

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Chapter Five presents the summary of the research and suggestions for further studies. This chapter is set out into three sections as follows:

Section One: Research summary

The purposes of this study were to investigate graduating students' listening ability in English for the service and hospitality industry, to find the cut-off scores for eight levels of listening ability, and to describe the descriptors for each level of the listening ability.

The subjects in this study are 250 4th year, male and female Thai students who are studying in the departments of tourism and hotel industry or related fields in Bangkok University, Kasem Bundit University, Kasetsart University, and Rangsit University. These students must have completed all required courses in English in their institutions.

The research instruments in this study included the ESP listening test, L-PESH Test, and the student's attitude questionnaire. Both the test and the questionnaire have been validated based on experts' judgment and statistical values.

The findings from this study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. Can the L-PESH Test differentiate Thai graduating students' listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry?

It was found that the L-PESH Test can differentiate the students' listening proficiency into eight levels. These levels included "Distinguished", "Superior", "Advanced-High", "Advanced-Low", "Intermediate-High", "Intermediate-Low", "Novice-High", and "Novice-Low". The highest ability level is "Distinguished"

whereas the lowest ability level is “Novice Low”. The performance description of each level can clearly differentiate students’ listening ability. The students with higher ability level can perform more complicated listening tasks than those who have lower ability level. For example, the students in the “Distinguished” level can perform all tasks described in the lower ability levels. However, this result can be generalized to the group of subjects in this study only. To apply this result in describing listening ability of other students, not participating in this study or not majoring service and hospitality industry, may lead to invalid and unreliable decisions.

2. What are the appropriate cut-off scores for each level of listening ability?

The total score of the L-PESH Test was 80. The cut-off scores were established based on frameworks suggested by Angoff (1971), Brown (1996), Morgan and Michaelides (2005), and Claycomb (1999). The established cut-off scores were:

77-80	=	Distinguished
65-76	=	Superior
53-64	=	Advanced-High
41-52	=	Advanced-Low
29-40	=	Intermediate-High
17-28	=	Intermediate-Low
5-16	=	Novice-High
0-4	=	Novice-Low

3. What are the descriptors for each level of the listening ability?

The proficiency levels and descriptors were justified and triangulated with the results of the interviews with experts and test takers, and were presented in the following paragraphs.

Distinguished: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- make inferences within the cultural framework of the target language
- understand all forms and styles of speech concerned with social, and professional needs tailored to different audiences
- function in all of the situations described below whether professional or social, concerning concrete or abstract subjects

Note: The listener in this level may have difficulty with some dialects and slang.

Superior: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand registers used in the area of service and hospitality
- make implication from the guest replies, requests, and complaints
- handle emergencies and guest s illness
- understand and deal with complicated and serious requests or complaints
- understand most work related situations
- understand most speakers of English in international meetings
- function in all of the situations described in the lower ability levels

Note: In this level, the listener rarely misunderstands but may not understand excessively rapid speech with strong cultural references.

Advanced-High: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand explanations about how to perform routine tasks related to service and hospitality industry
- understand co-worker discussing simple problems that arose at work
- understand and deal with simple requests and complaints
- understand description and narration in different time frames or aspects
- understand short lectures or interviews on both familiar and new topics
- function in all of the situations described in the lower ability levels

Note: In this level, the listener shows an emerging awareness of culturally implied meanings beyond the surface meanings of the text but may fail to grasp sociocultural nuances of the message.

Advanced-Low: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand simple exchanges in everyday professional or personal life with both native English and non-native English speakers (face-to-face)
- sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places
- take order at the table in the hotel restaurants or bars
- understand and explain simple dishes or drinks in the menu to the guests
- arrange a table or a room reservation
- understand and make simple suggestions about food and rooms to the guests
- function in all of the situations described in the lower ability levels

Note: Understanding in this level may be uneven because of variety of linguistic and extra linguistic factors in the text.

Intermediate-High: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand explanations related to routine work in one to one situations
- understand limited social conversations (face-to –face)
- understand simple directions and time
- take simple phone messages

Note: Understanding in this level is inconsistent because the listener may fail to grasp main ideas and details.

Intermediate-Low: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand adequately for immediate survival needs such as basic greeting to the hotel guest “Good morning/afternoon/evening”.
- understand simple questions in social situations, spoken slowly and deliberately, such as “How are you?”, “What’s your name?”
- understand utterances which consist of learned elements in a limited number of content areas

Note: Misunderstandings in both main ideas and details frequently arise.

Novice-High: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand short, learned utterances with repetition, rephrasing, and presented in slow rate speech
- understand some words and phrases from simple questions and statements, high-frequency commands, and courtesy formulae about topics

Note: The listener requires long pauses for assimilation.

Novice-Low: The test takers in this performance level can do the following:

- understand some frequently used isolated words.
- have no ability to understand even short utterances

Note: The listener has very limited understanding.

The results from this study were used to identify the students’ listening proficiency in English for the service and hospitality industry. Following is a summary of the students’ listening ability.

The students who took the L-PESH Test were categorized into eight groups according to the established cut-off scores.

Out of 250 students, there were no students in the highest ability level, “Distinguished”. There were no students grouped under the levels of “Novice-High”

and “Novice-Low”, as well. There were 15 students in “Superior” level, 31 students in “Advanced-High” level, and 81 students in “Advanced-Low”. The “Intermediate-High” level covered 97 students, while “Intermediate-Low” included 26 students.

The Distinguished level students can relate their listening ability to positions such as Assistant to General Manager, Training Manager, Administrative Manager, Personnel Manager, Outlet manager, Sales and Marketing Manager, Assistant to Group Training Manager, HRD Manager, F&B Manager, Front Office Manager, Executive secretary, Spa manager, Chief Engineer, and so on.

The listening ability of the Superior group may fit the following positions; Front Office Assistant Manager, Reservation Agents, Business Center supervisor, Front Office supervisor, Public Relation Officer, Sale& Marketing Officer, Purchasing Officer, Engineer, Accountant, and so on.

These Advanced-High and Advanced-Low level students can be fit into the following positions; Cashier, Electrical Engineer, waiter, waitress, butler, bell captain, Assistant Executive Housekeeping, Spa Receptionist, Japanese Restaurant Server, and so on.

The Intermediate-High and Intermediate-Low level students may be able to get the jobs in the following positions; Mini-bar man, F&B staff, Lounge/Lobby Bar Receptionist, Laundry Manger, Florist Supervisor, Operator, and so forth.

In conclusion, the graduating students’ listening ability in English for service and hospitality industry was investigated by means of the L-PESH Test administration. The findings show that these 250 students who took the test have different levels of listening ability. Their ability was classified into eight levels as mentioned earlier. The graduating students who participated in this study possess average listening ability, ranging from Intermediate-High to Advanced-Low. Though listening ability was found not to be very high, it is sufficient for the students to perform the tasks in various positions in leading hotels in Bangkok.

In addition, since the cut-off scores and ability descriptors of the L-PESH Test were established based on the test scores of 250 test takers in a single test administration, the statistical values may not be stable. Therefore, in establishing these cut-off scores and descriptors, the research did not only rely on the statistical values. The cut-off scores and descriptors were also triangulated by the related experts and educators.

However, the listening ability only cannot indicate the students' real level of language proficiency. In some kinds of test, such as placement decisions or screening decisions for employment, the consideration may cover multiple content categories (i.e., using a combination of scores by separate reading comprehension, writing, and speaking). It is not appropriate to consider only the applicant's particular content area or skill without considering his or her mastery of the other content areas or skills required for a particular position. In such instances it may be advantageous and, in fact, necessary for a complete test or the total student performance to be considered as a whole rather than as one item or content area at a time. Therefore, the L-PESH Test needs three more skills focusing on speaking, reading, and writing to be included in order to increase its standard.

Section Two: Significance of the research

The results of this study can be advantageous in the following aspects.

1. As for the quality assurance in each university, to see if their graduating students in this field have adequate English ability to enter competitive job markets or not, ESP proficiency tests in English for the service and hospitality industry are needed in order to investigate this ability. The L-PESH Test can serve as part of these tests to be used in investigating graduating students listening ability.

2. The test results can tell the levels of listening ability of the students and identify their gaps between their present level and the needed level of English competency of each position or what kind of training they may need to get.

3. Research-related participants such as the educators, the employers/hoteliers, the graduating students, and other interested persons can benefit from the results of the study because the findings can:

3.1 provide the guidelines for educators to design English courses to improve their students' ability in English listening, especially in the area of English for service and hospitality in which listening and speaking skills play significant roles. The students should have more chances to practice and improve these two skills in the university. However, in real learning situations, it was found that reading and writing skills are more emphasized while listening and speaking skills are less practiced and evaluated. To serve the need of the job market and to equip the students with adequate ability in English to perform their future tasks, the universities and educators may need to re-consider their curriculum design in this field of study. Courses in English for specific purposes focusing on listening and speaking skills should be included in the curriculum from the very first year of study. With more learning and practices, the students can better their quality in English listening and speaking.

3.2 provide frameworks and processes for language testers to develop any tests of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), focusing on listening skills. These new ESP tests can be used as an in-house test or a standard one.

3.3 be used as self-assessment among students in related fields to practice and improve their listening ability at their own pace.

3.4 be used by employers to measure the candidate's ability in English before the main procedures in their recruitment.

3.5 provide suggestions for further studies concerning listening skill.

Section Three: Suggestions for further studies

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, there are limited budget and time constraints in this study, the researcher cannot develop tests on the other three skills; speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, in order to establish standard for a new test, there is a need for more test administrations and a larger group of subjects. To achieve its standard, the new test needs a number of reviews and revisions. And most importantly, the test must be reliable and valid. Therefore, it is a good idea that the L-PESH Test is revised and re-administered to other groups of subjects. Item-analysis, the process in setting cut-off scores, and the validation of the proposed cut-off scores and ability descriptors should also be reconsidered in further studies.

In addition, this study focuses only on listening skill; further studies on developing the tests on speaking, reading, and writing in English for service and hospitality industry are worth conducting. According to some information gained during the interviews, many experts, educators, students, and hoteliers agreed and look forward to having other three sets of tests that measure speaking, reading, and writing ability in this field. Some teachers and heads of departments in those four universities who were interviewed are interested in joining the researcher to develop the other three tests. They strongly believed that the complete set of the L-PESH, S-PESH, R-PESH, and W-PESH Tests will be useful and contributing in improving the English language proficiency of the students in this field.

Moreover, from this study the researcher found that there are many more interesting aspects for future studies. For example, a study on the comparison of the established cut-off scores from different methods would be interesting. It is also interesting to study the relationship between the L-PESH Test scores with the scores from different test types. Further studies can also be conducted to investigate the impact of pictures used in the test. A study of native and non-native English accents used in the recording is also worth conducting. Alternative methods in setting cut-off scores and ability descriptors can be tried out in future studies.

Lastly, recommendation is also made for educators to consider revising their current curriculum that can provide more learning and practice in English listening

and speaking skills. It was also suggested by the specialists in the interviews that students taking this field of study should get acquainted with English for service and hospitality from the very first year in the university. This means that courses in English for service and hospitality should be provided for them from the very beginning. The skills that should be emphasized are listening and speaking followed by reading and writing.

In conclusion, in the eyes of educators and language testers, there is always still more room for studies on establishing standards, setting cut-off scores and their descriptors, particularly for other disciplines of the ESP listening tests. Studies on appropriate curriculum design in English for the service and hospitality industry are also interesting and waiting to be conducted.