



The Use of Role-Play Cards to Improve Hospitality Vocational School Students' Speaking Skills in Responding Guest Complaint

Rasendria Jalu Siswanto¹, Koesoemo Ratih²

^{1,2}Department of English Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

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Corresponding Author:

Rasendria Jalu Siswanto
rasendriyajalu30@gmail.com
Department of English
Education, Universitas
Muhammadiyah Surakarta

Abstract

This study aims to improve students' speaking skills in handling guest complaints by using Role-Play Cards. This research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in three cycles involving students of a vocational high school in Surakarta. The data were collected through speaking tests, observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The results showed a significant improvement in students' speaking performance across cycles. In Cycle I, the students' average score was relatively low, indicating difficulties in vocabulary use, fluency, and confidence. In Cycle II, the average score increased significantly after the implementation of Role-Play Cards supported by vocabulary and expression lists. In Cycle III, the students' performance became more stable, with most students achieving high scores. The final scores in Cycle III were obtained by averaging the scores from the teacher and the researcher to ensure objective assessment. In addition, the findings revealed that students became more confident, active, and able to respond to guest complaints appropriately. Therefore, it can be concluded that Role-Play Cards are effective in improving students' speaking skills and classroom engagement.

1. Introduction

English is a highly recognized international language and plays an essential role in various fields, especially in education and employment. Proficiency in English includes speaking, which is one of the main media for oral communication among professionals (Nathir Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). Speaking is also considered a productive skill as it involves knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, as well as the ability to express ideas and convey meaning effectively (Akhter, 2021). Therefore, mastering speaking skills is an important part of English learning, particularly for students in vocational high schools (SMK).

As the tourism sector continues to grow rapidly, the hospitality industry requires vocational high school graduates to have strong English communication skills (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023). In professional settings such as hotels, staff are expected to communicate effectively with international guests. One of the most common forms of oral communication in hotels is handling guest complaints. The ability to manage complaints properly has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and the professional image of the hotel (Magatef, Momani, Ghaiath, & Al-Ahliyya, 2019). Therefore, vocational students, especially those in hospitality programs, are required to master speaking skills in order to respond to guest complaints appropriately.

However, in reality, the speaking skills of vocational high school hospitality students are still relatively low. Many students experience difficulties in using appropriate vocabulary related to hospitality contexts, producing formal expressions, and speaking fluently and accurately (Fauzi, Andi, & Fauzi, 2024). Research conducted by Santosa, P.P. (2017) found that many vocational high school students still make errors in grammar, vocabulary usage, and sentence construction when speaking English. This condition indicates the need for innovative learning strategies that can improve students' speaking abilities in line with industry demands.

In addition, current teaching methods tend to be conventional, focusing more on theoretical aspects and general speaking activities that are less relevant to workplace situations (Luisa & Renau, 2016). As a result, students often feel less motivated because the learning process lacks meaningful context. In contrast, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes the importance of using materials and activities that reflect real-world professional needs (GUO Hui, 2017). Therefore, learning media that can bridge classroom activities with real-life situations in the hospitality industry are highly needed.

Role-play cards are considered one of the interactive teaching media that can support this need (As Sayfullooh et al., 2024). These cards contain short scenarios related to hotel situations, such as handling complaints about room conditions, service issues, or facilities. Through these scenarios, students are encouraged to practice responding politely and professionally using appropriate service expressions.

Although various studies have examined the use of role-play in English language learning, several limitations still exist. Khalida (2020) highlighted the need for real-life based learning materials for vocational students and emphasized the role of role-play in improving speaking skills. Similarly, Malinda & Mulyani, (2024) found that role-play combined with vocabulary cards can enhance students' speaking ability. However, these studies did not specifically focus on the use of structured role-play cards to improve students' speaking skills in responding to guest complaints within the context of hospitality ESP. Therefore, there remains a gap in applying role-play strategies that are specifically designed for handling guest complaints as a key competency in the hospitality field.

Based on the gap identified above, the research question of this study is: How can the use of role-play cards improve students' speaking skills in responding to guest complaints? This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of role-play cards in improving students' speaking skills in handling guest complaints. This study was based on preliminary observation conducted in a vocational high school in Surakarta, where students experienced difficulties in responding to guest complaints in a formal, structured, and appropriate manner. The novelty of this study lies in the use of structured role-play cards specifically designed for guest complaint situations in the hospitality context, providing students with guided and contextual speaking practice that aligns with industry needs.

2. Method

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve students' speaking skills in responding to guest complaints through the use of role-play cards (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The research was conducted in three cycles, each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. In the planning stage, the researcher prepared learning materials, including role-play cards and supporting vocabulary expressions. In the acting stage, the implementation focused on engaging students in role-play activities based on guest complaint scenarios. The observing stage involved monitoring students' participation and speaking performance during the activities. In the reflecting stage, the researcher evaluated the results of each cycle to identify improvements and determine the necessary revisions for the next cycle.

The participants of this study were students of a vocational high school in Surakarta, particularly those in the hospitality program. The class was selected based on preliminary observation which showed that students had difficulties in speaking, especially in handling guest complaints in English.

The data were collected through speaking tests and observation. Speaking tests were administered at the end of each cycle to measure students' improvement in speaking skills. The assessment focused on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, expression, and comprehension. The students' speaking performance was assessed by two raters, namely the teacher and the researcher, to ensure the reliability of the

scores. In addition, observation was conducted during the learning process to identify students’ participation and engagement when using role-play cards.

The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis by calculating the mean scores of students’ speaking performance in each cycle. The scores from the two raters were averaged to obtain more objective results. The results were then compared to determine the improvement of students’ speaking skills and the effectiveness of role-play cards in the learning process.

3. Result & Discussion

Students’ Speaking Score Improvement

The results of this study show the improvement of students’ speaking skills in responding to guest complaints through the use of role-play cards across three cycles.

Table 1. Students’ Mean Scores in Each Cycle

Cycle	Mean Score
Cycle I	8.17
Cycle II	17.78
Cycle III	16.52

Based on Table 1, the students’ mean score increased significantly from Cycle I to Cycle II. The mean score in Cycle I was 8.17, indicating that most students had low speaking performance. They experienced difficulties in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence when responding to guest complaints.

In Cycle II, the students’ mean score improved significantly to 17.78. This shows that students began to demonstrate better speaking performance after the implementation of role-play cards.

In Cycle III, the mean score slightly decreased to 16.52. However, the score remained higher than Cycle I, indicating an overall improvement in students’ speaking skills.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of role-play cards is effective in improving students’ speaking skills in responding to guest complaints. The findings show that there was a significant improvement in students’ speaking performance from Cycle I to Cycle II, followed by a relatively stable performance in Cycle III. The improvement indicates that role-play cards provide students with structured and contextual speaking practice, which helps them develop fluency, vocabulary, and confidence in speaking.

In addition, the use of role-play cards encourages students to be more active and engaged in the learning process. The real-life scenarios presented in the cards enable students to better understand how to respond to guest complaints appropriately in a hospitality context. Therefore, role-play cards can be considered an effective teaching medium for improving speaking skills in vocational education.

However, this study has some limitations. The research was conducted in a single class of a vocational high school, which may limit the generalization of the findings. In addition, the duration of the research was relatively short, and the results were based on three cycles of implementation.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future researchers conduct similar studies with a larger number of participants and longer research duration. Further studies may also explore the use of role-play cards in different context or combine them with other teaching strategies to enhance students' speaking skills more effectively.

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