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Development of an Instructional English Manual for Hotel Receptionists in Buriram Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to achieve three main objectives: 1) to investigate the needs of hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand for learning English for hospitality, 2) to construct an instructional English manual tailored to meet the receptionists' needs; and 3) to examine the satisfaction of the developed manual. The population of this study consisted of 200 hotel receptionists working in Buriram province, Thailand. The sample was 32 receptionists from hotels in Muang district, Buriram province, selected by purposive sampling. The research instruments included a questionnaire on the need for learning English for hospitality, a satisfaction questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis. The findings revealed that: 1) the hotel receptionists expressed a high need for an instructional English manual, 2) the developed manual was in the form of a mini e-book comprised of five units: greeting and saying goodbye, making reservations, asking and offering help, writing emails for hotel business, and providing hotel and other relevant information; and 3) the satisfaction towards the manual was at the highest level.

Keywords: development, English for hospitality, instructional English manual, hotel receptionists

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Introduction

English is critically important today, with around two billion people using it daily. It aids in communication with foreigners and provides access to modern knowledge, diverse cultures, science, technology, and business expertise. Continuous learning and development in English are essential for effective daily use (Piriyasil, 2014). English proficiency is crucial for business, especially in the international sector or when transitioning from local to global levels. It involves not just correct grammar but also key communication skills like presentation, negotiation, and interpersonal abilities (Malokani et al., 2023).

Thailand is a popular tourist destination, attracting millions globally. Before COVID-19, tourist numbers had been increasing since 2015, with foreign visitors significantly boosting the hotel industry. This sector has been a major income source for Thailand for a century, particularly due to its growth in free trade (Piriyasil, 2014). Tourists seek engaging experiences at Thailand's attractions, and quality service can encourage repeat visits.

Agarwal and Naidu (2021) emphasize that modern hotel success depends on employee's competence which includes knowledge, skills, and mindset. Front office staff are especially vital as they handle guest inquiries and contribute to positive first impressions. Therefore, effective English communication is crucial for this role (Kandampul & Suhartanto, 2000). Buriram is known for its volcanoes, ancient Khmer sites like Phanom Rung Historical Park, and cultural crafts such as silk and Na Pho Mudmee. The Buriram United football team and Chang International Circuit also draw many tourists, greatly boosting the city's tourism revenue (Khumtaveeporn & Wattanasuwan, 2023; Wongsanun, Soontayatron & Komonpaisarn, 2022).

According to Phomtham et al. (2020), English communication challenges for hotel receptionists in Buriram Province are understanding foreign accents, grammar, and pace of speaking. Receptionists cannot speak with the complete sentence which leads to communication barriers. This highlights the need for an English manual tailored to hotel receptionists' needs and requirements to improve their skills and enhance the quality of service. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate the needs of receptionists in Buriram and consider these insights to develop practical training materials, which is an electronic manual.

Literature Review

1. Needs Analysis

Need analysis is a key consideration while developing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum. Brown (1995) defines need analysis as a method of obtaining information to create a curriculum that meets the requirements of specific learners. Basturkmen (2010) describes the need assessment as the process of identifying the language and abilities required to determine the content of an English for Specific Purposes course. Brown (1987) explains that needs analysis is a systematic and continuing process of acquiring information about students' needs and preferences, evaluating the data, and then making course selections based on the interpretation to suit those requirements. Learners can reflect on their learning when needs analysis is employed as a continuous education component. It creates learning as a conversation

between the instructor and the students, as well as among themselves (Graves, 2000). It can be observed that it is the planners' obligation to investigate the learners' needs in order to create and teach a successful course. When examining target needs, three components are considered: necessities, lacks, and desires. This study's needs analysis was undertaken to create an English manual for hotel receptionists.

2. English Language Function Needed by Hotel Receptionists

Effective communication is essential for providing exceptional service and ensuring guest satisfaction. For hotel staff, mastering key English language functions is crucial, especially in settings where guests come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The study of Yamin (2021) showed that the language function that needed by the hotel staffs in Bandung was giving information on hotel facilities and services, followed by answering question and handling complaint, welcoming guest, offering help, and daily conversation. Moreover, Kongtham (2020) investigated the English language functions for hotel staff while delivering their services. The findings indicated five most pertinent functions of the English language in the hotel jobs which were apologizing, welcoming and greeting, offering assistance to guests, suggesting directions, and providing and explaining about hotel facilities and services. Furthermore, reading additional information with hotel technical terms, writing daily reports or logbooks, reading e-mails, telexes, and faxes, and writing messages to guests were also found at the highest level.

3. Satisfaction

In today's globalized world, English teaching materials, such as booklets, manuals, and video clips, play a vital role in training users across various industries. These resources are essential for users to operate, maintain, and troubleshoot products effectively. Previous research has shown that the quality of these teaching materials significantly influences user satisfaction. By evaluating user satisfaction based on specific criteria, such as propriety, accuracy, and feasibility, these materials can enhance the learning experience and ensure users can fully utilize a product's capabilities. Satisfaction has been studied and defined in the literature for a long time. It is broadly defined as comparing expectations and perceived service quality (Oliver, 1980). Learner satisfaction is important for the success of institutions and individual learners (Wong & Chapman, 2023). For example, the satisfaction of using English communication for cultural tourism by Pansa et al. (2022) was at a high level. The learners were satisfied with the variety of manuals. Also, they were properly ordered and easy to understand. Therefore, in this study, the satisfaction with the English manual was categorized by propriety, accuracy, and feasibility. The propriety refers to the appropriateness and ethical standards of the manual, ensuring that it is suitable for the intended audience and context. Accuracy ensures that the information provided in the manual is correct, precise, and reliable. Feasibility refers to the manual's practicality and usability in real-world scenarios, such as its convenience and ease of assessment.

Therefore, according to the needs and language functions required by hotel receptionists, the present study aims to develop a manual based on these needs to elevate the quality of service under the following objectives.

Research Objectives

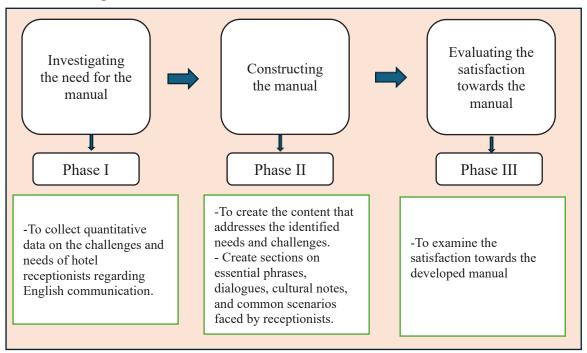
- 1. To investigate the need for an instructional English manual for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand
- 2. To construct an instructional English manual for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand
- 3. To examine the satisfaction towards the instructional English manual for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand

Methodology

1. Research Design

The present study employed mixed-method design which was divided into three major phases which included investigating the need for the manual, constructing the manual, and evaluating the satisfaction towards the manual as exemplified in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research Design



As shown in Figure 1, the primary objective of this study was to create the instructional English manual for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand which was divided into three major phases: investigating the need for the manual, constructing the manual, and evaluating the satisfaction towards the manual. This study employed mixed-method design to gather the data from the sample which was the hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand.

2. Population and Samples

The population for this study comprised 200 hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand. The sample consisted of 32 receptionists working in the reception departments of six hotels who often encounter with the foreigners in Muang district, Buriram province, Thailand. The criteria for selecting these hotels were based on several factors. First, the selected hotels are located in prime areas of Muang District, close to major tourist attractions and transportation hubs, ensuring they experience a high volume of guests, particularly foreign visitors. Second, the chosen hotels have a diverse clientele, including a significant number of international guests, which makes English communication a critical skill for the reception staff. Third, the hotels selected are of a moderate to large size, with a sufficient number of receptionists who regularly interact with guests, providing a good sample. Lastly, the hotels were also selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, including allowing their reception staff to use the manual and provide feedback through interviews. These criteria ensured that the study focused on hotels where English communication is particularly relevant.

3. Instruments and Procedures

The instruments of this study were a need analysis questionnaire, a satisfaction questionnaire, and a semi-structure interview. The need analysis questionnaire used in this study was divided into three parts. Part 1 focused on collecting personal information from the participants. This part included questions about the respondents' gender, age, work experience, and the duration of time they had spent learning English. Part 2 addressed the need for an English manual for hotel receptionists. This section analyzed the level of need for the manual and identified the specific content that should be included in the manual. It consisted of 15 questions designed to gauge the receptionists' requirements and preferences. Part 3 provided space for additional opinions. This open-ended section allowed participants to write their suggestions or comments regarding the proposed manual. The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert reviews using IOC, resulting in a validity score of 0.96, which indicated a high level of accuracy in measuring the intended content. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted, and reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89.

As for the satisfaction questionnaire, the sample was required to rate their satisfaction towards the developed manual in terms of propriety, accuracy, and feasibility. The validity of the satisfaction questionnaire was ensured through experts' review, resulting in a validity score of 0.95. Additionally, the reliability of the satisfaction questionnaire was 0.88, indicating a high level of internal consistency in the responses.

Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the hotel receptionists in Muang district, Buriram province, Thailand to gather further in-depth details about their satisfactions towards the English manual. The interview comprised five questions, presented in both Thai and English, to ensure clarity and comprehensive understanding. These interviews aimed to provide qualitative insights that would complement the quantitative data collected from the satisfaction questionnaires. The questions are tailored to explore the satisfaction with the

manual's feasibility, content relevance, propriety, and accuracy. The questions are as follows:

- 1. How would you describe your experience with the manual's usability? Was it easy to access and convenient to use in your daily tasks? Could you provide examples where you found it particularly user-friendly?
- 2. To what extent did the content of the manual align with the tasks and challenges you face at work? How helpful was the manual in solving problems or addressing situations you encounter with guests?
- 3. What are your thoughts on the prioritization and organization of the content in the manual? Did the order in which topics were presented make sense to you, and how well did it meet your needs?
- 4. How satisfied were you with the design aspects of the manual, such as the font size and overall layout? Did these elements enhance your ability to use the manual effectively, or were there any areas you feel could be improved?
- 5. Regarding the accuracy of the manual, how satisfied were you with the correctness of the information, the precision of the typing, and the appropriateness of the language used? Were there any areas where you noticed errors or inconsistencies?

To ensure the validity, three experts reviewed and validated the interview questions to confirm that they aligned with the research objectives using IOC method. The validity score of the interview questions was 0.95. Moreover, the reliability of the interview data was examined through inter-coder reliability, where multiple researchers independently analyzed the data and compared their interpretations. This approach ensured consistent and credible qualitative insights that enriched the quantitative data.

4. Data Collection

Two types of data collection were employed in order of gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected from the questionnaires (i.e., need analysis, and satisfaction questionnaire) from 32 hotel receptionists who worked in the six hotels. The qualitative data were collected through the semi-structured interview with 32 hotel receptionists. Each interview was audiotaped to ensure that all the information was recorded and could be reviewed afterward. After the completion of the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed.

5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the computer program, focusing primarily on descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The statistical analysis was performed using the following criteria (Srisa-ard, 2003):

Range of the mean score	Interpretation
4.50-5.00	The highest
3.50-4.49	High
2.50-3.49	Moderate
1.50-2.49	Low
1.00-1.49	The lowest

In addition, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

Results

The present study's primary goals were to achieve three objectives. First, the study attempted to investigate the need for an instructional English manual specifically for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand. Second, this study focused on developing the instructional English manual to meet the specified need. Finally, the study sought to examine the satisfaction towards the developed manual. The findings concerning the need for the instructional English manual are illustrated in Table 1.

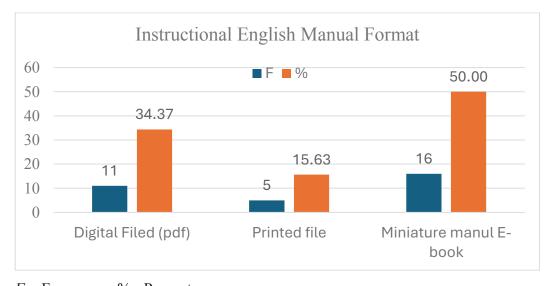
Table 1Need for the Instructional English Manual for Hotel Receptionists

Statement	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)				
Do you need the English manual for hotel receptionists?						
1. Yes	23	71.87				
2. No	9	28.13				
Total	32	100.00				

Table 1 showed that the majority of hotel receptionists (23 out of 32) needed the instructional English manual (71.87%) while others (9 out of 32) did not need the manual (28.13%). Thus, the results indicate that the English manual is needed by the majority of hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand.

Furthermore, in terms of the format, a majority of the respondents expressed the need of the English manual to be in a form of a mini e-book as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Needs of the Instructional English Manual Formats



As shown in Figure 2, the required format of the instructional English manual can be ranked from the highest to the lowest as mini manual e-book (F = 16, 50%), followed by digital file (pdf) (F = 11, 34.37%), and printed file (F = 5, 15.63%).

Moreover, the need for the contents of the manual was also investigated. The findings are exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2Needs for the Contents of the Instructional English Manual for Hotel Receptionists

Contents	M	SD	Levels of Needs
1.Greeting and saying goodbye	4.31	0.47	High
2. Making Reservations	4.40	0.49	High
3. Telling the accommodation cost	4.40	0.49	High
4. Describing facilities and services	4.43	0.50	High
5. Asking and offering help	4.56	0.53	The highest
6. Dealing with guest requests and guest complaints	4.68	0.47	The highest
7. Giving general and relevant information about the hotel	4.71	0.45	The highest
8. Vocabulary about the hotel business	4.71	0.45	The highest
9. Writing emails	4.65	0.48	The highest
Total (<i>N</i> =32)	4.54	0.48	The highest

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

As shown in Table 2, the respondents highly desired the manual that incorporated the contents which consisted of nine topics (i.e., Greeting and saying goodbye, Making Reservations, Telling the accommodation cost, Describing facilities and services, Asking and offering help, Dealing with guest requests and guest complaints, Giving general and relevant information about the hotel, Vocabulary about the hotel business, and Writing emails) in overall at the highest level (M = 4.54, SD = 0.48). It can be seen that Giving general and relevant hotel information, and Vocabulary about the hotel business (M = 4.71, SD = 0.45) are at the highest level, followed by Dealing with guest requests and guest complaints (M = 4.68, SD = 0.47). However, Greeting and saying goodbye was the least desired (M = 4.31, SD = 0.47) to be included in the English manual.

Therefore, based on the findings of the hotel receptionists' need for the English manual, the researchers have designed the English manual specifically tailored for their need. This manual includes several key components which are the cover page, an introduction that outlines the manual's purpose and objectives, a table of contents that provides a detailed list of the sections and units, the main contents, and a references section for additional reading materials. The development of this manual was driven by the specific needs expressed by 32 hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand. Their input was carefully compared and analyzed

to ensure that the manual would effectively address their requirements and enhance their communication skills.

The contents of the manual were divided into five main parts. Unit 1 covers hotel business vocabulary. Unit 2 addresses the sentences or expressions used in giving general and relevant hotel information. In Unit 3, the manual covers the conversation or expression for dealing with guest requests and complaints. Unit 4 explains how to write professional emails for hotel business, including the necessary format and language. Finally, Unit 5 emphasizes conversations and expressions about asking for and offering help. This manual serves as a practical guide to enhance the English communication skills of hotel receptionists, ensuring that the hotel receptionists can perform their duties effectively and professionally.

In addition, the researchers assessed the satisfaction towards the instructional English manual for hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand which is classified into three categories: 1) propriety, 2) accuracy, and 3) feasibility. According to the findings, the respondents were satisfied with the English manual as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 *The Satisfaction towards the English Manual*

Categories	M	SD	Levels of Satisfaction
1.English manual propriety	4.60	0.24	The highest
2. English manual accuracy	4.13	0.18	High
3. English manual feasibility	4.80	0.29	The highest
Total (<i>N</i> =32)	4.42	0.23	High

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation

As demonstrated in Table 3, the respondents expressed a high satisfaction (M = 4.42, SD = 0.23) towards the overall aspect of the manual in which the feasibility of the English manual received the highest satisfaction (M = 4.80, SD = 0.29), followed by propriety (M = 4.60, SD = 0.24), and accuracy (M = 4.13, SD = 0.18), respectively.

Regarding the semi-structured interview, the respondents expressed that, in terms of feasibility, the manual was convenient to use and easy to assess. Additionally, they were satisfied with the contents that were relevant to their work, and the knowledge from the manual was useful for problem-solving. In terms of the manual's propriety, the respondents were satisfied with the appropriate prioritization of content and the suitability of the font size. Furthermore, they found the manual style to be appropriate and well-suited for its users.

Finally, concerning the accuracy of the manual, the results revealed that the respondents were satisfied with the accuracy of the data, followed by the precision of the typing, and the correctness of the language used in accordance with usage guidelines.

Discussion

From the findings, it can be seen that the hotel receptionists needed the English manual at a high level. This may be due to the fact that they are required to gain new and sufficient knowledge as well as skills and updated information. Thus, English manual for hotel receptionists is essential to ensure effective communication with guests from diverse backgrounds, enhancing customer service quality and satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Moreover, the contents that received the highest mean were giving general and relevant hotel information, vocabulary about the hotel business, and dealing with guest problems and guest complaints, respectively. This result is consistent with Yamin (2021) who states that the most important skill needed by hotel staffs is speaking skill. Moreover, speaking skill in terms of giving information about facilities and services around hotel, is highly needed followed by handling complaint. This indicates that the contents could be applied in their work in the real settings. They need to know how to explain or recommend the hotel information to the guest correctly and appropriately. In addition, the hotel receptionists preferred the English manual in a form of a mini e-book. That is because it is convenient to use, portable, and accessible everywhere. It is in accordance with Franchisca et al. (2022) who found that the employees of Grand Zuri Hotel Padang preferred the e-module manual that is attractive, and easy to be used and understand.

Furthermore, this English manual was designed based on needs of the hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand to be applicable to their work. The manual is divided in to five topics: 1) Hotel business vocabulary; 2) Giving general and relevant hotel information; 3) Dealing with guest requests and complains; 4) Writing emails; and 5) Asking for and offering help. This finding is consistent with Riyantika et al. (2020) who conducted needs analysis of English for Specific Purposes at food beverage section at Emersia Hotel, Bandar Lampung. It was revealed that the language functions needed were greeting, offering menu, asking for the customer's needs or orders, confirmation, dealing with billing, apologizing or dealing with complaining. Moreover, according to Wibawa et al. (2021), the four topics that are needed by the hotel receptionists are Renewal of reservations, Cancellation of reservations, Handling of group reservations orally and in writing, and Handling of individual reservations orally and in writing. It can be said that the receptionists or hotel staff need to communicate and handle guest complaints effectively to ensure guest satisfaction, maintain hotel reputation, and create a comfortable environment.

In addition, the satisfaction of the English manual for hotel receptionist was at a high level in terms of feasibility, propriety, and accuracy, respectively. It can be said that the manual has proper quality, relevant information, and is appropriate. Additionally, it also covered real-world scenarios in hotels, making receptionists find the manual highly practical. The contents were useful and the staff can improve their skills. The results are in accordance with Kasumajaya, Padmadewi and Budasi (2015) who developed English materials for hotel receptionists that received a high satisfaction due to their quality (4.14/5) and focus on enhancing students' speaking abilities in the front office course. Moreover, Bousri (2018) also found that the English conversation training course for front office staff at Baiyok Hotel significantly

improved their listening and speaking skills in which the participants express the highest satisfaction in terms of teaching and learning methodology.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the needs of hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand for an English manual, to develop an English manual tailored to their needs; and to examine the satisfaction of the developed manual. The findings indicated that the hotel receptionists in Mueang district, Buriram province, Thailand needed the English manual at the highest level since it can be applicable to their work in the real settings. The required format of the manual is in the form of mini e-book because it can be used anytime anywhere at their convenience. Moreover, the components of the manual include the cover page, introduction, table of contents, contents, and references. The contents cover five topics: 1) Hotel business vocabulary; 2) Giving general and relevant hotel information; 3) Dealing with guest requests and complains; 4) Writing emails; and 5) Asking for and offering help. Regarding the satisfaction towards the manual, the respondents expressed the highest level of satisfaction in terms of propriety, accuracy, and feasibility.

The study highlights several critical insights. First, the hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand, expressed a high need for an English manual specifically tailored to their work context. This emphasizes the gap between existing language resources and the practical needs of hotel staff. Second, the preference for a mini e-book format reflects the need for practical, accessible, and on-the-go resources that can be easily integrated into the daily workflow of receptionists. Moreover, the identified content areas: hotel vocabulary, giving information, handling guest requests and complaints, writing emails, and asking for or offering help underscore the multifaceted nature of communication in the hospitality industry. This suggests that receptionists need a broad range of language skills to handle various situations effectively.

It can be concluded that the English manual is useful to be applied as a guideline in providing effective service especially in the hotel front desk which is the first place where the guests come into contact with the hotel personnel. By developing an English manual tailored to the specific needs of receptionists in a particular region, the study provides a targeted learning tool that addresses real-world communication challenges. This specificity can lead to more effective learning and application in day-to-day interactions. Additionally, with better access to relevant language resources, hotel receptionists can communicate more effectively with international guests. This can lead to improved guest satisfaction, as receptionists will be better equipped to handle inquiries, manage complaints, and provide assistance. Finally, the manual serves as a professional development tool that can enhance the language skills of hotel staff. Over time, this can contribute to the overall competency of the workforce in the hospitality industry, particularly in a region like Buriram, which may increasingly attract international tourists. In summary, the study effectively identifies and addresses the specific needs of hotel receptionists for an English communication resource, thus contributing to enhanced service quality and professional development within the hospitality sector.

Recommendations

1. Implications

The study highlights the critical need for tailored English language resources in the hospitality industry, particularly among hotel receptionists in Buriram province, Thailand. The findings suggest that the development of a specialized English manual significantly enhances the ability of hotel staff to communicate effectively with international guests. This improvement in communication is likely to result in better customer service, increased guest satisfaction, and potentially higher customer retention rates for hotels in the region. Furthermore, the preference for a mini e-book format underscores the importance of accessibility and convenience in training materials, which could be applied to other industries requiring similar language support.

2. Further Studies

There are several limitations and suggestions for further studies. First, the study did not compare effectiveness with other methods. Future research could compare the effectiveness of the developed English manual with other language training methods, such as interactive apps or in-person training sessions, to determine the most effective approach for improving English proficiency among hotel receptionists. Second, the study primarily focused on the immediate satisfaction and perceived usefulness of the English manual, thus a longitudinal study could be conducted to assess the long-term impact of the English manual on job performance, guest satisfaction, and career development among hotel receptionists. Moreover, the study was conducted in a specific region which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries. It is recommended that similar studies could be conducted in other provinces of Thailand or in different countries to explore regional differences in the needs and effectiveness of English language manuals in the hospitality industry. Additionally, future research could investigate the integration of advanced technologies such as AI-based language assistants or chatbots in conjunction with the manual to further enhance communication efficiency in realtime scenarios. Finally, further studies could also explore customer perspectives on the quality of service received after the implementation of the English manual, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness from both service provider and customer viewpoints.

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