



# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING SPEECH ACTS THROUGH LETTER WRITING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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## Abstract

This article examines the effectiveness of teaching speech acts through letter-writing activities in English language instruction. Speech acts, as functional units of communication, play a crucial role in developing learners' pragmatic competence. However, traditional language teaching often focuses on grammatical accuracy rather than functional language use. This study explores how letter-writing tasks—both formal and informal—can serve as an effective pedagogical tool for teaching speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, inviting, and complaining. Using a mixed-method approach, the research analyzes learners' performance before and after the implementation of letter-based instruction. The findings indicate that integrating speech act instruction into letter-writing tasks significantly enhances learners' pragmatic awareness, functional language use, and communicative competence. The study concludes that letter writing provides a meaningful, context-rich environment for mastering speech acts in English.

**Keywords:** Speech acts, pragmatic competence, letter writing, communicative language teaching, functional language, ESL pedagogy, discourse competence, writing instruction, pragmatics, language teaching methodology

## Introduction

In contemporary English language teaching, the development of communicative competence has become a central objective. Communicative competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge and includes the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. One of the essential components of communicative competence is pragmatic competence, which involves understanding and performing speech acts effectively.

Speech acts—such as requesting, apologizing, suggesting, inviting, and complaining—are fundamental to human interaction. They reflect not only linguistic knowledge but also sociocultural awareness. Despite their importance, speech acts are often underemphasized in traditional language classrooms, where the focus tends to remain on structural aspects of language.

One promising approach to addressing this gap is the integration of speech act instruction into writing tasks, particularly letter writing. Letters provide a natural and context-rich medium for expressing intentions, emotions, and social relationships. Through letter writing, learners are exposed to authentic communicative situations that require the appropriate use of speech acts. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching speech acts through letter-writing activities in English language instruction. It seeks to answer the following research questions:



How does letter writing influence learners' ability to perform speech acts? To what extent does it improve pragmatic competence? What pedagogical mechanisms support this development?

### **Methods**

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research was conducted with a group of intermediate-level English language learners enrolled in a higher education institution.

#### **Research design**

Participants were divided into two groups: a control group receiving traditional instruction and an experimental group receiving speech act instruction through letter-writing tasks. The intervention lasted eight weeks.

#### **Instructional procedure**

The experimental group engaged in structured letter-writing activities designed around specific speech acts. Each lesson followed a sequence:

- Exposure to authentic models (reading letters)
- Identification of speech acts and linguistic patterns
- Guided practice through controlled exercises
- Independent letter writing
- Peer review and reflection

#### **Tasks included writing:**

- Formal complaint letters
- Apology emails
- Invitation letters
- Request letters
- Thank-you notes

#### **Data Collection**

- Data were collected through:
  - Pre-test and post-test writing assessments
  - Discourse completion tasks (DCTs)
  - Classroom observations
  - Learner reflections
  - Evaluation Criteria

#### **Learners' performance was evaluated based on:**

- Appropriateness of speech act usage
- Linguistic accuracy
- Pragmatic awareness
- Coherence and organization

### **Results**

The findings demonstrate that teaching speech acts through letter writing significantly improves learners' communicative and pragmatic abilities.

Firstly, learners in the experimental group showed a marked improvement in their ability to perform speech acts appropriately. Their use of polite forms, indirect language, and context-sensitive expressions increased considerably compared to the control group.



Secondly, the quality of written output improved in terms of structure and coherence. Learners were able to organize their ideas more effectively, using clear introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions aligned with the communicative purpose of the letter.

Thirdly, learners demonstrated enhanced pragmatic awareness. They became more sensitive to factors such as formality, social distance, and the relationship between the writer and the recipient. For example, learners learned to differentiate between formal requests (“I would be grateful if...”) and informal ones (“Can you...?”).

Moreover, learner engagement and motivation increased significantly. Students reported that letter-writing tasks felt meaningful and relevant to real-life communication.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study confirm that letter writing is an effective medium for teaching speech acts in English language instruction. One of the key reasons for this effectiveness lies in the contextualized nature of letters. Unlike isolated grammar exercises, letters require learners to consider purpose, audience, and tone.

From a pedagogical perspective, letter writing supports the integration of multiple language skills. While primarily a writing activity, it involves reading models, analyzing language use, and reflecting on communicative intent. This integrative process enhances overall language competence.

Another important factor is the authenticity of the tasks. Writing letters simulates real-world communication, making learning more meaningful. This aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching, which emphasize the importance of purposeful language use.

The role of feedback and reflection also proved to be crucial. Through peer review and teacher feedback, learners were able to identify errors, refine their language, and develop greater awareness of pragmatic norms.

However, certain challenges were identified. Some learners initially struggled with understanding cultural nuances embedded in speech acts. Additionally, teachers need sufficient training to design effective speech act-based writing tasks.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant role of letter writing in teaching speech acts and developing pragmatic competence in English language learners. The findings suggest that integrating speech act instruction into writing tasks leads to improved communicative effectiveness, greater linguistic awareness, and enhanced learner engagement.

It is recommended that language teachers incorporate letter-writing activities into their curricula as a practical and effective means of teaching functional language. Future research may explore the use of digital communication formats, such as emails and online messaging, in speech act instruction.

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