

## **Developing Effective Service Communication: The Role of E-book in Enhancing English Speech Acts in High Vocational Training**

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### **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were to develop electronic book (E-book) to enhance English speech acts knowledge for services and find out the achievement before and after using of the E-book of the students in high vocational certificate level in Yala province, and to assess the satisfaction after using electronic book to enhance English speech acts for services of the students in the high vocational certificate level. 31 students enrolling in high vocational certificate level in Business Foreign Language Department were purposively selected as the participants of the study. The research instruments used for data collection were: electronic book, pre- and post- learning achievement assessment, quality evaluation checklist, and satisfaction assessment forms. The data were analyzed by mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), T-Test dependent, and standard deviation (S.D). The findings showed that: 1) The average score from the evaluation of the e-book by three experts in terms of content and media presentation was at a high level. The contents had an average score of ( $\bar{X} = 4.48$ , S.D. = 0.34), and the average score for media presentation was also high ( $\bar{X} = 4.43$ , S.D. = 0.47), 2) The post-test had a higher mean score than the pre-test ( $\bar{X} = 20.68$ , S.D = 6.59;  $=16.90$ , S.D. = 4.00), indicating a statistical significance at the 0.05 level; 2) The students' satisfaction towards using electronic book on speech acts for services was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.19$ , S.D. = 0.79). It indicated that using electronic book can effectively improve English speech acts knowledge for services of the students.

**Keywords:** English Speech Acts, E-Book, Services

### **Introduction**

English is a universally recognized and essential language which plays a vital role in communication, professional settings, intercultural understanding, and comprehending the perspectives of other nations (Phithakphongphan, 2020; Imsa-ard, 2023; Jumanazar qizi, 2024). In the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, Thailand recognizes the importance of acquiring English which is reflected in its national education policies. These policies mandate comprehensive English instruction that includes listening, speaking,

reading, and writing skills (Meejaeng & Panawong, 2010; Taladngoen, 2019). However, the teaching of English in Thailand, from elementary to higher education levels, faces persistent challenges (Phothongsunan, 2016; Sa-idi, & Pittpant, 2024). A significant issue is the predominant focus on grammar instruction, which often comes at the expense of practical language application. Varnish (2018), a lecturer at the Language Institute of Chulalongkorn University, highlighted this concern to the BBC news agency, stating that both seasoned and newer teachers tend to prioritize structured English grammar and vocabulary memorization over fostering students' active language usage. Consequently, this approach diminishes students' motivation to learn English. Additionally, effective communication involves not only grammar but also the crucial aspect of politeness, as it facilitates the exchange of information, emotions, and viewpoints among individuals. Importantly, politeness plays a significant role not only in personal interactions but also in the area of business operations, where successful communication hinges upon its presence (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It can be clearly asserted that politeness in communication is crucial for achieving one's satisfaction, which is a vital component of successful business operations. The attributes of humility and mutual respect form the foundation of societal foundations, reinforcing the need for politeness in business interactions (Afriana et al. 2023).

Speaking of Business Foreign Language Department at Yala province, the main mission focuses on cultivating students' learning potential and enhancing their English communication skills across various service sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and aviation. Therefore, it is essential for students to grasp the concept of politeness. In service-oriented work, effective language use, encompassing politeness, a positive behavior, enthusiasm, and emotional self-control, is paramount for ensuring customer's satisfaction. After surveys and discussions with teachers, it revealed that students enrolled in the High Vocational Certificate program in the Business Foreign Language department have been facing challenges in English communication. These challenges include a lack of self-confidence stemming from personal traits, fear of accents, insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, particularly in terms of politeness, which can lead to miscommunication.

To enhance English communication skills of the students at the diploma level in the Business Foreign Language department, this research attempts to develop their language proficiency regarding politeness through generally speech acts used for services which are greeting, offering, making a request, and apology via E-book as a mean. This is because E-book can incorporate images, sounds, video files, and animated graphics into its file, enhancing the reading experience and facilitating learning for learners (Kalayanawong, 2022; Saptano, 2023). As confirmed by many researchers who studied the achievement of using E-book to promote language learning, it was found that using E-book can help overcome the physical barriers between teachers and students, fostering a deeper understanding of students' learning situations. This opens up new avenues for content planning and teaching approaches, resulting in suggestions to enhance the enjoyment of learning, increase motivation, and improve teaching effectiveness (Nurgaliyeva et. al, 2019; Sun & Pan 2021). Obviously, Almunawaroh (2020) who studies the effectiveness of using an E-book in ELT confirmed that E-book can be integrated into English language instruction across all educational levels to enhance students' motivation in learning. This, in turn, contributes to a higher level of understanding in the process of learning English. Hence, the researchers attempted to elevate the student's communicative potential and

enable them to confidently navigate real-life situations while minimizing communication errors by means of E-book.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To develop electronic book to enhance English speech acts knowledge for services.
2. To study the learning achievement before and after using of electronic book on speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology of the students in high vocational certificate level in Business Foreign Language Department
3. To study the students' satisfaction after using electronic book on speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology.

### **Literature Reviews**

#### **1. Politeness**

Politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is more than just being courteous—it is like a tool that helps people behave appropriately in different cultures and social settings. There are two main types of politeness strategies: positive and negative. Positive politeness is when people use friendly and familiar language to create a comfortable atmosphere and avoid causing offense. This is crucial in service-related jobs, where creating a positive and warm connection with customers contributes to their satisfaction. On the other hand, negative politeness comes into play when the goal is to prevent offense by showing respect. This involves using careful language, like hedging or framing disagreements as opinions, to maintain a sense of respect and understanding, especially in service-oriented contexts.

For professionals in fields such as hospitality, tourism, or aviation, being skilled in politeness strategies is a must (Phithakphongphan, 2020; Sa-idi, & Pittpunt, 2024). Good communication is key to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Afriana et al. 2023). Knowing how to balance positive and negative politeness helps minimize misunderstandings and keeps interactions smooth. In the business world, where communication is vital, service providers need more than just language skills but they need to understand cultural differences, social dynamics, and the art of politeness to not just meet but exceed customer expectations (Chiaravijit, 2022). This not only prevents potential business losses but also creates an environment where positive interactions and long-lasting relationships can thrive.

#### **2. Speech Acts**

A speech act is an utterance that performs a communicative function, going beyond merely conveying information. For instance, speech serves various purposes such as making statements, asking questions, apologizing, describing, or persuading. In speech acts, words are employed not just to articulate something but to accomplish a specific action.

The concept of speech act theory was introduced by British philosopher John L. Austin in his 1959 book “How to Do Things with Words.” In this work, Austin defined performatives as a type of speech where words cause an action rather than simply stating facts. Performatives involve words that bring about a specific outcome or create something new. For instance, the phrase “I do” in a marriage ceremony is a performative as it actively leads to the occurrence of marriage. Naming a ship or making a bet are other examples of performatives.

Austin outlined three key actions related to speech acts, later expanded upon by Searle in 1975. Locution pertains to the actual words used in verbal or written communication, essentially conveying the meaning of the statement. Illocutionary acts are tied to the speaker’s intention, indicating what the communicator aims to achieve with the message. For instance, in the question “Can you open the window?” the speaker intends for the listener to actually open the window, going beyond a literal inquiry about the possibility. Finally, the perlocutionary act refers to the impact of the words on the recipient of the message—the person who hears or reads them. When someone hears the request, “Can you open the window?” their subsequent action of opening the window is an example of the perlocutionary effect of speech.

To sum up, speech acts help convey not just information but also the speaker's intentions. They go beyond the literal meaning of words to express actions, attitudes, or emotions, providing depth and nuance to communication. Understanding speech acts is essential for effective interaction in various contexts, such as everyday conversations, services, business negotiations, or academic discussions. It ensures that the speaker's intended meaning aligns with the listener's interpretation.

### 3. E-Book

Rahim et al. (2020) claimed that e-book is designed to be visually appealing and includes a variety of multimedia elements such as video, animation, and audio. This combination is aimed at assisting students in grasping abstract subject matter by providing a more vivid and interactive learning experience (Setyaedhi & Pramana, 2024). This approach will not only help students better understand the material but also generate increased interest and motivation. The students will benefit from enhanced learning outcomes, driven by their newfound enthusiasm and stimulated engagement with the learning activities facilitated by the use of e-books. Muangngam (2020) also asserted that electronic books can insert images, sound, motion pictures, quizzes, and can be printed as needed from the printer. Another important aspect is that electronic books can be continuously updated to stay current, a feature not found in conventional books.

### Research Methodology

This research employed an experimental methodology to study the achievement and satisfaction resulting from the use of E-books to develop English speech acts for services among higher vocational certificate students. The research scope, population and participants, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis, were presented as followed.

## **Research Scope**

The content used for creating pre- and post-tests, was categorized under the following topics: Greeting, Offering, Making Request, and Apology. The test format was Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT-Test) with 4 options for each question. The test presented 30 scenarios, and respondents were required to choose the most appropriate response for each scenario. The participants were 31 students at the higher vocational certificate level in the Business Foreign Language Department at Yala province by using purposive sampling technique. The research was conducted from December 2022 to March 2023.

## **Population**

The population of the study were the students pursuing high vocational certificate level in the Business Foreign Language Department at Yala province, Thailand.

## **Participants**

31 high vocational students in Department of Business Foreign Language in Yala province studying in the second semester of the 2022 academic year were selected to participate in the study by using purposive sampling technique. This is because this college is the only institution among public vocational education groups in the three southern border provinces that offers programs related to foreign languages, particularly English for business at the high vocational certificate level and there is currently no prior research conducted in this context within this topic area.

## **Research Instruments**

The research instruments used to collect data were pre-test, post-test, an electronic book, quality evaluation checklist, and questionnaire asking for the satisfaction.

### **1. Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT)**

To assess the proficiency of Thai students in pragmatics and speech acts, several approaches have been suggested which are the Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT), Contextualized Pragmatics Judgment Test (CPJT), and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). However, the Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) stands out among those methods. This is primarily because Thai students may be acquainted with this format, as it involves multiple-choice questions commonly used to evaluate their knowledge across various subjects. MDCT possesses distinctive features, presenting written scenarios, conversational dialogues, and response options that include distractors. In the present study, initially, the test items in the multiple-choice discourse completion test were 50 items created relating to services based on the target speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology. E-book content, relevant literature, existing materials were reviewed to form the items at this stage. 50 items were then examined by three experts who have expertise in the field with a minimum of three years of English teaching experience resulting in the omission of 20 items deemed excessively difficult, too easy, overly polite, or irrelevant to services. The remaining 30 items were subjected to further validity testing

by the same three experts, yielding a validity coefficient of 0.70, indicating the test's validity. The actual test comprised 30 questions pertaining to service scenarios, specifically focusing on four speech acts: Greeting (4 items), Offering (10 items), Making a Request (10 items), and Apology (6 items). Each item carried a weight of 1 mark, and the scores obtained did not impact the students' English courses either positively or negatively.

## 2. An Electronic Book (E-book)

Content and media presentation of an electronic book encompassing four speech acts (Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology) was assessed by the same three experts who evaluated MDCT since they could relate the content and the test items. Quality evaluation checklist forms regarding the contents and the media presentation were administered to the three experts. The assessment yielded a positive outcome presented in the table 1 in the results session. The electronic book comprises comprehensive material on Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology which highlight the use of appropriate and polite sentences, responses, acceptance, and declination in various service scenarios. Additionally, users have the option to access audio recordings and videos demonstrations for each speech act provided in the E-book.

## 3. Quality Evaluation Checklist

The quality evaluation checklist items were modified from digital media checklist created by Gamboa (2021). The modified checklist was then evaluated by the three experts using Item Objective Congruence (IOC) analysis to confirm its reliability. The checklists exhibited a validity coefficient over 0.50, signifying favourable validity. The checklist comprised of 12 items.

## 4. Satisfaction Survey Form

The questionnaire items used in the present study were modified from the previous research by Khedif, et al. (2014) and Sari et al. (2022). The modified questionnaire assessing student satisfaction was then subjected to Item Objective Congruence (IOC) analysis by the three experts to ensure its reliability. The questionnaire demonstrated a validity coefficient exceeding 0.50, indicating its favourable validity. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items employing a 5-Likert scale to evaluate students' satisfaction levels relying on the following criteria and interpretation: 4.51-5.00 (Highest), 3.51-4.50 (High), 2.51-3.50 (Moderate), 1.51-2.50 (Low), and 1.00-1.50 (Lowest).

## Data collection

The experts were first required to do the checklist in the quality evaluation form both contents and media presentation in order to find out its quality. To examine the students' achievement and satisfaction, the data collection process commenced during the second semester of the academic year 2022 from December 2022 to March 2023 at Yala province. The procedures started with the administration of a pre-test consisting of 30 questions, which the participants were allotted 45 minutes to complete. Subsequently, the participants underwent a 15-day period of studying four speech acts: Greeting, Offering,

Making a Request, and Apology, accompanied by audio and video resources. Throughout this stage, the researchers created an online chat platform to monitor and support the participants' progress. Upon completion of the study period, the participants were instructed to take a post-test within 45 minutes. Additionally, they were requested to fill out a satisfaction survey form to gauge their overall satisfaction.

### Data Analysis

The data were statistically analysed according to the research objectives. Dependent Samples T- test was run to compare the results of students' learning achievement. The Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation (S.D.), and percentage (%) were employed to analyse the data of E-book contents, media presentation, and students' satisfaction. A five-point Likert scale was also employed to range each item average as the following criteria and interpretation: 4.51-5.00 (Highest), 3.51-4.50 (High), 2.51-3.50 (Moderate), 1.51-2.50 (Low), and 1.00-1.50 (Lowest).

### Research Results

The results were presented according to the research objectives as followed: 1) to develop electronic book to enhance English speech acts knowledge for services, 2) to study the achievement before and after using of electronic book on speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology of the students in high vocational certificate level in Business Foreign Language Department, and 3) to find out the students' satisfaction after using electronic book on speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology.

**Table 1** shows the quality evaluation in regarding E-book contents and media presentation.

Item	( $\bar{X}$ )	(S.D.)	Level
Contents	4.48	0.34	High
Media Presentation	4.43	0.47	High

Based on table 1, the quality of the E-book rated by the three experts showed that the quality of the contents was at a high level ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.48, S.D. = 0.34). Likewise, the quality of the media presentation was at a high level ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.43, S.D. = 0.47).

**Table 2** illustrates the results of comparing scores on pre-test and post-test after using E-book to improve English speech acts knowledge for services.

	(N)	FULL SCORE	( $\bar{X}$ )	(S.D.)	t	SIG.
<b>Pre-test</b>	31	30	16.90	4.00	3.49	0.05
<b>Post-test</b>	31	30	20.68	6.59		

\*p ≤ .05

Table 2 shows the score differences between the pre-test and post-test of students who utilized the E-book. The pretest displayed a mean score of 16.90 (SD = 16.90), whereas the post-test showed a higher mean score of 20.68 (SD = 20.68). The t-test yielded a value of 3.49, which indicates a statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

**Table 3** presents the results of the students' satisfaction towards using E-book in enhancing English speech acts related to services among students: Opinions regarding the content suitability of E-book.

List	( $\bar{X}$ )	(S.D.)	Level
1. Clear, accurate, and reliable	4.26	0.76	High
2. Concise and easy to understand	4.06	0.80	High
3. Well-organized in a sequential and coherent manner, making it easy to understand when read.	4.13	0.79	High
4. The content in the electronic media adheres to the principles of language and grammar.	4.29	0.81	High
<b>Total</b>	4.19	0.79	High

From table 3, it was found that the overall average mean score of the opinions regarding the content suitability of the E-book for developing English speech acts in the service aspects among students was at a high level ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.19). Considering each item, *the text in the electronic media is highly accurate and adheres to language and grammar principles*, possessed highest average score of 4.29 ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.29), followed by *the content is highly clear, accurate, and reliable*, with an average score of 4.26 ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.26), *The content is well-organized, coherent, and easy to understand when read*, with an average score of 4.13 ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.13), and *the content is concise and easy to understand*, with an average score of 4.06 ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.06), respectively.



**Table 4** demonstrates users' opinions on the suitability of the design of E-book.

List	( $\bar{X}$ )	(S.D.)	Level
1. The formatting in the electronic book is user-friendly and easy to read and navigate.	4.26	0.76	High
2. The electronic book is aesthetically pleasing, modern, and engaging.	4.45	0.71	High
3. The color scheme in the design of electronic book is appropriate and well-suited.	4.45	0.80	High
4. The use of a consistent theme in the electronic book is implemented uniformly.	4.35	0.82	High
5. The smoothness of linking to other electronic book, such as videos, is achieved seamlessly.	4.19	1.03	High
<b>Total</b>	4.34	0.82	High

According to table 4, the overall mean score of opinions regarding the appropriateness of the design aspects of E-book for developing English speech acts for services among the students was also at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.34$ ). *The electronic book was highly attractive, modern, and engaging*, was rated at the highest among all items which was of 4.45 ( $\bar{X} = 4.45$ ), followed by *The color schemes used in the design of electronic media were highly appropriate*, with a mean score of 4.35 ( $\bar{X} = 4.35$ ), *the use of consistent themes in electronic media design* was at the highest level, with a mean score of 4.26 ( $\bar{X} = 4.26$ ), and *the smoothness of linking to other electronic media, such as videos*, was at a high level, with a mean score of 4.19 ( $\bar{X} = 4.19$ ).

**Table 5** presents users' opinions on the suitability and practicality of E-book usage and its application.

List	( $\bar{X}$ )	(S.D.)	Level
1. The content is beneficial to users and can be applied effectively.	4.45	0.91	High
2. It can serve as a source of knowledge about speech acts.	4.29	0.92	High
3. It is a source of information that aligns with the users' needs.	4.35	0.86	High
<b>Total</b>	4.37	0.90	High

## Research Discussion

The results of the study on the achievement of using E-book to develop English speech acts commonly used in the field of services can be discussed as follows. Based on the average scores from pre- and post-tests using E-books to develop English speech acts regarding services, it was found that the pre-test scores had a total of 30 full marks. The students achieved an average score ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 16.90 with a standard deviation (S.D.) of 4.00 before using E-books. After using E-books to develop English speech acts and conducting a post-test, it was found that the students' scores improved, with an average score ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 20.68 and a standard deviation (S.D.) of 6.59, indicating a statistically significant difference at 0.5. The aforementioned results indicated a positive outcome after using E-book. This clearly demonstrates the actual achievement of using E-books to develop speech acts for services for the students, which was consistent with the research conducted by Srithongkul (2021) on the development of multimedia electronic book in English for Study Skills subject of students at Dhonburi Rajabhat University. 40 undergraduates who were studying English for Study Skills subject were selected by using a purposive sampling. The instruments used to collect the data were: multimedia Electronic Book, learning achievement test and the questionnaire of students' satisfaction. The study found that the posttest scores in English for Study Skills Subject were higher than those of pretest with a statistical significance level of .05, indicating a significant improvement in learning outcomes. It also was in accordance with the research conducted by Laksanasut and Thitivesa in 2020. Their study mainly aimed to compare the academic achievement of the royal police cadets' English speaking skill after using an interactive e-book with the attainment target of 70 percent. The participants were 20 voluntary police cadets enrolled in the 1st semester of the 2019 academic year at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. An interactive e-book was used to collect data. It was found that the achievement of the royal police cadets' English speaking skill after using an interactive e-book met the attainment target of 70 percent at the statistically significant level of 0.05. These results pointed out that E-book can develop learners' English language proficiency and arouse the students' interest though there are various media or applications available for learning these days.

Apart from this, the results of the satisfaction assessment towards using E-book for the development of speech acts: Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology in the service sector was at a high level showing a positive satisfaction. The results were in accordance with the research conducted by Sohsawaeng, et al. (2020) who studies on the development of interactive book with music and activities to promote community-based learning for undergraduate students. 30 fourth-year students from King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi were purposively selected as the participants. It was found that the participants expressed the highest level of satisfaction towards the interactive book with music activities. They confirmed that this interactive book can be distributed for further use. Likewise, Al-Jarf (2021) investigated the collaborative mobile E-book reading for struggling EFL college readers. The results regarding students' satisfaction with using E-books to enhance their reading skills indicate that they hold positive attitudes toward both the extensive collaborative E-book reading and the overall Reading I course. All students found the extensive collaborative E-book reading to be beneficial and enjoyable, viewing it as a novel approach to engaging in reading activities and enhancing their English reading proficiency.

To sum up, it can obviously be seen that despite the availability of various teaching media and convenient applications for English learners these days, this research affirms that using E-books can still contribute to the development of learners' knowledge and is suitable for broader distribution and utilization in English language teaching and learning. Considering the students' satisfaction towards using E-book for the development of English speech acts for services, the students express positive satisfaction. They agree that E-book can be used as one of the best sources to learn English speech acts as it can interact with the users through its contents, pictures, sounds, and videos. Therefore, teachers should design a quality E-book with a more diverse range of components, not only the text but including visuals, audios, and videos, to help students enjoy the learning process and have a new learning experience. This can obviously promote the development of self-learning skills among students.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

In summary, the findings of this research revealed that after the post-learning assessment, all students obtained higher scores compared to their pre-learning scores. This result clearly shows that the use of electronic media, particularly the E-book designed to develop speech acts such as Greeting, Offering, Making a Request, and Apology, can effectively improve students' learning performance. Even though there are currently a variety of modern applications, online platforms, and advanced technological tools created for educational purposes, this study suggests that the E-book remains a useful and supportive learning tool. It can help enhance students' understanding and practice of speech acts in real-life communication. Moreover, since the students showed high satisfaction with using the E-book, it shows that electronic media can increase students' learning motivation and interest. This study also suggests that educational institutions or teachers in vocational education should consider integrating technology-based materials like E-books into their teaching to develop students' English skills for specific purposes, particularly in-service communication, which is essential for their future careers.

### **Research Suggestions**

#### **1. Recommendations for the Utilization**

1.1 To attain better learning achievement from the students by using E-book, the teachers should incorporate a variety of content, not only text but also images, audios, and videos, to ensure diverse information.

1.2 The use of E-books as a teaching aid is confirmed by this research to be effective in developing learners' knowledge. Despite the availability of various teaching media and convenient applications for learners today, this research affirms that using E-books can still contribute to the development of learners' knowledge.

## 2. Recommendations for Further Research

2.1 In-depth focus group discussions after learning through electronic media to obtain more accurate data and further validate the findings should be carried out.

2.2 It is advisable to study the research on developing English language proficiency among high-performing students, which can serve as a guideline for supporting students with lower proficiency level.

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