysis is the concept of "personnel personality". It is seen that all airlines except Emirates, as a personnel personality, put forward their expectations regarding the approach of their cabin crew to their customers with definitions such as smiling, hospitality and/or positive approach, being successful in human relations, friendly and empathetic. This shows that airlines give great importance to cabin crew about their relationships with their customers. In other words, it is seen that airlines want to work with successful and cheerful people about human relations. In addition, THY, Corendon and Etihad Airways state the importance of the

appearance of the cabin crew they look for, with definitions such as well-groomed, stylish, strong in representation. In all coding, this is the strongest common attitude among all airlines.

Except Pegasus Airlines, it is seen that all the companies' adverts include qualifications regarding the reactions and mindset of cabin crew in the face of events. It is seen that they include definitions such as dynamic versatility, positive attitude, being open to learn, high awareness, decision-making ability in difficult situations, vision, adaptability, being open to improvement and modernism.

Except Pegasus, which does not specify its criteria, it can be said that the third most stated concept in the adverts of all airline companies is the compliance with the difficulty and flexibility of the working conditions. These criteria are defined in the adverts as "to adapted to difficult working conditions, flexible working, emotional endurance, professional endurance, continuous good performance and professionalism". These criteria are found in all airlines except Pegasus and Sun Express. Especially THY expects candidates who will apply for adverts to handle difficult working conditions with 3 different definitions such as to adapt to difficult working conditions, emotional resilience and flexibility. Other airlines state occupational endurance and endurance. On the contrary, Emirates expects professionalism and continuous good performance.

In the coding, they expect candidates who will apply for the adverts to work well in a team, with the criteria of "team player and being a team worker" in the adverts of Tailwind, Onur Air, Pegasus and THY.

Airlines expect candidates to apply for the adverts to be ready for the constant travelling required by the position, with the coding state by the criteria of "desire to see new places and to not have a travel obstacle", which were repeated in the adverts for 4 times. These criteria are found in the adverts of Sun Express, Onur Air, Tailwind and Etihad. Apart from these, there are no criteria with a high number of repetitions. To know how to swim stated in the first table appears with 2 repetitions in Tailwind and Onur air. In addition, Emirates which has employees from various countries states being cosmopolitan; Onur Air states sales skills, which encourages employees to make sales to customers; and Etihad, which belongs to the United Arab Emirates, states the criteria related to their special situations in their adverts.

Result

When the adverts of airlines that recruit cabin crew from Turkey are analyzed, it is seen that the most important difference in terms of application criteria is the height-weight standards of the companies. While the companies operating in Turkey state the physical criteria which are thought as appropriate to their companies, It can be said that the airlines operating in the UAE published a cabin crew advert with a more modern approach since they made a statement such as "the required height to access emergency equipment on their aircraft".

Another difference found in the adverts related to the study is the age criteria. While the airline companies operating in Turkey state an upper age limit in their job adverts, It is not the same in companies operating in the UAE. The fact that Turkey has a young population affects the young personnel preference of the airlines. However, this approach is also considered to be a controversial issue.

In the analysis, it can be said that the factors stated in the job descriptions of the companies give an idea about the business model. For example, Onur Air and Tailwind have included the statement "have no obstacle to travel" in

their adverts, unlike other airlines. The reason for this situation may be the long-term operations of the two airlines outside the country.

According to Demirhan, (2019) the physical performance of women, who are identified with delicacy, thinness, tolerance, patience and kindness, are the basic conditions for being accepted in the profession. It is possible to state that this fact is seen more clearly in cabin crew recruitment criteria particularly in companies operating in Turkey compared to airlines in other countries.

It is seen that the most significant criteria in cabin crew recruitment adverts are human relations and physical endurance in general. It can be said that the ability to build successful human relationships is a very important criterion because of the nature of the profession. The flight operation is provided by the harmonious operation of many different operating elements, and a malfunction in one of the operating elements usually affects the operation in a direct way. For instance, numerous reasons such as the delay in catering loading, when a lost phone is noticed, a passenger who changes his mind about flying, the cargo door not closing, and the delay of the cleaning team can cause malfunctions in the operation. The fact that the large number of variable situations that can affect the operation and the disruptions related to these can cause uneasiness and dissatisfaction among the passengers from time to time. The positive communication of cabin crew with passengers can help to minimize dissatisfaction. Physical endurance is extremely important for cabin crew. Flight personnel generally do not have a standard flight schedule. So, they are expected to be able to adapt to different working hours. In addition, they should also have the ability to continue the operation with a high awareness throughout their tenure, which is based on 13 hours (Directorate General of Civil Aviation, 2021b). Therefore, it can be said that it is apprehensible that physical endurance is emphasized as an important issue to be included in the adverts.

Etihaad's "cosmopolitan" emphasis on "can adapt to new people" also gives an idea about organizational structures. As these two companies have multinational employees, they want to hire cabin crew who will not lose their energy because of conflicts caused from cultural differences. These criteria are found as "teamwork, team player" in the airlines of Turkey. The coordination of the team is an extremely important issue for guest satisfaction and flight safety. This situation can be described as the reason why airlines want to prefer personnel with teamwork skills.

It can be said that these descriptions, which are stated in almost all cabin crew adverts, are one of the most important personnel groups that enable cabin crew members to create a positive image on customers. In addition, it is seen that the business model adopted by airlines is also effective in recruiting personnel. Therefore the reason, there are more extensive interactions between personnel and passengers of airlines which provide full-service, and in this case, the hospitality of airlines providing in-flight services takes a more important role than low-cost companies (Nameghi & Ariffin, 2013). For this reason, it is seen that while concepts such as hospitality are included in the cabin crew adverts of airlines that provide full service, it is seen that these concepts are not given importance in low cost airlines.

Cabin crew members are obliged to take critical decisions (firefighting, unruly passenger, first aid etc.), so they should have awareness on issues such as decision making, implementation or taking precautions before the situation occurs, and make more effective decisions in cases where intuitive decisions are required (Nas, 2010). In addition, there is a difficult training process due to the different aviation rules, laws and high responsibility. At the end of the

process, there are exams and trainings that cabin crew must pass. For this reason, they want to work with civil servants who are more likely to be successful by specifying criteria such as being open to learn and development.

In general, the similarities and different qualifications sought in cabin crew were stated as a result of the analyzes of the adverts. These desired qualifications are also shaped within the scope of possible situations, professional difficulties and fulfilling the general expectations of the customers and the situation to be worked on.

Okabe's, (2017) study has shown that it can be a relation between organizational stress and overall job performance and the hospitality of the cabin crew. This shows that the employees should possess this qualification before, rather than gaining it later.

In this study, there are only airlines that recruit cabin crew from Turkey. In future studies, increasing the number of samples and analyzing companies located in different areas can provide more general data about the profession.

Declaration

The contribution of all authors of the article to the article process is equal. There is no conflict of interest to be declared by the authors.

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